

Gowrie SA appreciates the effort and resources that have gone into production of the Productivity Commission Draft Research Report and values the opportunity to respond as follows:

Staffing – Draft Finding 5.1

- We applaud the finding that wages for many workers in the ECD sector need to increase. We are hopeful that the Commission will have a role in suggesting how this could be achieved.
Without ensuring parity of pay and conditions and professional development and support the issues of the attraction and retention of suitably qualified early childhood workers will continue to be a major issue which will impact on the quality of early childhood services.
- While we understand that in rural and remote areas exemptions may well be required due to the inability of services to recruit suitably qualified staff, we believe these should be limited. Gowrie SA would like to see a specific recommendation to fund more programs to deliver training for qualifications to at least Diploma level to rural and remote areas. This would include a specific focus on training for Aboriginal workers to achieve qualifications. We are supportive of the Government ensuring that RTO's are adequately resourced to ensure new, appropriately qualified workers are available for the ECEC sector, and that wages and working conditions are addressed so that the ECD workforce is attractive to new staff.
- Public recognition, particularly for those educators working with children in LDC, FDC and OSHC has long been an issue. Is there a reason why early childhood programs in Australia are not resourced at an equivalent rate per child as school based funding given the research evidence of the importance of the early years?
If funding of ECEC programs were increased, including access to grant and capital upgrade funding opportunities, then public perceptions of the early years sector will also increase which may in turn assist in the attraction and retention of staff.

Qualifications and professional development – Draft recommendation 10.1, 10.4 & 10.5, draft finding 10.2 & 10.4

- Review and increase of staff wages should be linked to staff qualifications. It is reasonable to expect that staff with a four year early childhood degree provide greater pedagogical support and a wider range of knowledge regarding theories of children's learning than those who have a two year Diploma.

Draft Recommendation 5.1

- Gowrie SA feels that while a three year qualified early childhood teacher is a positive interim step to deliver a preschool program. In the long term, the goal should be to ensure all educators are continually updating their early childhood knowledge. This would mean ensuring that three year degree qualified educators are required to commence study for their fourth year as soon as possible.
- Gowrie SA agrees that the quality of RTO's, in particular those offering RPL and upskilling of current staff, needs to be closely monitored, and standards raised. A nationally consistent RPL assessment tool would be welcomed.
- Gowrie SA is concerned that Cert 111 continues to be described as a qualification in it's own right and recommends a descriptor such as 'entry level' be applied. We feel reforms have not gone far enough in this area. Government policy for four year degree teachers needs to be supported through the structure of ECEC, thereby motivating staff to attain a Diploma and progress to four year early childhood degrees, particularly those who are in service leadership

positions. Establishing a career structure would support achievement of the national quality agenda.

Draft recommendation 10.8

- Professional development and support for all staff is crucial regardless of their qualification. The Government provides support for professional learning for long day care, OSHC and FDC staff through the Professional Support Coordinators (PSC). We believe higher levels of support should be offered to the ECEC sector and there should be requirements in service budgets to enable staff to ongoing professional development.
- Gowrie SA would recommend that specific consideration be given for early childhood leadership programs, with funding made available to encourage service leaders to participate in professional learning on leadership. We believe there is currently specific funding available to support school leadership development.

Parent Fees and affordability – Draft recommendation 3.2

- As many services are already finding, and the draft report shows, when long day care fees increase (and thus the gap between CCB and the actual fee increases), disadvantaged families reduce their time in quality early childhood services due to affordability and shame when they are unable to pay their account. The current gap fee needs to be urgently reduced to enable disadvantaged children (who will benefit the most) to access ECEC services.
- While CCB and CCR assist families, the provision of high quality early childhood services with above ratio staffing, staff attraction and retention measures and above minimum standard qualifications are a significant portion of a childcare budget. Any increases in centre fees increases the gap families are paying.
- There is little capacity for centres to be able to offer above award wages and conditions that attract and retain staff without detrimentally affecting affordability for families.
- The current suite of childcare funding arrangements limits the establishment and maintenance of high quality services.
- Gowrie SA would like to see an overall review of childcare funding arrangements with a consideration of a balance of funding directed to parents and some funding directed to centres. While all funding goes directly to parents the direct relation between fees and costs will continue to impede the development of quality services and their ability to retain staff.
- Many older services are unable to afford the capital costs of upgrading ageing buildings – unfortunately long day care services were not part of the ‘education revolution’. In the past the Commonwealth Government provided a capital upgrade program which allowed centres to maintain facilities and we would recommend this be made available on an ongoing basis.

Integrated services – draft recommendation 12.1 & 12.4

Gowrie SA notes the Commission’s request for further information and data about integrated service provision. We note that the integrated services research conducted by Charles Sturt University (2010) on behalf of the national Professional Support Coordinators Alliance has not been referenced in the Commission’s draft report. This national Australian research study provides detailed information about the complexity of integration and includes a number of recommendations about supporting current and future provision for integrated service staff, including comprehensive information about leadership requirements. Gowrie SA would be pleased to resubmit this report for the Commission’s perusal.

- We recommend that child health and family support services work more closely with early childhood services to increase family participation and information sharing opportunities. Early childhood centres are an underutilised community hub - if health checks, etc were conducted from long day care services, this will reduce the need for families to attend a clinic for health checks and may ensure more effective early detection and intervention for child health problems.

Improving outcomes for Aboriginal children and families – Draft recommendation 14.1, 14.3, 14.4, 14.6,

- While it was heartening to hear Minister Garrett recently announce at a conference that the government were supporting 20 Indigenous people to attain a Certificate II, this appears inadequate as a national response. It is our recommendation that consideration be given to providing opportunities within all Aboriginal communities for training to Cert 111 level with pathways to Diploma and beyond. This would seem to be an important strategy for closing the gap.
- Gowrie SA is concerned that some Indigenous services may initially be excluded from the NQS and recommends that funding, support and resourcing is a priority for these services.

Draft recommendation 9.2

- Gowrie SA understands that providing appropriate quality housing is necessary to attract ECEC workers to remote areas. Unless Aboriginal families have access to appropriate quality housing themselves, then this initiative may not assist in closing the gap. Families who continue to live in such disadvantaged circumstances will be unable to access or benefit from education and care programs, despite the best of intentions. Overall, disadvantage for Aboriginal families must be addressed as a matter of urgency and we would recommend that the Productivity Commission liaises with other appropriate government departments to address this holistically.

Inclusion support – Draft recommendation 8.1 & 8.2

- The draft report clearly recognises that services are subsidising the cost of extra staff to assist with the inclusion of children with additional needs. It should be noted that increased access to specialised and suitably qualified staff who are able to work alongside educators would be of more benefit than employing an extra casual staff member. While educators need support and assistance to build capacity and understanding on how best to work with, educate and include children with additional needs, it needs to be recognised that for some children their needs are so specific that additional knowledgeable staff are needed.