

3 February 2014

Childcare and Early Childhood Learning
Productivity Commission
GPO Box 1428
Canberra City ACT 2601

To whom it may concern

As a mother of a 10 month old son who will begin accessing a long day care service in early February 2014, I am keenly interested in the Productivity Commission's (PC) Inquiry into Child Care and Early Childhood Learning. I welcome the opportunity to make this submission. My comments are presented below in response to questions to families posed by the PC in its December 2013 Issues Paper.

How does government support to families and childcare providers impact on accessibility, flexibility and affordability of childcare?

- Obviously the quantum of, and eligibility for, CCB and CCR impact affordability, as do incentives / disincentives provided through the tax system. I concur with the submission by Goodstart that women with children face a strong deterrent to work because the financial incentives of taking on extra days are too low. CCB and CCR levels appear about right, but please see below my comments on the complexity of the system.
- In my experience, and those of the majority of mothers that I know, accessibility is the biggest issue facing families seeking education and care services for their child. It is difficult to know the extent of the issue, as like so many others, my husband and I have been forced to put our son on at least 10 different waiting lists in our area, and pay an administration fee with each application. Like all parents, I would like to be able to make choices based on the quality of the service, as per the objectives of the National Quality Framework and its quality assessment and rating process, rather than feel pressured to take whatever place is available.
- I would ask the PC consider a recommendation on the need for a central child care availability list, using real time data (the current MyChild website is unreliable).

Is the level of overall government support for ECEC appropriate? What financial contribution should parents be expected to make to the care and education of their children? To what extent should governments subsidise use of childcare and early learning? Should families reasonably expect to receive childcare support in addition to paid parental leave and family tax benefits?

- While I comment that CCB and CCR levels appear about right, the answer to this question has to be a resounding no – A system that sees its most important input – highly qualified early years educators, paid less than supermarket checkout operators, cannot possibly be considered as 'appropriately resourced'. I note the Government is choosing to manage this issue through the Fair Work Australia process. But if this Inquiry can only make recommendations within current funding, then the only sensible way to address low

educator wages is to reconsider the Australian Government's soon to be introduced Paid Parental Leave Scheme, which is all but universally considered to be overly generous. A common sense approach to the allocation of scarce resources must surely be that the rates of pay for early childhood educators are a priority for the Australian Government. Otherwise any reform will only ever tinker with the edges.

Is it difficult to apply for or receive financial assistance for childcare? Is there scope to simplify childcare support? What changes could be made to the way childcare support is administered to make the process easier for parents or providers? Is the distinction between approved care and registered care necessary?

- Yes. Processes and eligibility around CCB and CCR are confusing for someone trying to understand the system for the first time and should be combined into a single payment. This work has already been completed and recommendations 99 – 101 from the Henry Tax review should be adopted.

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? If so what kind of support should be offered? What conditions, for instance accreditation requirements, should apply to such funding or funding increases?

- No. If we are not looking at additional funding as part of this Inquiry, then diluting current resources for what is arguably a less efficient way of providing education and care to children is counter-intuitive. This option is also regressive in that it focusses on the care side of the equation, but neglects the education / learning that takes place in long day care and family day care services, which research overwhelmingly tells us is so vital in the early years.
- In addition, the quality and regulation of such services would be extremely difficult to manage. The Government should pay close attention to the findings coming out of the current Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse to see exactly what can happen in the absence of an appropriately regulated system that involves the care of children and young people.

Thank you again for providing this opportunity to comment. I wish the Commission well with this hugely important work.

Yours sincerely

Nina Olle