



3 February 2014

Dr Wendy Craik AM
Commissioner
Childcare Inquiry
Productivity Commission
GPO Box 1428
CANBERRA CITY ACT 2600

sent via email: childcare@pc.gov.au

Inquiry into Child Care and Early Childhood Learning

Dear Dr Craik

Please find for your consideration Children's Educators ACT (CEACT) submission to the Inquiry into Child Care and Early Childhood Learning.

About CEACTION

CEACT is a network of professionals from the children's education and care (CEC) sector in the Australian Capital Territory.

The Executive Manager branch of CEACTION is a forum of executive-level managers from the various CEC organisations in the ACT. The forum is open for representation from all sector organisations in the ACT, including community not-for-profit and private operators.

The CEACTION Executive Manager branch regularly represents the interests of the ACT CEC sector at the Children's Educators ACT Forum Meetings, which are hosted by the ACT Education Minister Joy Burch and the ACT Children's Policy and Regulation Unit.

Submission

CEACT is pleased to provide comments on the following sections of the terms of reference for this inquiry.



The contribution that access to affordable, high quality child care can make to optimising children's learning and development.

CEACT strongly supports the continued rollout and full implementation of the National Quality Framework (NQF).

The NQF has, for the first time in Australia, provided a national and accountable standard for the quality of early learning experiences.

Brain research has consistently pointed to the importance of the first five years of a child's life¹. Resilience, social skills and self-regulation are vital skills in later life, and are best supported and nurtured in the early years.

Australia is committed to being an educationally high-achieving country. To achieve this, there must be a stronger focus on quality early learning experiences in the first five years.

This is particularly critical for children facing disadvantage or vulnerabilities. A strong foundation of quality experiences in early childhood can support children to face the challenges of formal schooling and adulthood, for a far smaller investment than programs that target adults or older children.

The current and future need for child care in Australia, including consideration of the following:

Hours parents work or study, or wish to work or study

Organisations represented in CEAAT have reported difficulties for many members of the community, particularly young women in vulnerable or disadvantaged situations, to access a children's education and care service for the purposes of studying or re-training.

Ensuring that there is affordable access to people in these kinds of situations is of serious concern, as it has the ability to significantly diminish structural disadvantage for families. This could be achieved through a greater level of funding for occasional care spaces for families in these circumstances.

Accessibility of affordable care

The ACT currently has the highest mean cost of children's education and care services in the country². For families facing disadvantage or vulnerabilities, this can put access to a quality early learning space out of reach.

CEACT strongly recommends to the Productivity Commission that access and affordability be viewed through the principle that those who would benefit most



from high-quality children's education and care should be most able to access it.

All children can benefit from these services, but they can be of most benefit to children experiencing vulnerabilities such as poverty, disability or neglect. Currently the system makes it complicated and difficult for those families to access these services.

Due to the restrictions inherent in the published terms of reference around funding, accessibility and affordability should be structured to emphasise accessibility and affordability to families and children experiencing disadvantage.

The needs of vulnerable or at risk children

International research has consistently shown that high-quality early learning programs, services and environments can help redress vulnerability and disadvantage for children, and at a much lower investment than funding programs to address those issues later in life³.

The children's education and care sector has a capacity to more fully support the needs of young children and their families, but this would require a far greater role for Government funding, support and oversight.

CEACT advises that any proposed structural changes to sector funding is focused on ensuring that the needs of children experiencing vulnerabilities or disadvantage are the highest priority.

The benefits and other impacts of regulatory changes in child care over the past decade, including the implementation of the National Quality Framework (NQF) in States and Territories, with specific consideration given to compliance costs, taking into account the Government's planned work with States and Territories to streamline the NQF.

CEACT strongly supports the creation and implementation of the National Quality Framework, and also strongly supports its continued rollout in full.

The NQF was created in order to assure that a minimum national standard was in place to ensure the health, safety, wellbeing and positive learning outcomes for all children in a children's education and care service.

The organisations represented by CEACTION have worked constructively with the ACT Government, the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) and the sector more broadly to meet the new requirements of the NQF.



CEACT has noted ongoing commentary in the media, and from the Federal Government, on “regulatory burden” or “red tape”. CEACTION disputes the assertions that the NQF has imposed unnecessary regulatory burdens on children’s education and care services. International reports have shown that where regulation is “light-touch”⁴, or poorly enforced⁵, this can have significant detrimental outcomes to children.

CEACT agrees with ACECQA that the adoption of the NQF has significantly streamlined and clarified what was previously an over-complicated and confusing system, overseen by the National Childcare Accreditation Council.

CEACT strongly encourages the Productivity Commission to recommend that the NQF should be rolled out in full.

Yours sincerely
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References

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- 2: Canberra Times, “ACT families pay nation's costliest childcare” 30/12/2013
<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/act-news/act-families-pay-nations-costliest-childcare-20131229-301z9.html>
- 3: The Heckman Equation <http://heckmanequation.org/heckman-equation>
- 4: New Republic, “The Hell of American Day Care: An investigation into the barely regulated, unsafe business of looking after our children”
<http://www.newrepublic.com/article/112892/hell-american-day-care>
- 5: RTE, “Criminal investigation into alleged creche abuse”
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