

# Government involvement in childcare and early learning

What role, if any, should the different levels of government play in childcare and early childhood education?

- Financial Support for families wishing to access childcare – IE: Same as what is offered now.
- Grants for outstanding providers wishing to extend their business in other areas
- Assistance and support at a local government and council level – we are in the process opening our 3<sup>rd</sup> Centre, however the delay in council time will prolong the opening which can't keep up with the demand of our community
- Recognise the work of not only non profit / council centers but also private business wishing to extend their business in the genuine interest of providing quality early Childhood Education to their community.

What outcomes from ECEC are desirable and should be made achievable over the next decade?

- High standards and expectations in the field of Early Childhood Education
- Consistent training for Educators
- Continue with the NQF process
- Have assessors from ACECAQ on the 'same page' with expectations on quality, EYLF and NQF processes – not bringing their opinions of early childhood into their rating of the centre but to follow specific guidelines.

*The Commission is seeking empirical evidence on demand for ECEC, in particular:*

- Are there families from particular household structures, socioeconomic groups or geographic areas that are now using some forms of ECEC significantly more than in the past?
- Which types of families are likely to require significantly more or less use of ECEC in the future?
  - In our area approx 90% of our families are working full or part time. We do have some parents that are in care for the benefit of their children gaining a positive and productive start to their Education.
  - Families who are looking for quality care for their children in preparation for them transitioning into school

*The Commission is seeking evidence on the effect of the different types of ECEC, including separate preschool programs, on children's learning and development and preparedness for school.*

How does the amount of time spent in ECEC and the age at which a child first enters childcare impact on learning and development outcomes?

- This depends on the knowledge of the educators to match the outcomes and developmental age of the child.
- This also depends on the service quality and enthusiastic approach it has to the love of children
- Proactive Staff
- Positive learning environment for the children

Would extending the length of the school day have a significant impact on children's learning and development outcomes or parents' workforce participation decisions? What other impacts would such changes have?

- Yes and No
- Extending the school day would allow flexibility for parents for the care of their children, which will assist families in meeting their employment needs.

- Extending the day for children in a learning environment should be limited. Studies have shown there is a capacity of children's retention and attention to learning. There would need to be some leverage for educators to have a certain amount of time in the day allocated to the EYLF learning outcomes and the rest of the day labeled as 'care'.
- This would also need to consider the regulations of having certain trained staff on site at certain times. For example: I find there is no point having an ECT on site at 7am. During drop off and pick up times educational program are not being taught, but rather this is a time for families to collect and drop off their children. These regulations should be looked at, as this is where the money for business owners could be save. Having an ECT during the 'learning' part of the day would be more beneficial.
- Definitely having a 'Responsible Person in Charge' is important at all times but not an ECT.

## **Impacts on workforce participation**

What is the relative importance of accessibility, flexibility, affordability and quality of ECEC (relative to other key factors) in influencing decisions of parents as to whether they work or remain at home to care for children?

- Personal Choice is a main one – some mothers WANT to go back to work because they love it, and some because they have to.
- Accessibility: waitlists, location, quality
- Flexibility: days available suiting employment needs
- Affordability: Govt rebates definitely play an important role in the amount if childcare care parents can have
- Quality: I hold this of GREAT importance as a choice of where to send my children

What trade-offs do working parents make in relation to their demand for ECEC? For example, are they prepared to accept lower quality care if that care is close to where they live or work and/or enables them to work part-time or on certain days?

- I find that many working parents are quite proactive and will put their child's name on the waitlist early on.
- Having spoken to a few parents some are willing to put their children in a lower quality centre purely so they can work.
- We have some parents begging us to accept them as our quality is of a high standard
- We have many parents who are enrolled in other centres yet want to come to us because of our standards

Has increasing workforce participation by mothers increased demand for childcare, or has improved availability, affordability, and/or quality of childcare led to increased participation?

- I believe it is the increase in working mothers and fathers who need a double income
- Also the demand is there for parents wishing their children to be prepared for Primary School

How have government ECEC support programs affected workforce participation?

- Childcare Rebate mainly, CCB and CCR

## **Availability and cost of childcare and early learning services**

*The Commission is seeking evidence on:*

- The extent to which parents are experiencing difficulties accessing ECEC that meets their needs/preferences and whether there are particular categories of care, times, locations or circumstances for which accessing ECEC is more difficult — for example, regional areas, certain days or part days each week, or for children with additional needs?
- Our waitlist - extensive
- Days available - limited

- Wishing to go on holidays and not pay for their fees while away – not understanding business needs have to be met
- How parents identify vacancies or choose which ECEC service to use — for example, are parents aware that the My Child website ([www.mychild.gov.au](http://www.mychild.gov.au)) and at least one privately operated website allows them to search for centres reporting vacancies and do they find this service accurate and/or useful?
  - Yes – we promote these types of websites for referrals if they can't get into our centre. We don't recommend any particular centre as our standards are different to other centres in the area
- They find it useful

*The Commission is seeking information from ECEC providers on:*

- How the sector has responded to growth in demand, including changes to types of care offered, cost and pricing structures used by different types of providers, and any viability pressures
  - Growth – ACECQA has been quite proactive in our needs to further increase our numbers at one of our centres recently.
  - Cost is always competitive especially now with the new regulations of paying high qualified staff
  - Some centres increase in price has no reflection on any improvement in their program, aesthetics or overall quality of staff
- The key barriers that are inhibiting an expansion in ECEC services where demand is highest, development of more flexible ECEC, or alternative models of care
  - Council limits
  - Council time frames
  - Regulations on space for varying ages. At the moment all outdoor and indoor space is the same regardless of the age of children. I don't think that 6month olds need 7sq meters of outdoor playing space. Changing these regulation could allow for more space available to families
- Approaches to managing childcare waiting lists that have been shown to be successful.
  - We have a strict and fair policy meeting the standards of the 'Priority of Access'.
  - We are challenged nearly each day on our waitlist and what people can do to further them selves on the list.

*The Commission is seeking information from employers that currently provide childcare services or assist employees to access childcare, on:*

- The nature of the services or assistance provided
  - Our employees are encouraged to put their name on our lists ASAP
- Issues encountered in supporting employee use of childcare services.
  - Mentor our employees in the daily life of having their children at the centre.
  - Salary Sacrifice for employees paying for the childcare.

## **Flexibility of childcare and early learning services**

*The Commission is seeking information on:*

- The extent and nature of unmet demand for more flexible ECEC
  - Parents also need to be responsible and put their name down at an early stage. We have parents angry with us because we have such an extensive list.

- Govt assistance with council 'red tape' in assisting providers in opening more centres when wishing to expand.

- **The reasons why current providers are not offering more flexible care options**

- Administration costs of organizing payments, bonds, enrolments.
- Hours of work – regulations having requirement of highly paid staff on premises from time of opening and closing.

- **The experiences of providers who offer flexible care options and their management strategies to maintain financial viability**

- Effective communication between families, Directors / Owners
- Proactive use of employment time
- Meeting company targets of accepting casual care

- **The outcomes of the Child Care Flexibility Trials and circumstances under which successful approaches can be replicated**

\* how will the 'successful approaches' be measured – from studies, demands of parents, experience of Govt officials ??

- **Affordable approaches to improving flexibility, including innovative options that could involve new provider models**

\* Willing to consider without compromising our business plan and provision of quality care.

## **Cost of childcare and early learning services in Australia**

*The Commission is seeking information and where possible quantitative evidence on:*

- **Financial difficulties arising from paying childcare fees, including the types or location of families experiencing the greatest difficulties in meeting childcare costs**

- We provide information for families on the CCB and CCR
- As business owners we have our own levels of integrity in providing free care to a nominated charity

- **Changes in the use of ECEC, including the type of care used (formal and informal), in response to changes in the cost of care**

- This would be dependent on the Regulations of having certain staff on site at certain times. Once again having an ECT on site is more costly than a Diploma or Cert 3 at different times of the day.

- **The extent of price competition between providers and the effect this has had on fees and the quality of services provided**

- As a mother and consumer I don't mind paying for a service. I do believe however that my money should be seen in the quality of the service and not just as an excuse of 'ratios have increased or staff need to get paid more'. If the staff perform and are proactive then the increase of fees is justifiable. If the centre runs at a lower quality then an increase in fees would need to be explained.
- You get what you pay for. I don't understand how some people can complain about the cost of childcare fees when staff are looking after and educating their child all day.

- The flexibility providers have to price in response to demand and/or to meet the particular care and learning needs of children.
- Inclusion Support – at our centre the children’s best interest is always a priority. It angers me when parents move from other centre saying they weren’t able to access the inclusion support option. To me this shows the business owner could not be bothered with the process and out of pocket expenses. This issue then opens up the concept of Business Owners who are Educationally minded or just in it for the money – BIG debate in my books!!!

## Government regulation of childcare and early learning

*The Commission is seeking views and evidence on:*

- The effect of increased staff ratios and qualification requirements on outcomes for children
  - We over ratio anyway as we like to provide top quality environment not only for the children but for our staff also.
  - Increasing staff ratios does not improve on outcomes for children.
  - Improving outcomes for children comes from the enthusiasm, experience and intelligence of staff (academic or emotional) on how to embed a curriculum into the teaching and care of children.
- How ECEC providers are handling the pace of implementation of new staffing ratios under the NQF
  - We do it because we have to
  - Advertising constantly
  - Employing on quality
  - Mentoring our staff on a daily basis and providing them with Professional development opportunities.
- The case for greater recognition and assessment of competencies as an alternative in some cases to additional formal training and qualifications
  - I find experience can hold a greater importance than attaining a qualification.
  - It all comes down to the individual as an educator: how they perceive education, how they were brought up themselves, their views on how children learn, how they suit the centre, their knowledge of the EYLF, their passion for extending their own career in Education.
  - I find it extremely unfair that a graduate from TAFE can hold more responsibility than someone with more experience and different qualifications. A responsible person in charge can be a 20 year old diploma qualified person. They do not have the life experience to oversee 70 children and 10 staff whom are older and have a lot more experience. Should it be up to the directors to decide on responsible persons in charge?
- The impact of changes to staff ratios and qualification requirements on the cost of employing ECEC workers
  - \* I think there needs to be a review on what type of staff should be on the premises at what times. As mentioned earlier having an ECT on site at all times is pointless as the main service an ECT provides is educational program.
- Whether any increased staffing costs have been, or will be, passed on in higher fees charged to families.
  - \* This would be fair if the standards of teachers were to increase – enthusiasm, dedication to work and care of children and attitude to overall work place requirements. Childcare can no longer be an “easy” option for school leavers.

*The Commission is seeking information on:*

- Initiatives of governments to address workforce shortages and qualifications, including the cost and effectiveness of these initiatives

- Looking at how teachers are being trained
- English language standards of employees – I can't justify employing someone with limited English to teach children – lack of communication, expression and instruction to children.
- Higher standards in Educational training of students
- Standard outcome for lecturers in training people who wish to become educators. There is a big difference between university, TAFE and Open Colleges.

- Initiatives of providers to address their workforce shortages and skill needs, including the cost and effectiveness of these initiatives

\* Unfortunately staff who can't provide the necessary requirements to deliver a teaching program aren't employable. This can range from: attitude, grammar, motivation to children and knowledge of updated information about child development.

- Particular locations and areas of skill for which it is hard to find qualified workers

- We are located in the Eastern Suburbs and find it hard to find good quality workers. Generation Y??
- Work ethic and attitude lacking in 50% of potential staff members.

- The extent to which training/childcare courses enable workers to meet the requirements of the NQF and how training could be improved

\* I feel this process at the moment is very much a tick the box process for providers to meet standards.

- Other workforce and workplace issues, including any aspect of government regulation, that affects the attractiveness of childcare or early learning as a vocation.

- Early Childhood careers are not as attractive as Primary Education.
- This depends on the provider / owner. For us we support and provide a wonderful workplace environment,. Where as some business owners who are just in it for the money don't care about the little tings and just operates to meet the needs of regulations.
- Early Childhood degree trained teachers could be paid as the same level as Primary however as a business we could not afford it as we are not funded as school are.

Are the requirements associated with more subjective aspects of the National Quality Standards, such as 'relationships with children', clear to service operators and regulatory staff? Is further guidance required?

- it is all clear as the document is laid out very effectively. It comes down to the interpretation of this document and what opinions are of the owners and regulatory staff.
- I think personal opinions on how children learn etc should be put aside and a focus on how the NQF is present in the centre should be addressed.
- I think that Educators need to learn and listen to professionals who conduct studies etc and consider these in their learning.
- I think that an educator who is a mother should bring some experience but also be open to statistical information about child development.

Could the information provided on the 'My Child' website be changed to make it more useful or accessible to families? Are there other approaches to providing information to parents about vacancies, fees and compliance that should be considered?

\* I think more information to mothers who are pregnant – bounty hospital bag etc could be provided so they are aware of the demand for places in childcare and not to leave it to the last minute.

## **Other regulations**

*The Commission is seeking information on:*

- How particular regulations (including the NQF) impact on the structure, operations, cost and profitability of ECEC services — for example, are services consolidating or amalgamating their operations to reduce administration costs
- I think there needs to be a leader within the centre who has the intelligence and motivation to interpret the NQF in a productive and effective way to meet the need of staff, parents, community and children.
- We have one appointed Director in charge and they ensure all aspects are met and they mentor the staff and gather their input constantly.
- The NQF should be actively present in TAFE, University etc so that student are graduating with a full understating of its purpose.
- The share of fees that can be attributed to compliance costs (quantified if possible)
- The extent to which regulatory requirements are causing services to change the number or mix of children they care for
- should be considered based on safety and child development
- The extent to which regulatory burdens arise from duplication of regulations and/or inconsistencies in regulations across jurisdictions
- I think all assessors should be on the same page and have strict guidelines to follow. I know our centre runs differently to others, we meet all the needs of the Regs, EYLF and NQF, however if an assessor visited with their own beliefs and opinions they may conflict with our philosophy and running of the centre.

## **Options for regulatory reform**

How could the NQF and other regulations affecting ECEC be improved — both requirements and their implementation/enforcement — to be more effective and/or to reduce the compliance burden on ECEC services or workers and/or administration costs for governments?

- Introduce these documents into effective training courses
- Update the Regs to meet the needs of certain communities.
- Allow provider to ask for leniency in Regulations that may relate specifically to their location etc.

Are there lower cost ways to achieve the regulatory objectives for ECEC?

- Implementing into training courses making graduates more employable

## **Support provided by state, territory and local governments**

*Some general questions about government support:*



- How does government support to families and childcare providers impact on accessibility, flexibility and affordability of childcare?
- CCB and CCR is of a great benefit as it allows parents to afford childcare

• Is the level of overall government support for ECEC appropriate?

- Yes
- CCR could be increased to meet the demand of families returning to work

Some specific questions for families claiming government support:

• Is it difficult to apply for or receive financial assistance for childcare?

- As a parent – no as there are specific requirements that need to be met.

• Is it straightforward to determine how much financial assistance you will receive?

- Yes

• What effect have government support for childcare and other family income support arrangements, such as paid parental leave and family tax benefits, had on demand for ECEC?

- Giving families this support has promoted many to return to work. I for one love to work. I am about to have my 4<sup>th</sup> child and have worked fulltime since leaving university. Having the govt support has enabled me to have a family and enjoy what I do, my quality of living is wonderful and I appreciate all the support I can get

• Have increases in support reduced the out of pocket cost of childcare for parents, or have fees just risen in response?

- Fees rose when the EYQF was a topic as centers thought a fee increase was the answer and a good excuse to increase fees.
- Fees also rose this year due to the new staffing requirements.

Some questions specifically for service providers:

• Is it confusing and/or costly to deal with the large number of programs and agencies administering ECEC support? Is there overlap, duplication, inconsistency or other inefficiencies created by the interaction of programs?

- No. Once again if a centre has someone in charge of these documents and processes then dealings in this areas are efficient.
- We use ACECQA web sight to ensure we are receiving and working with the correct information.

• Do existing arrangements for delivering support present any difficulties for ECEC providers in assisting families with resolving eligibility or payment issues?

- No. The website are clear. We do get asked many times, however having a comprehensive list of website for support is a great resources for us to have.

• Which government support schemes do you consider are warranted, well designed, and efficiently implemented and administered and which are not?

- The benefits for assist families paying fees



- ACECQA
- Inclusion Support

Which schemes do you consider offer the most assistance to your operations?

\* ACECQA

## Options for reform of childcare funding and support

How could government support programs be reformed to better meet government objectives for ECEC?

- Support for working families CCR
- Local Councils priority given to childcare development for providers
- Acknowledgement of private providers along side community run centres

What financial contribution should parents be expected to make to the care and education of their children?

- Paying fees. Some people are too reliant on the govt for providing them with a lifestyle. If you have children please be prepared with expenses that come with it. If I buy a car I am aware that there will be ongoing costs.

To what extent should governments subsidise use of childcare and early learning?

- I agree with the CCTR and think this is a great assistance to many families

Should families reasonably expect to receive childcare support in addition to paid parental leave and family tax benefits?

- Yes. CCTR and Paid parental leave
- I agree with the govt new paid parental leave scheme and applaud its benefits.

Is there scope to simplify childcare support?

- Increase the CCR
- Not means test the CCR

What changes could be made to the way childcare support is administered to make the process easier for parents or providers?

- I think the process is easily accessible as it is

Is the distinction between approved care and registered care necessary?

- Not sure what this means

Should support be paid directly to parents, direct to ECEC services or some combination of these?

- Combination on parents requests
- Where funding is paid directly to operators of ECEC services, what conditions should apply?
- Clear understanding to parents of their benefits and what stage they are up to with their benefits.
- Limited time for operator admin ringing parents etc.

• What would be the advantages and disadvantages of different payment models?

- As long as it was a tick box and a clear choice it would be ok.

• Should childcare assistance be subject to testing of family/parent income levels, or to other requirements such as a necessity to be participating in work, study or training?

- Not means tested, I think that some families would miss out. I believe that if parents are going to work to make a living they should be supported no matter what they earn – I believe it is wonderful for children to see their parents working
- Study or training also is important but clear evidence should be provided to centerlink in support of the benefit.

If so, what income thresholds or activity levels should determine eligibility?

- Working families
- Training or studying families

To what extent are such requirements currently abused?

- Stay at home mums wanting full time or close to care and taking advantage of the low paying of fees. In one of our centre we have parents paying very little on many benefits with high demands of our service outside our policies.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of such requirements?

- Providing proof for the priority of access in childcare.

Should childcare expenses be tax deductible for families?

- Yes. A great way to support families that are working and contributing to the community

Is support appropriately targeted? If not how could it be better targeted (including less targeted)?

- More recognition for the working families. I find that many working families speak a lot more of wanting quality of care and aren't too concerned about the amount of fees in particular however truly welcome the CCTR.

• Should a greater (or smaller) proportion of the assistance be directed to: particular regions; particular types of ECEC; ECEC used for particular purposes — parents working, studying or undertaking other activities; or to support additional needs children or lower socioeconomic groups?

- Centres providing high standards of care could receive grants
- Working parents
- Rural areas
- Accessibility for lower socioeconomic groups, which is linked to the CCB anyway.

• Is there scope to streamline and simplify access of providers to support arrangements for children with additional needs?

- Inclusion support is a great incentive however not all centre access it as they see it a burden with all the admin procedures and staff aren't experienced in filling out forms and following procedures.

Should support be extended to cover certain types of childcare not currently funded or to increase funding for specific types of childcare — for example nannies providing in-home care?

- Depends on the definition of support. The nannies I have seen do not provide adequate 'Educational Support' to children. However they do provide a great amount of support to the working families.
- This could work if the support was offered to qualified Nanning services that had employees with certain qualifications.
- Many of our parents have nannies to assist them with their working life. Which in turn provide the children with care and love they need at certain times of the day

If so what kind of support should be offered?

- Govt subsidies based on proof of nanny compliance

What conditions, for instance accreditation requirements, should apply to such funding or funding increases?

- Proof of qualifications
- Performance reviews

What measures, if any, should governments consider to encourage employer provided childcare services?

- Performance pay
- Centre rating standards – grants etc given to centre that are providing top quality program and care.

Is there scope to rationalise and streamline the many types of funding provided by the Commonwealth or state/local governments?

- Yes. With systems in place that are fair and proactive

## **Background Information on Platinum Pre School and Jo O'Brien**

Info about the beginning of Platinum Pre School

<http://www.mumsense.com.au/articles/realising-my-small-business-dream-platinum-preschool>

Profile of Jo O'Brien

<http://www.careforkids.com.au/childcarenews/2012/july/joanna-and-nichola-interview.html>

Communicating with Families

<http://wehearyou.acecqa.gov.au/2012/11/30/communicating-with-families-2/>

Platinum Pre School Website

<http://wehearyou.acecqa.gov.au/2012/11/30/communicating-with-families-2/>

Jo O'Brien – Linked In

[http://www.linkedin.com/profile/view?id=111467370&trk=nav\\_responsive\\_tab\\_profile](http://www.linkedin.com/profile/view?id=111467370&trk=nav_responsive_tab_profile)

Additional information, which may be considered for the Public Inquiry

- The new changes to Qualification for ECT – having a Diploma, Primary Teaching Degree & Teaching number – THANK YOU. This has now enabled me to apply for ECT which make our business more enriched.
- Qualifications / Theories - I consider these in early Childhood to be very broad with a strong personal opinion being brought into the workplace. Just from reading and researching there seems to be many educators who are 'stuck' in the past and refuse to move forward in giving children the opportunities to grow and develop. Many educators / careers allow the child to have control of the running of the center and what programs are taught. I have found that the intentional teaching aspect of the EYLF allows children to be educated in themes / topics of discovery and enrichment.
- Levels of responsibility – responsible person in Charge – not understanding the meaning behind this needing a qualification when the role would be to oversee that the centre is safe, meeting all WHS standards and running smoothly.

Interesting how a 20 year old with little 'work experience' is qualified for this position over a 40 year old with 20 years experience

- Working mothers – I find these employees are vital to our environment. The qualities, ideas, care and nurture these employees bring to the work place are reassuring to other staff, families and the children. This is why I am a big supporter of the paid parental leave scheme being put into place.
- 'Training up to Scratch' – I admire this inquiry. I find it is not up to scratch in some educational facilities. I find that TAFE trained students have a very casual approach to early Childhood Education and aren't completely supportive of the EYLF or NQS. University Degree teachers come with the knowledge of the EYLF and the positive approach to integrating structure to the daily routine of the centre. Other off site companies offering Cert 3 and Diploma I find are useful for people wanting to 'tick the box'. These type of courses are led individually with very little 'hands on' guidance. They are rushed through and vary in quality. The supervisors who visit tend to only refer to their own experience as an educator and have little knowledge of modern theories etc.
- Attitude of the current workforce – I find this to be quite poor. We advertise constantly and the quality of people applying for jobs is low. I find a lack in positivity, independence, creativity, respect, initiative and overall willingness to work. I find that employees are quite expectant. I think this stems from their upbringing, high school Education and Tertiary education.
- Business Vs Education – I have observed 3 types of Early Childhood Management Systems.
  1. Community based Pre School and LDC etc – these are run by an appointed Director and work for the council / govt. They have little ownership of the centre and therefore their opinions and running of the centre is based on their own experience, beliefs and opinions.
  2. Business Owner looking to get rich – These centers are owned by business owners who appoint a Director and have no ownership over the programs. This is where I find discrepancies in resources, food for children, quality of care, variety of programs being taught and high fees for little quality, difference of opinion of Educators and a lot of 'tick the box' for accreditation.
  3. Business Owners who are Qualified in Education – these owners take on all the responsibility of accountability in their business. They are in it for the children, families and communities and provide authentic education programs for children. They mentor their staff constantly and work towards the same goal.