



Gowrie Australia is a coalition of not for profit early childhood organisations which were established over 70 years ago by the Commonwealth Government as a best practice demonstration model. The Gowrie Centres were named after the then Governor General's wife, Lady Zara Gowrie. While each state based organisation is a separate entity governed by voluntary Board of Directors, they come together as Gowrie Australia to collaborate, share best practice and undertake research and publish a quarterly early childhood education and care magazine "*Reflections*". The Gowrie organisations remain committed to the model of high quality early childhood education and care.

Gowrie services in Queensland, Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania, New South Wales, and Western Australia undertake the following roles:

- Provide national leadership in the high-quality provision of education and care services for young families
- Conduct research into new and innovative service models
- Offer a range of diverse early childhood services across Australia in local contexts
- Provide training and professional development for thousands of early childhood educators annually
- Engage in national networking and advocacy across the early childhood profession.

Gowrie Australia supports the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Childcare and Early Childhood Learning as the priority should be given to improving the educational, health and well being outcomes for **all** young children and investment must be increased to achieve this objective.

## Quality

The present National Reform Agenda for Education and Care must be upheld in order to continue the support for the strengthening of young children's learning and development in early childhood education and care. With over 1 million children accessing early learning services in Australia, it is imperative that they and indeed all children have access to quality targeted services. The agenda is based on sound international evidence from research and practice and aims to:

- Dramatically strengthen young children's learning and development in early childhood education and care
- Raise the qualifications and competence of Australia's early childhood education workforce
- Provide positive and inclusive services for indigenous families, refugee and migrant families, children with additional learning needs, and families facing economic hardship
- Provide peace of mind for working families that their children's emotional, social, physical and intellectual development are being promoted in early childhood services
- Enhance and secure Australia's future economy by ensuring Australia's pre-schoolers are ready to begin school with knowledge and skills to support academic success

The National Quality Framework and National Quality Standards must be maintained and pursued in the best interests of children. For those services that are unwilling to improve and have unacceptable practices, robust meaningful sanctions are required to support continuous improvement and improved the outcomes for children.

### **Workforce Development**

Recruiting and retaining highly qualified and experienced educators to the education and care sector has become increasingly challenging. A key contributor is the issue of wages and conditions with a lack of parity with peers in the school system. The sector generally 'low wage' issue impacts directly on the whole community as well as negatively influences Australia's performance on an international scale. Status and standing of the profession further exacerbates the ability to have a stable, qualified, experienced and professional education and care workforce. Educators are currently undervalued and not recognised for the important role they play in the lives of young children.

Government must take responsibility to promote and recognise the ECEC workforce as a profession rather than an 'industry'. Immediate and significant changes in the national strategy, including wage reforms are required to support a quality education and care system. Wage increases alone are insufficient; the conditions of the early childhood workforce must also improve in recognition of the importance of ongoing professional learning and development to continually improve practices. Development of the curriculum and the program requires ongoing improvement of knowledge and concepts post qualifications. Given the Diploma qualification is a basic level qualification and Certificate 111 cannot be regarded as a qualification but rather as entry level preparation, it is imperative that ongoing professional development is available to support ongoing engagement in program development together with assessment and monitoring of children's learning, development and well being.

The quality and effectiveness of early childhood education and care is directly linked to the knowledge, expertise and experience of those providing it. The OECD (2006) report stated: *There is a general consensus, supported by research, that well educated, well trained*

*professionals are the key factor to providing high quality early childhood education and care with the most favourable cognitive and social outcomes for children. Research shows that the behaviour of those who work in early childhood education and care matters and that this is related to their education and training. The qualifications, education and training of early childhood educators are, therefore an important policy issue.*

Gowrie Australia acknowledges that the qualifications base of Australia's early childhood education workforce has already risen dramatically due to investment in additional university places and fee assistance for TAFE students. However, whilst the quantity has increased this has at times been at the expense of quality. The National Quality Framework has been a key driver to increase qualifications but at the same time the pressure to meet the requirements has sometimes resulted in less rigorous and robust training delivery. There must be:

- Investment in ongoing professional development to support stronger leadership and curriculum implementation
- Continued investment of the Inclusion and Professional Support Program to support localised contextual communities of practice and professional development
- More rigorous and robust compliance of tertiary and vocational training providers to ensure course content is more focused, participative and inclusive reflecting current policy and best practice delivered by ethical and experienced teachers committed to high quality outcomes

## **Workforce Participation**

The PCI discussion paper has a strong focus on increased workforce participation and affordability and accessibility. It is agreed that for Australia's economy to grow, people are required to participate in the workforce both before and after having children. It is important that priority is given to the improved education and well being outcomes for children balanced with the benefits of increased workforce participation. Children's rights must be central to any future decision making and the needs of working families do not overshadow the needs of children.

## **Funding Review**

Gowrie Australia supports a comprehensive review of funding for the education and care sector. The present unhelpful fragmentation of funding streams for early childhood services is complex and confusing to families. For example: CCR and CCB as two separate payment system. Similarly, if women's workforce participation is to increase, solutions must be found for dual income families where one income is entirely committed to paying for the cost of education and care.

Better targeting of funding to families from vulnerable circumstances is required. A priority must be supporting those families who are most at risk.

The extension of funding to Nannies is of concern. This form of care is currently unregulated and usually employed by high income families. If this form of care is receipt of government funding then it must participate in the National Quality Framework and National Quality Standards and comply with the National Regulations and Law. If the extension of funding results in less funding to families currently using approved models of education and care, the affordability issue will become a greater challenge.

Government must have a more targeted approach to the approval and funding of new services. Work must be undertaken to investigate what services types are needed in communities and in particular those areas not covered by the existing market prior to the approval of a new service. This will prevent duplication, address areas of need particularly for target groups identified in COAG. Incentives would be required for providers to enter the market in areas considered not sustainable or viable but to support communities with reliable and consistent education and care service provision.

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