

Thank you for the opportunity to address the following areas of the Productivity Commission into Child Care.

I am a qualified Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood) teacher currently employed by TAFE Queensland. I have worked in the early childhood education industry for 27 years both in NSW and Queensland in various settings from preschool, kindergarten, long day care, indigenous service, state and independent primary schools from P – 7 and since 2008 as a full time TAFE teacher. I have worked as a group leader, teacher and director.

I would like to comment on 3 areas:

1. *Training*
2. *Retention of staff*
3. *Inclusion and professional support*

1. Training

TAFE Queensland offers a range of products from face to face classes, online only study with telephone support and some visits to the service as well as a supported program whereby existing working Educators can study online with support from a designated Workplace Assessor who visits frequently. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is also offered to eligible experienced staff involving a telephone interview and a visit to show required evidence of competence.

We have just embraced a new Training Package which thankfully contains minimum Vocational Placement hours so that students must complete 120 hours (per qualification) in a child care service to be eligible to receive their award. TAFE staff are mostly qualified early childhood teachers with 5 years minimum early childhood education experience. This standard must be maintained. Course lengths and time must be maintained so that students can assimilate then practice class content in assessments as well as practically within the child care service before being responsible for the education and care of young children.

Employability skills need to be covered within the course. Literacy and numeracy skills must be of a sound level and learning support should be supplied for students free of charge to help them achieve this goal. Registered Training Organisations that do not adhere to these standards should be held accountable. New options for training will always be considered as we pride ourselves on being flexible and industry relevant however any reduction in time for learning and quality of teaching should not be considered.

Many relevant and high quality professional development opportunities need to be available for staff so that continuous improvement occurs. (see retention and PSC information below).

2. Retention of Staff

Staff conditions are out of touch with other spheres of education. Wages and vacations are far below that of Educators in the school system. Working with young children and their families is a physically and emotionally charged job and over time can become draining especially when working

conditions do not support the complexities of the job. Education does not start aged 5 years, it starts pre conception. A holistic view of Education in Australia would see parity in the education system conditions from pre conception into tertiary studies.

Brain research shows that 0 – 5 years is a critical time for brain development in all areas of physical, social, emotional, language, cognitive and creative functions. Waiting until aged 5 to educate and support children is simply too late. There is much research to support this argument – I have attached a link for your consideration. Early childhood education is a critical stage in a person's development. Many negative issues that will occur in later life can be addressed at this time thus avoiding emotionally painful and expensive treatments or education later in life.

http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/learning_and_teaching/childrens_learning/the_brain_research.html

Staff need to feel supported in this critical role through excellent working conditions and ongoing high quality training.

3. Inclusion and Professional Support

Educators need strong support in the area of inclusion whether it is a child with a disability, English as a second language or gifted and talented children. The Inclusion Support Agencies need to be greatly expanded to meet this need. The timeline for receiving assistance must be further streamlined so that Educators are getting support straight away. Early childhood is a time when developmental issues are identified and if the right mechanisms are in place to deal with these issues then great success can occur relieving children and their families from a compromised education and therefore future life. The crucial time is in our early childhood education services to address inclusion issues saving heartache, time and money later.

The Professional Support Coordinators around Australia are very valuable and their delivery of high quality programs should be supported and extended. Educators feel supported when they have current, high quality information. I have recently been involved in presenting a year-long action research program with PSC in Queensland around the new position of Educational Leader. This experience has shown the intrinsic motivation of these Educators to perform well in this position as child advocates. The result of this action research is continuous improvement within their services and we are now considering ways to share our learning and results with other Educators so that their quality is improved.

Thank you for considering my submission. I conclude by saying our competent, active, intelligent, strong and capable children still need us as adults to advocate on their behalf. Let us all do the right thing as outlined above for their benefit now and for all our benefits in the future.

Yours sincerely

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Queensland