

early learning coalition

Locked Bag 12, Haymarket, NSW 1240

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Early Learning Coalition

Response to the Productivity Commission Draft recommendations

Contents

1. About the Early Learning Coalition
2. Overview
3. Key Concerns
 - a. Quality education for children aged Birth to 3 years.
 - b. Maintain ratio standards required under the National Quality Framework
 - c. Retaining quality staff and the effect on the children in Early Childhood Education settings.
 - d. Impact of recommendations on staff confidence and career progression.
4. Conclusion
5. Appendix -Educator surveys collected from ELC services.

1. About the Early Learning Coalition

The Early Learning Coalition is an alliance of private providers, community directors and peak organisations that advocate for high quality early childhood education and care, one that supports the needs of families in our communities. We underpin values of high quality practice with a strong understanding of our principles. Our services showcase our member's commitment to high quality ECEC represented in the centres they operate for the children in their community. We would also like to state that the Early Learning Coalition backs the submissions published by the Institute of Early Childhood, Macquarie University: Sandra Cheeseman & Dr Sheila Degotardi. Our submission supports this academic research with expertise in our field and the longevity of our experiences in early childhood education and care.

The Early Learning Coalition is a unique in that it bridges a divide between private and community based services. The unifying factor is a belief in necessity of high quality services.

The Early Learning Coalition honors the following guiding principles:

- Early Childhood Education needs to be focused on high quality
- A regulated Early Childhood Education sector is necessary to deliver quality programs for children. It is imperative that this includes the National Quality Framework structure.
- To ensure high quality education for children then workforce participation for the sector also needs to be addressed

We wish for our submission to be taken into consideration in Government decision making processes.

We would also like to state that the Early Learning Coalition backs the submissions published by Institute of Early Childhood, Macquarie University: Sandra Cheeseman & Dr Sheila Degotardi. Our submission supports this academic research with expertise in our field and longevity of experiences in early childhood education and care.

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2. Overview

The Early Learning Coalition thanks the Productivity Commission Inquiry for their invitation to speak at the hearings in Sydney on the 14th of August. As a coalition, we have some concerns regarding the draft report.

The areas of concern (outlined in Part 3 of this submission) are:

- a. Quality education for children aged Birth to 3 years.
- b. Maintain ratio standards required under the National Quality Framework
- c. Retaining quality staff and the effect on the children in Early Childhood Education settings.
- d. Impact of recommendations on staff confidence and career progression.

Each area of concern has been contributed by our ELC members.

It is imperative for the Productivity Commission to prioritise the rights of every Australian child to receive high quality education and care. Our coalition unanimously agrees that our Government's terms of reference to the Commission, which emphasized 'accessibility, flexibility and affordability, overlooked the importance of high quality ECEC and the right of all children to access quality services.

While the draft report seems to be focused on workforce participation, we wish the government to recognise the advantages to our children, community and economy by investing in high quality early childhood education and care.

The draft report has focused on workforce participation for women. We feel that the position of an educator in early childhood, a predominantly female sector, is given no representation at all. As low income earners, many of these women cannot afford childcare for their own children. With one child the financial burden is bearable but if you have two or more children the cost is more than your wage. There seems to be a predetermined image of the type of women that the government wants to support to return to work; they are able to afford a nanny, they have fairly well paying 'professional' employment and they want childcare available at any time of the day that suits them. We wish to acknowledge that every woman should be enabled to return to the workforce if she so chooses. Decisions made surrounding workforce participation need to be fair and equitable for all.

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3. Key Concerns

Our main concerns regarding the draft recommendations released by the Productivity Commission Inquiry are the following:

- a. Draft Recommendation 7.2
- b. Draft Recommendation 7.5
- c. Retaining quality staff and the effect on the children in Early Childhood Education settings.
- d. Impact of recommendations on staff confidence and career progression.

a. Draft Recommendation 7.2

Requirements for educators in centre-based services should be amended by governments such that:

- *All educators working with children aged birth to 36 months are only required to hold at least a certificate III, or equivalent*
- *The number of children for which an early childhood teacher must be employed is assessed on the basis of the number of children in a service aged over 36 months.*

*This part of the submission has been written by Margaret Carey
Clovelly Childcare*

High quality education for children aged birth to three years is dependent upon the knowledge, experience and qualifications of those who are the primary caregiver for these children. In an institutionalised setting this can only be ensured by the regulatory environment. It is a flawed, but popular opinion, that very young children just need a babysitter.

Firstly I would like to say how encouraging it was that the draft report from the Productivity Commission Inquiry recognised the importance and relevance of the National Quality Standards. The NQS and the associated National Law, has enshrined in the sector, a level of quality that ensures the best outcomes for children. It is also encouraging that the commission has put together an advisory group that draws from many different arms of the sector.

However, the particular point I wish to address is, the notion that children under 3 years of age do not require a qualified professional, in the form of an Early Childhood Teacher. I believe this is a grave mistake. Research about early brain development and the importance of this first 3 years of a child's life is everywhere. Among professionals in early childhood, it is already a given that the more highly qualified the educator is, the better the quality of provision and outcomes for children (1).

I am the director of a community based long day care centre that has worked very hard to comply with the NQS and to also follow the Early Years Learning Framework. This is the curriculum document from the Department of Education that gives the early childhood sector a very real and very valuable pedagogical context to work within. It is the framework that is also to be used in the formal education system from kindergarten to year 2.

¹ A detailed overview of this literature was provided by Sheila Detogardi and Sandra Cheesman from the Institute of Early Learning, Macquarie University. The ELC supports the research and recommendations of these academics

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We have two early childhood teachers, one who works with the 3 to 5 year olds and another who works with the 2 to 3 age group. I would invite you all to come to our centre to see quality in action....to see the impact of teachers and qualified educators. Ultimately we aim to also have a teacher in our nursery with the babies and infants and in fact I would like all our educators to be early childhood teachers. Why is this so important?

I realise that there is a preconception that looking after babies and toddlers requires less brain than brawn, the physicality of working with very young children is not in question. What is in question is whether they benefit from a professional who has a depth of understanding of child development, who can make visible children's learning, who can respond with intentional teaching moments and who parents can trust is doing the job.

Certificate III is only a basic understanding of these things. The Diploma delves deeper, but it is not until you have the understanding of formative developmental theory that you can see the impact of this knowledge with the children. One of our main roles at the centre is as the advisor, as the partner, as the experts for parents who need help with a multitude of issues they have with their babies and toddlers as they grow. We cannot do this unless we also have a depth of knowledge that allows us to understand the problem and speak with authority which is informed by current best practice and research undertaken at University level.

I would suggest that the issue of having a teacher for children under three is purely economic. That is, there is no question that a teacher improves the quality of program delivery, the sticking point is that it increases the cost of early childhood education. We follow a curriculum that now links to infants and primary education. It is overseen by the Department of Education and Communities. Early childhood is an educational sphere and there is already an economic model to deliver education. If we really want to overhaul the sector we need to look at the big picture and see how high quality early childhood services exist in other countries. We cannot afford to continue with a dichotomy that sees an ongoing argument over whether what we do is care or education, it is undoubtedly education, but the level of duty of care is so much higher because these babies and young children are so vulnerable, and that is precisely why we need teachers.

b. DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 7.5

To provide services with greater flexibility to meet staffing requirements, ACECQA should:

- *remove the requirement that persons with early childhood teacher qualifications must have practical experience for children aged birth to twenty four months*
- *explore ways to make the requirements for approving international qualifications simpler and less prescriptive in order to reduce obstacles to attracting appropriately qualified educators from overseas.*

All governments should allow services to temporarily operate with staffing levels Below required ratios, such as by maintaining staffing levels on average (over a day or week), rather than at all times.

*This part of the submission has been written by Margaret Carey
Clovelly Childcare*

The Early Learning Coalition believes that we should maintain ratio standards required under the National Quality Framework, including the increase in ratio's for two to three year olds. One of the main indicators of high quality service provision is the ratios of educators to children. On a day to day basis this means that educators can interact with children and families that the children have all their basic needs met AND also have time to actually engage with other children and adults. High ratios support a calm, organised and

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responsive environment. When ratios are not high then there is only enough time to meet basic needs and sometimes not even those are met; the environment is high stress, not only for educators but also for the children. The environment that exists in such circumstances is neither safe or responsive and definitely not high quality.

*This part of the submission was written by Albina Porracin
Beaumont Hills Long Day Preschool and The Parkway Childcare Centre*

My name is Albina Porracin; I am an early childhood educator, coordinator of two early childhood centres. I am a mother of three children who have attended or are attending education and care services and can see the benefits. I began in the early education sector more than 20 years ago because I wanted to make a difference in children's first five years of life. I obtained a Certificate III in Early Childhood Education. I then went on to obtain an Associate Diploma, before completing a Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood Education), I am currently studying my Masters of Teaching (Early Years). I have worked in the local government sector for 10 years, and the remainder in the private sector.

I have had the absolute privilege of owning two centres in Beaumont Hills, NSW for 6 and a half years now, and believe that we are making a difference every day. Providing quality education and care to 54 children aged between 0 and 6 years of age each day (106 children each week). The Parkway Child Care Centre is a 24 place centre that provides focused education and care for 0-3's. To provide quality education and care tailored to the individual needs of children we employ 8 full time educators instead of the minimum regulation requirement of 5 educators. Beaumont Hills Long Day Pre-School caters to children 3-6 years old. This centre has 5 dedicated full time educators plus an assistant, to work with children who have additional needs. The regulations require that I only employ 3 educators.

The first five years of a child's life provide the building blocks to the citizens who will contribute to our society in later life. The relationships children develop in the first five years of their life shape the way the child learns and grows. Early childhood education and care provides children, their families and the community with multi-skilled, flexible educators. These educators are trained to individualise care, promoting physical growth, social and emotional wellbeing, behavioral guidance and cognitive and communication skills.

The role of the early childhood educator is complex and varied. Early childhood educators support a child's development by providing families in their community with a safe and nurturing environment using child-centred education programs to promote growth and development. Children need time and patience from their educators to learn, grow and develop, to become socially and emotionally strong and secure. They need positive role models who teach them how to play and interact with others. The experiences provided to children in these early years stimulates brain development and create connections.

Our education and care services have built relationships with local families, schools, business and other care and education services providing children with a sense of community and developing an understanding of their space in the world, as well as giving them learning experiences before primary school. Educators can only deliver high quality programs such as these if they are given adequate program and planning time and the ability to spend one on one time with all children throughout the day, currently provided by increased educator numbers. The early years learning framework (EYLF) outcomes place emphasis on the importance of the relationships that develop between children and their educators.

The fees/cost may be considered high, but are required in order to provide high quality education and care, and this is not so we can make huge profits, but merely to cover the expenses associated with providing an education and care service. To retain our staff we need to offer attractive work packages/ above award

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wages and good working conditions, and to do this we have to have more educators to run the centres well. Close to three quarters of the fees received go to educator wages/superannuation/entitlements (which our Bank dislikes) with the remainder towards payment of loan interest and all other expenses involved in maintaining a Service. I believe the government should contribute more, if not all, on behalf of families and not reduce what is currently being offered on their behalf.

My two greatest concerns are the amendments to educator ratios and that 0-3's educators are only required to have Certificate III's qualifications. I will talk about ratios, as Margret is covering qualifications and Stephanie about higher wages to retain educators.

One of the productivity commissions guiding principles is to 'ensure safety and quality of care for children, including achievement of learning and development outcomes appropriate to the type of service'.

I believe to follow the productivity commission's recommendation 7.2 to allow services '*to temporarily operate with staffing levels below required ratios, such as by maintaining staffing levels on average (over a day or week), rather than at all times*' is putting the safety and education of the children at risk. An example that comes to mind is the day before the productivity commission draft came out, an educator went home sick, who was on the closing late shift, and I replaced the educator. If not, the children would have been left with one educator only from 5.30 till 6.00pm close. One educator cannot provide supervision or even adequate supervision and high quality of care to all children remaining and their families at this time. Educators would become stressed, in turn stressing the children and parents. Had the Productivity Commission's recommendations been in place at this instance, then the current high standards of care and education provided by the centre would severely be lowered and end in families not enrolling their children. This would lead to educators losing their jobs and the Centre closing down.

Children need quality interactions; these can only be provided with higher educator ratios. Clinical Physiologist, Dr Anne Chelfont, believes children need undivided attention to prevent anxiety. I can see an increase in children with additional needs and 1 to 1 attention. These children require individualised programs and one on one support to correct behaviour through positive role modelling. Although additional funding can be sort (ISS) to help children with additional needs, not all children have a diagnosis or parents who are ready to acknowledge the child's issues. To provide parents with the respite they need and the community with another working adult, the children need to be nurtured and supported in the early childhood setting. Currently children with additional needs are supported in my centre by providing additional staff at an additional cost to the centre.

"The Early Years Learning Framework outcomes place emphasis on the importance of the relationships that develop between children and their educators." Quality interactions are essential to child development. Children require time playing, talking, listening and interacting with trusted adults and peers to develop communication, problem solving skills, social and emotional skills and positive self-efficacy.

Providing safety and quality care to all children cannot be guaranteed if educator ratio's decline. This will result in educators providing 'life guard supervision' an approach which means 'the act of watching over the work or tasks of another who may lack the knowledge of the concepts at hand.'

Behaviours we deal with in a one to one situation include, attending to language delays in children, ill children until their families pick them up, dealing with altercations or disagreements between children, and there can be many if you don't have the educators to support and guide and prevent this as 'prevention is better than cure'. Dealing with aggressive behaviours, such as biting, kicking, hitting, punching, throwing toys and furniture, vomiting, destroying others work or items, and major tantrums and crying.

I surveyed my team and they have raised these concerns regarding increased stress and accidents:

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“Educators will be more stressed and there will likely be more accidents due to reduced supervision. I think maintaining ratio is most important to ensure adequate supervision”.

There was also a concern for babies needs not being met at all or on time or when needed, such as changing a nappy or putting them to sleep or feeding them when they are hungry.

Following the draft recommendations as set out by the productivity commission I believe would adversely affect the educational quality and care provided by education and care services. Children would not be given the opportunity to grow and develop in a positive learning environment, as educators will be further stretched to complete their required tasks, including documenting child development, accountability checklists (i.e, WHS checklists), programming, nurturing, feeding, cleaning and most importantly providing individualised attention and child centred learning. Family and community members will be presented with children who are less socially and emotionally ready to engage in society and their learning environment. Making it difficult for children to reach their potential when they arrive in the formal school environment.

The Early childhood education and care sector requires educators who stay long term, who develop positive relationships with children, families, the communities they work in and with fellow educators. The wider community needs to recognise educators for the quality services they provide, via higher wages and providing rewarding and less stressful workplaces. By following your recommendations, undue stress will be placed on educators and will lead to educators leaving the industry. We need to look at ways of increasing educator numbers and qualification instead of decreasing numbers and lowering qualification. Educator should be given adequate administrative time to complete administrative requirements, so they can get back to what is really important - the children. Early childhood educators are not baby sitters, we provide education and care for our most precious individuals, young children.

c. Retaining quality staff and the effect on the children in Early Childhood Education settings.

*This part of the Submission is written by Mark Abbey
Lane Cove Montessori*

The Early Learning Coalition (ELC) strongly wishes to address key factors of workforce issues that need to be addressed in terms of personnel who choose careers in the child care sector.

One significant issue at the moment is the ability to recruit and retain good quality, committed staff. It's one of the biggest challenges and it is becoming a constant battle. Committed people are leaving the Childcare sector in pursuit higher paid employment, they do have the passion for early childhood education and care, but are forced away from the industry due to insignificant salaries they receive.

It is important we value all staff with a professional remuneration, this means having to pay salaries that are higher than the nominal award wage in order to retain existing staff from being head hunted to other centres or leaving the industry all together. Unfortunately operators of Childcare centres have no choice but pass on this additional cost to parents in terms of higher childcare fees.

Encouraging staff to further educate themselves and pursue higher education in the field is also a difficulty. They see no benefit in developing their skills any further due to the low and insignificant salaries in this industry. I have an example of an employee who was keen on completing the Diploma, but decided not to complete the diploma due the low remuneration she would receive. The additional responsibility and commitment she would have to carry was not reflected in the salary scale a diploma qualified person deserves.

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It's questionable how we can support child care employees to pursue a career that's highly regarded, rewarding and has real potential for progression.

As a result of the above issues sadly it is the children at the child care facility who are impacted. The children are exposed to a constant changing environment due to constant staff changers and also due to the fact that the industry is unable to recruit the correct type of qualified personal with the skills that are required. This has a direct impact on the quality of care a centre provides.

Good high quality care is what all centres should thrive for. This is fast becoming an unachievable goal due to the reasons stated above. Quality child care should not be a luxury but a necessity, it is considered that these early years in a child's life are the most important in terms of development, and not being able to provide committed, dedicated and qualified personal for this very important industry is a serious impact on the children and the future of this country.

d. Impact of recommendations on staff confidence and career progression.

*This part of the submission was written by Stephanie Bruno
Barfa Bear Childcare*

Hello my name is Stephanie Bruno. I have worked in the Early Childhood sector for over 17years, both in community based, not for profit and private centres. At present I am the Assistant Director and Educational leader at Barfa Bear Childcare Centre. This is a privately owned service.

I have worked at Barfa Bear since my first son Dominic was born 8 years ago and I am now a proud mum of three primary school children. I was very blessed to have all my children come to work with me at my amazing centre.

I wish to portray to you my passion for early childhood education and care. 33 years ago I was a 4 year old child who had limited English, I was very shy and left handed. I can still remember my Early Childhood Educator her name was Miss Gun. She took me under her wing and taught me how to interact and become a confident child. I truly believe this was my calling. I wanted to be like her. I often think about those days and funny enough I have seen her through my adult years and I have told her how she inspired me to be the Educator I am today.

Every day in my position I am challenged with something new:

- *one day I am a child's nurse
- *one day I am a mother's councilor
- *one day I am a teacher
- *one day I am a friend
- *one day I am a family's advisor
- *one day I am a mum telling a personal story

At present I believe I have found quality as I have an amazing team. I have 2 Certificate III, 1 Diploma trained and 3 Early Childhood Teachers who have offered my families nothing but high quality care and education. They offer an engaging and safe environment, respectful relationships with children and their families, connections within our community and a respect for themselves and their peers as Educators.

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To enter into the early childhood sector you need a certificate III, a senior first aid certificate, training on asthma and anaphylaxis action plans and management, working with children checks and constant, ongoing personal development and in service training. I am baffled by the notion that we still seen are glorified baby sitters, when clearly we are qualified professionals.

You have spent months learning about the early childhood sector, and I ask you now, why are we not paid as professionals? Low wages have been an issue in the sector for too long. Educators earn as little as \$18 per hour while qualified trades people earn \$10 more. There has been much talk about supporting women to return to work, but early childhood educators are not included in this discussion.

Right now over 60 educators leave the sector each week. This is undoubtedly due to low wages. Educators earn more stacking shelves at a supermarket, and many are forced to choose between staying in a job that they love and moving to a job that pays the bills.

Staff turnover has led to a crisis in the sector, there is already a shortage of educators and employers have trouble recruiting qualified and experienced staff. This turnover of staff greatly affects the children and their families who value and benefit from constant and stable educators.

At present I have an Educator who is married and lives with their parents as they cannot afford to purchase their own home. I also have an educator whose parents are paying for their Early Childhood degree as they cannot afford to pay their own bills let alone pay for upgrading their skills.

Personally I have had to take three lots of maternity leave. I could not afford to place my children in care so my mother took care of them as I had three children under the age of 4. I could only go back to work 2 days a week which just covered my childcare fees for my eldest child. I couldn't even pay one bill with the rest of my pay. My husband was left with working two jobs just to get us through. This financial strain was a very difficult. Unfortunately I do not stand alone there are many similar stories.

Early childhood is a female dominated sector. We would not be in this position today if it was a traditional male role. As we continue to work on substandard wages WE ARE the ones subsidizing fees. It feels like low paid women are expected to continue to work for substandard wages to prop up women who are paid more than us, and sometimes much, much more than us. Affordability of childcare must not come at the cost of exploiting women any further.

For many years educators have had no choice but to accept the long hours, the lack of recognition, feeling isolated as services run independently. But now, more than ever educators are realising that we are all in the same situation – we are struggling, there is a crisis and we want to be recognized for the professional work that we do, not only within our services, but within our community and for the future of our country.

Professional wages will mean that society will recognise that Early Childhood Educators are professionals. We cannot do this without government support. Families are under enough financial strain without adding to their expenses.

We have an amazing level of professionalism and quality standards already in the Long Day Care services across the country. It is my strong belief that we need to maintain these standards. Rolling back the quality standards for the sake of a dollar is misguided and will have a terrible effect on the children in our centres that deserve the right to quality early childhood education. The quality standards are upheld by professional, qualified and educated educators and we deserve to be recognised and paid professionally.

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4. Conclusion

The individuals who contributed to this submission did so as representatives of the group as a whole. The fundamental points are agreed upon and focus wholeheartedly on the belief in high quality service provision. The factors that contribute to high quality most definitely are high ratios of staff to children and highly qualified, experienced educators. These two aspects are under threat from the Productivity Commission Inquiry draft recommendations and the Early Learning Coalition wishes to strongly support the current regulations as they exist in these two areas.

The Early Learning Coalition fully supports the National Quality Standards and the quality and best practice it supports in centres. The Early Learning Coalition supports growing evidence that play based educational programs provided in the early years is critical for cognitive and social development in children aged birth to 5 years. Our national quality framework needs to be protected to enhance the quality of Australian Early Childhood Services that support the need for excellence in curriculum programming for children's individual needs and abilities. The Early Learning Coalition does not support the sacrifice of children's right to quality education for accessibility and affordability. We urge the Productivity Commission and our Government to prioritise quality early childhood education and care in Australia to maximize the confidence of our society and returns in our economy.

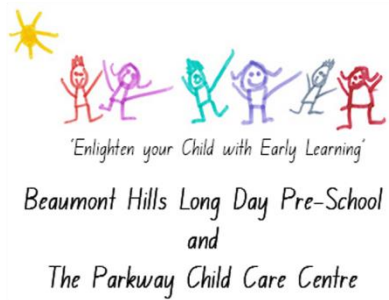
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Survey of Early Childhood Educators about Productivity Commission Recommendations
Draft Recommendation 7.2

Requirements for educators in centre-based services should be amended by governments such that:

“All educators working with children aged birth to 36 months are only required to hold at least a certificate III or equivalent.”

What research or evidence suggests that this will work? How many years experience will a Cert III need to be a “responsible person” or do they become one straight after completing the study? What happens to all the trained Diplomas, ECTs that have worked hard to get where they are?

I think we need Diplomas and ECTs from birth to 36 month as they have more knowledge than CERT III. The children benefit from educational programs as they are constantly developing and learning different skills throughout. The Cert III are not fully qualified to handle certain situations unlike the diplomas.

Definitely not a CERT III, educators do not have enough knowledge based on their training to be able to run a room and lead effectively. A lot of Cert III trained educators would also not have enough experience working in the industry as well. I believe they need a leader who is more knowledgeable and in many cases more experienced to provide guidance and support to run an appropriate and effective program and deal with any issues that may arise.

The training at CERT III level is insufficient to be able to properly care for all the needs of the babies and toddlers. I believe the children will not be supported appropriately as this level of training does not go into enough details about child development, learning strategies and positive behaviour strategies.

It would not be beneficial to the children in care as lack of qualifications / experience may result in the children’s health and safety being put at risk. I do not believe CERT III offers adequate training and experience to ensure effective management of any and all possible situations when caring for infants.

Recently qualified CERT III employees do not have enough knowledge and practical skills to follow children’s cues, maintain paperwork and respond to families concerns and requests for understanding. The mix of Diploma and CERT III employees provides a balance of knowledge of skill and life experience creating a richer more responsive environment in which children learn and grow. Almost having completed my Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood) I have an understanding of the more in depth knowledge and insight that can be gained through further study and have found this knowledge useful when confronted by the diversity of cultures, abilities, socio-economic classes, levels of education, and different beliefs families present with.

Birth to 36 months is a critical age to work with if you don’t have extended knowledge of children’s development. In the long term this could impact on the child’s development, health and safety and learning. Also, this could impact on the parent’s level of trust and confidence in the centre.

I disagree with this as I believe it is important to have diplomas and Early Childhood teachers. The children benefit from these as it is never too early to educate children and these years are crucial. The diplomas and ECT are trained in areas that Cert UU are not and ensure that the safety of the children are being met.

I do not believe this is a significant requirement. Certificate 111 staff do not have an extended knowledge and experience to deal with certain aspects of a diploma level staff member. We

have a duty of care towards the children and to provide good service to the families. This will not occur if there are no staff members with further qualifications higher than a Certificate 111.

I think educators working with children should hold a minimum qualification of certificate 111 but they should be working towards a diploma to help better their understanding of the role they have in working with children.

“All governments should allow services to temporarily operate with staffing levels below required ratios, such as by maintaining staffing levels on average (over a day or a week), rather than at all times.”

If we are operating below staffing levels how are babies and toddlers individual needs met? The babies eat, sleep and have their nappies changed at different times of the day. At this centre if the government allows us to operate below required ratios not only do we put children's health, safety and well being at risk, educators will 'burn out' by doing more and staying back to ensure everything is done.

I believe we need ratios as this helps with supervision and the safety of the children. It also allows staff members to spend quality time with the children. It would be very stressful for the staff members if we had less staff and the children would have less interaction.

How are we expected to be able to care for the children if we do not meet ratio? Ratios are there as a minimum requirement so that we can look after the children. If anything, we need to ensure under all possible times that we meet or extend these guidelines.

This would create extra stress for educators to be able to provide high quality education, care and adequate supervision. We have to deal with stressful situations, children with challenging behaviours and have to complete documentation that is now required of educators.

I would be extremely concerned about proper supervision of children and would be worried about an increase in accidents. I would also be concerned about children / babies not having their needs met in times of below ratio e.g. Babies sitting in soiled nappies.

Inadequate supervision will occur without a high amount of supervising educators. This may result in the children's health and safety being put at risk. Educators may become stressed and overworked which will affect the quality of care. Time off the floor for documenting purposes may not be possible.

This concept and recommendation is very risky. When you are dealing with a family's most precious asset (their child), putting them at risk of harm by not having adequate ration supervision will drive families from the industry and therefore close centres. When caring for and educating young children they are demanding with current ratios. To face the prospect of reduced ratios at times would apply more pressure to staff and have the possibility of increased errors.

Services shouldn't be allowed to operate with staffing levels below required ratios even in the short term.

I disagree, I believe that the safety of the children should come first and this is not possible unless the ratio is being met. Ratios need to be met at all times so that it is less stressful for staff members and ensures the children's needs are being met.

Three of the most important aspects in preschool is the well-being, health, safety and education of the children. These will be affected without the required ratios as there will be fewer educators with the same amount of jobs needing to be done. Supervision and interactions with the children will be less sufficient and will also add to the educators stress. I do not believe this is a good idea.

I think for the children's safety and staffing needs it is best not to operate below the required ratio's. Better to have an extra staff member there than be one short, that way the children will be cared for and have someone there.

What strategies do you feel the government should adopt to:

- a.) Support Professional Educators recognition and wages in early education and care
- and***
- b.) To encourage high quality educators into industry?***

- A.) Provide continuous professional development; provide more funding and support for people to get into the industry and provide pre-requisites for getting into early childhood education training to provide high quality educators; provide more grants and pay support so that educators are getting paid and recognised fairly for the importance of the job they do; higher pay would also attract higher quality educators and more men to the industry; encourage more men into the industry with higher wages and greater professional recognition; Qualified educators deserve more recognition for their contributions to early years education; In relation to obtaining a “Responsible Person” certificate more consideration of wages should be applicable to these individuals recognising their level of education and years of experience; to maintain a commitment to professional educators the government should provide additional funding for training in specific areas such as behavioural management, and dealing with learning difficulties to lessen the financial burden on centre owners;
- B.) Better training and work incentives – pay rises: better job prospects; increase overall funding to a level appropriate to a developed country like Norway, Finland and Canada; it is important to encourage high quality qualified educators into the industry as it is in the best interest of the children; diploma trained and ECT Staff leave the industry due to increased paperwork, increased responsibility, no increased pay recognition and better hours in schools – this needs to be addressed;

Is there anything else you wish to comment on about the Productivity Commissions Draft Recommendations?

People who come up with this obviously do not work in childcare and have no idea what goes on in a childcare setting. They should come and work in the industry to see how your productivity commissions draft recommendations change.

It seems as though they do not know childcare at all as they are demonstrating and ignorant view of what we do every day. What they have put forward would severely diminish our time with the children and reduce the level of care.

I believe that the quality of care and education of the children needs to be of upmost importance and therefore ratios must be maintained to also keep high quality staff as the recommendations would create a stressful work environment and would increase the likelihood of accidents.

It appears to reduce the quality of care provided to the children and increase the likelihood of accidents.

I understand the need for cost effective measures within the industry to make it more productive for all stakeholders but we cannot lose sight of what costs on a personal level these proposed changes will bring.

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Re. Recommendation 7.5 I don't think the NSW Government should allow the 3 months probationary hiring period in which unqualified staff may be included in staff ratios before beginning a qualification. This will put pressure on the new unqualified staff and on the permanent staff.

Re. Recommendation 7.2 I agree that the number of children for which an Early Childhood Teacher must be employed is assessed on the basis of the number of children in a service aged over 36 months.

Please note examples below of how your centre 'showcases' high quality education and care:

We provide a caring atmosphere for all children, parents, extended families, educators and visitors in a learning environment that is respectful, holistic, inclusive and safe. We have over ratio required educators – Diplomas, Cert III, ECT, Trainers – that is why we can meet each child's needs.

We are able to put in place high quality learning experiences and a learning environment that reflects individual children and groups of children's interests, strengths, family input/beliefs and community learning. We are able to maintain and evolve our learning environment due to our staff to child ratios.

Highly qualified educators, a higher amount of educators than required by ratio, time off the floor to document and plan for children's learning.

We support children and families with learning challenges in preparation for primary school. We provide a community based approach to the education of young children. We provide a programme that is inclusive of all children; their learning levels, learning styles and interests inclusive of the 0-2 age bracket. We also fund additional workshops to meet Educator's concerns.

Provide regular training to educators for personal development, employs highly qualified educators, high ratios of educators to children, always works in collaboration with families, unique learning experiences in a safe and healthy environment, follows policies and procedures at all times, reviews policies on a regular basis to improve our services to families and children.

More staff than required ratio; Close relationships with families; Great interactions with children; Checklists to ensure cleaning is done; Attend various trainings throughout the year.

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Survey of Early Childhood Educators about Productivity Commission Recommendations
Draft Recommendation 7.2

Requirements for educators in centre-based services should be amended by governments such that:

"All educators working with children aged birth to 36 months are only required to hold at least a certificate III or equivalent."

I believe this not correct as the more study and higher education/qualification you have the more information and knowledge you have to transfer to the children you are teaching. By only holding a certificate III like myself currently I lack some of the knowledge that my co-workers have. I'm working towards my diploma to gain more knowledge. I believe a Certificate 3 should be the minimum when working in the industry.

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I believe this is good for the industry and the children welfare by ensuring that all educators have this minimum level of certification it means that parents can be confident that their children are cared for and educated and trained with qualified staff.

I believe that children under the age of 2 require more assistance also because the ratio is 1:4. Working in the under two room myself in the past with ratio being 1:5 was difficult. I also believe that the qualification should be certificate 3 of anything higher with lots of patience.

I believe that children aged between birth to 6 months require educators with higher qualification e.g a mix between certificate III, diploma and a Early childhood degree qualification.

Experience and knowledge comes from both experience and education. I believe educators who continue to study and further qualify themselves are the most passionate staff and most motivated, they are the staff who are with the most outstanding care. Children aged between birth-36 months rapidly grow and require a high level of care and education in order for them to gain life skills, thus why it's so important to have staff with high qualifications.

As an educator I feel like you should be able to hold a higher certificate if you spend the time completing your diploma. This should not be removed from the children services training. Educators who have already undertaken their diploma training will not be recognised as a Diploma trained Educator which is very unfair as that is 2 years to complete this course.

I think in my opinion that having a Certificate 3 isn't enough because there is not much experience in this field and there isn't enough knowledge and understanding in a Certificate 3 and they don't cover enough in the topics.

I think that a certificate III qualification is enough for a qualified worker, working with 0-3 years. It's been like that for years and hasn't seem to have had any issues. The experiences are the same and so on. I believe Certificate III hold the same or similar knowledge than that of others.

I think when you work with children it is very important to hold at least a certificate III. 0-36 months is a very special age and at the same time a big responsibility to work with such a young age, that is very important to have a qualification and adequate practise to start working with this age.

I do not agree with this at all there are so many opportunities of learning about child care at different levels. What about all the educators who have invested so much time into extra studies and the cost! All to become a better educator and to increase their pay for extra support.

I don't think this is right as I believe many educators out there who only want to hold a certificate III either for better opportunities in the field for better pay or for more knowledge and experience. In my opinion Certificate III is a great start into the children's services career however I do believe it's not enough.

"All governments should allow services to temporarily operate with staffing levels below required rations, such as by maintaining staffing levels on average (over a day or a week), rather than at all times."

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No, I don't agree with the statement as there are ratio laws/rules set in place to make sure all staff members can supervise the children with ease and not have to stress over the children running wild.

I believe that all centres should have to maintain minimum staffing levels at all times. Having enough staff is important to ensure that the level of care and attention is maintained for the children. Operating at a lower level of staffing increases the load on staff, resulting in a depleted level of care.

This will cause stress to staff, children and families. This will happen if staffing get cut. We want to be recognised as teachers and professionals and we are not just babysitters.

Absolutely not! What about all the other questions in regards to staffing and children? What if a child is hurt and in need of care? When there is only one staff member available. What is a parent requires questions asked when educators are too busy running around because of the low child to educator rations. What if a fire evacuation takes place and educators can't take all the children out in time because there isn't enough staff? What if a lockdown needs to take place? Who will call for help?

Yes it may look good from a boss's perspective with not having to pay educators, but would YOU want your child in danger because of limited staffing????

Whoever wrote that statement clearly does NOT have experience in early childhood centre or have a child in care. As an educator that statement disappoints me! As an educator I am constantly trying to provide high quality of care, I encourage and support all the staff to do the same. By cutting staffing levels this will not only cause stress to the children in care it will also affect staff and families. No parent will feel confident or comfortable with leaving their child in a centre which does not have educated and adequate educators. Educators will also be stressed causing children to be stressed. They will not receive the right amount of education and care that they should have access too, this will then cause a chain reaction of stress and the children will be stressed as well. And not to mention the quality of care being worked towards and provided. The early childhood sector is aiming to be recognized as teachers and professionals - this will not be achieved if they can't provide a high level of quality care. The statement really frustrates me as I work so hard to get people past that theory that educators are 'babysitters' and that 'children stay in dirty nappies all day'. By cutting ratios and not having enough staff the quality of care will decrease causing these typical saying true!

I believe the staff to child ratios are in place for a reason and we should stick by ratio as it's easier for supervision and other child care activities. This means children will not be receiving the support they need.

I think that with a low quantity of staff it puts pressure on the staff members because there isn't enough teachers to provide good quality education for the children. I believe that the ratios need to be kept as they are if anything the more the better supervising as a staff member is very nerve racking as anything can happen even if you give your eyes on a child each! It's risky lowering the staff levels and wouldn't recommend that strategy. It makes room for the unexpected and cuts jobs of staff.

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I think it is necessary to keep staff according to required ratios all the time. We need to remember that we work with children and anything can happen in seconds. I don't think that cutting staff will improve the level of education.

Ratios should be maintained DAILY at all times. Depending on the number of children they need support and with less staff children will not be able to have extra time spent with educators. There will be less supervision on the premises which could lead to incidents.

I don't agree with this as ratios are very important to maintain always. If its below it makes the day harder for the children and the educators who already need to have their eyes open with the proper staff. Imagine how this could take place if the ratio level was below average.

What strategies do you feel the government should adopt to:

- c.) Support Professional Educators recognition and wages in early education and care
- and**
- d.) To encourage high quality educators into industry?**

I believe both should be adopted as both are relevant. We are educating the children during their time at pre-school not just letting them play and the teachers watch. The higher quality educators have the experience/knowledge to teach the children as well as come up with new fun ideas to educate them too.

For the amount of work and changes that has happened in child care I feel as though wages should be much more than it is at the moment and also be recognized for what we do with the children each day.

If educators aren't getting paid enough now why will they want to come to work?? There are a lot of educators that are forced out of Early education in order to be able to pay for their bills, place food on the table or even be able to afford higher education. Retail assistance get higher paid jobs with no qualifications/degree they stand around selling to people all day, whereas educators are working with the new generation of children to provide them with a higher and positive future.

Childcare workers are expected to do so much from paper work to planning children's interests and making sure all activities set up are for a reason. We are not just babysitters there is so much more to our job then just minding children. We need to study for a long time before receiving our ECT and even then the incentive is not there.

A lot of educators in my centre I feel are already very professional in what they do therefore taking on highly qualified roles. I feel like due to their experience and exposure to the industry they can do anything. But with more recognition for what we do then to assume our stereotypical role, I think the government would understand through our eyes and do so through supporting our wages too. We do a lot for what we are given.

I think the government needs to understand that we are not babysitters there is so much that we are expected to do and yet we are thought of as so little. We are expected to go through changes and keep up to date with daily paper work and continue to study to become the best educators for the children we care so much for yet we get no benefits ourselves.

I believe that childcare educator don't get enough recognition for the amount of job we do ☹️. We teach their kids, take care of them. But mainly we teach them, prepare them for big school and still we are seeing as nannies.

a) Government should support more the educators, giving us recognition for our work and experience, supporting our wages it will help to keep educators motivated.

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- a) The government should regulate a structured minimum wage scale for educators, reflecting qualification of staff along with minimum levels of qualification required.
- b) By introducing regulated minimum qualification levels this will mean that the only people who are serious about being in childcare are in the industry.
- a) the government funded scheme needs to be organized in order for directors to pay their staff with a professional wages. This needs to come from the government as families and directors cannot afford to increase wages independently.
- b) A high pay will increase the amount and the efforts that quality educators provide, without this recognition and appreciation staff feel there's no point in building and continuing to push themselves when they're not appreciated.
- b) I think that in this industry it is very good to have high quality educators because they have more experience and they also have much more knowledge.

Is there anything else you wish to comment on about the Productivity Commissions Draft Recommendations?

We offer an educational program in which children learn. We do not just watch them all day. I feel that we are not recognised in society as professionals. We need to change this view with government support to show society that we are not babysitters we offer an educational program and pay needs to support this.

We are educators who educate the children in our care. We offer music, movement, incursions, parades, excursions. We need to be seen as professionals. I am still finding that we are seen as baby sitters. The amount of work I do in one day shows that we do more than watch children. We need our government support to raise our pays accordingly.

I am a 27 year old individual who lives at home with my mother. I do not feel as though I will be able to afford to live out on my own, paying my house off, bills, car registration and having enough money left over for my own leisure. I want to be recognized for what I do.

When higher education is obtained such as a University Degree you are always told that the younger year's birth to 6 months is the most important years of a child's life. This is the time when their minds are filled with information; they grasp ideas and reflect on their actions. This is why they need a highly educated educator to be able to provide them with a stimulus for learning. A certificate 3 can be obtained in 6 months, what is an individual going to learn in 6 months, compared to a qualified 3-4 year trained University student?

The productivity commissioners need to have a good think about the actions they are putting in place. The educator's wages and children's futures rely in their hands. They need to think about their own children, do they want them to be provided with high quality education? If so, they need to provide educators with the support to **WANT** them to put in 100% for their children, recognise what they do and praise them with the wages they need and deserve! I have been in the early childhood industry for 3 years now with a 4 and a half year early childhood university degree, with a masters in teaching. I for one feel that I have so much to offer to all the children, families and staff however I would certainly like to be appreciated through my wages with the amount of work I put in at work each and every day. Yes, I can easily move to a primary school setting and obtain a higher wage, however I believe that the early years in childcare are the most important years of a child's life and I want to be a part of this. I am in the process of getting engaged and paying off my HECS bills, phone bills, car registrations, along with other expenses. How can I afford to live and pay for everything that needs to be paid for when early childhood educators are not recognized for their pay.

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The productivity commissioners need to get their hands dirty and take the time to visit childcare centres, looking at what educators do and how they do it throughout the day. No one has any idea of the amount of work and effort that goes into childcare, come and see for your selves!

I feel the above topics outline and express my thoughts and views. Without the proper recognition/appreciation and laws childcare centres will not get high standards, nor will staff be motivated to make any further changes.

At present I am studying my teaching degree. I live at home with my parents. I would not be able to study without their help financially. We need professional recognition and professional wages.

I work in the childcare industry for the love of children. I myself did not know how much work goes into childcare centres daily until I began my Diploma in childcare and look forward to extending my knowledge by beginning my ECT at uni next year. I do this to hold a higher certificate that can benefit me in the future to extend my knowledge and increase my pay!

Please note examples below of how your centre 'showcases' high quality education and care:

-All educators hold a minimum of a certificate 3.

-Children in the PRE-school room are/learnt how to write their name, letters, numbers and shapes and colours.

-Planned experiences are conducted based on that child's interests.

Barfa Bear childcare centre's always puts their children and families first. Educators have a passion for what they do and show this throughout the day, through the experiences and interactions with children and families. They need to be showcased to the rest of the community. Why are primary school educators for example getting higher pay when the younger years are the most important part of a child's life. We make the difference in that child's life.

- -Constant and ongoing support from local agencies, internet resources and families which attend the centre.
- -Ongoing trainings for professional skills
- -Constantly adding to our educational programs in order to further identify children's individual needs.
- -Going out of our way/ time to research and learn more about children, interests and resources.
- -Bringing work home to help cater for the children and family's needs.
- -Involving out community in our projects and interests.
- -Educators getting trained often in different areas.
- -Educators promote a lot of strategies to new learning according to their interests.
- Staff attend trainings on different areas of development in order to enhance their knowledge and share information with other staff members.
- -Researching and learning more about the children's interests.
- -Involving the community, parents and the society to participate into the activities we make.
- -Staff attends to different areas of development.

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