

**COUNTRY WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF NEW SOUTH WALES**



**SUBMISSION:  
Early Childhood Development Workforce**

**To:** Early Childhood Development Workforce Study  
Productivity Commission  
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The Country Women's Association of NSW wishes to thank the Productivity Commission for this opportunity to comment on the draft report examining the Early Childhood Development Workforce, and states that these comments will be mainly concentrating on the needs of those families in the outer regional, rural and remote areas.

Early Childhood Development is a very important issue and has impressively evolved from the mothers' group/child minding group developed over fifty years ago to the all-embracing framework of today. This works extremely well in the city/inner region areas, but those parents in the other areas have to battle very hard for the best for their pre-school children.

In the past the Country Women's Association rooms were used for the Baby Health Care service where mothers could meet in a relaxed atmosphere to have their babies' progress and health monitored by a professional. They would drive hundreds of miles, take their lunch, morning and afternoon teas, and stay the whole day. It was also an opportunity for these normally isolated mothers to interact with each other, and often learnt more from each other than they did from the nurse. This does not happen in modern times because appointments are made for set times, so now there is no interaction between the mothers.

However, in earlier times the most important aspect of these baby health care meetings was the socialising of the children, the mixing and playing games together.

NSW does not have the vast "very remote" areas of the other Australian states and territories; only 3% of Australian children under the age of 5 live in the remote and very remote areas, but this small percentage must be cared for. In these areas, there is no long day care, no outside of school hours care etc., all they have is a form of preschool.

In some outer /rural regions, mobile (preschool) vans attend a cluster of schools 1 to 2 days a week, when children 4 years of age have to travel (often for over an hour) with older school siblings and stay the whole day. No half day and pick up by Mum for these country kids. The mobile preschool meets in school libraries, local government rooms, CWA halls etc., and is a way for the children to socialise and start their education e.g. Literacy, numeracy and (most importantly) have professional checks on health, mental, physical, emotional, social etc. concerns, and treatment started for any deficiencies long before the children start kindergarten.

Directors, preschool teachers, qualified and unqualified teachers' aides are very vital members of the community but, unfortunately, are very poorly remunerated. In fact, aides working with the aged and disabled are much better paid than those working in child care. Their salaries must be increased.

The new National Quality Standard is seeking from January 1, 2012 to introduce higher staff-to-child ratios and higher qualification requirements for Early Childhood Development staff. These aims will certainly impact on the costing of the childcare facility. The local communities cannot support these additional costs, so governments will have to contribute greatly to help defray these increases.

Early Childhood Development staffs in outer region/rural/ remote areas wishing to update their qualifications come up against many barriers. Staff trying to upgrade find they have to travel to major cities; that the cost of travel, accommodation and course is quite beyond them; that their local facility has no replacement staff to cover their absence. Accordingly, so many give up and settle for distance education, which lacks the social interaction and communication between students afforded at colleges, universities etc.

The Productivity Commission draft states that more workers will be required in most types of early childhood education and care services but, unless there are (especially in the rural areas) enhanced incentives, ability to upgrade, increased wages, the provision of suitable housing, a drastic paring of paper work – then there will always be a dire shortage of workers.

Concern must also be expressed in relation to the lack of men in primary and preschool areas of education. There must be a balance in staffing, and it is known that many children, especially from single parent families, seek that balance.

It is thought that childcare as an educational component and not just a child minding service, should be tax deductible where the parent is working and earning an income. Rebates, allowances etc. are all very well but are sometimes difficult to understand, hard to administer and simply confusing to all.

Nowadays, all infant schools expect children starting Year 0 or kindergarten to have experienced early education and to have achieved social, literacy, numeracy etc. skills. Sadly, this does not always happen. There are many families who cannot afford preschool for their children. One kindergarten class in the outer region area has 19 in the class, and one third of these have not attended any form of preschool. How difficult for the teacher with one third of her class with no literacy, numeracy, social skills, anger management and no professional health checks carried out. So that teacher has two thirds of her class rearing to go further in reading, sums etc., and the other third holding up the class by needing a back to basics learning.

For this reason, while applauding the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education seeking to provide access to 15 hours per week of preschool education for all children in the year before they commence formal school by 2013, we would also ask that NSW adopts the current policy of other states and territories in providing one year's **free** preschool to every

child before starting Year 0. Only then will we see equality of service over the whole state – whether for a city child or a country child.

Finally, it is recommended:

- That a serious push be made to attract more workers to the industry and assistance given to workers' efforts to upgrade
- That wages be increased to recognise the importance of the ECD workers
- That any cost brought about by changes forced by the National Quality Standard e.g. staff to child ratio will be covered financially by governments
- That very serious consideration be given to twelve months free preschooling to every child in NSW.

Social Issues Committee

Country Women's Association of NSW.