
Early Childhood Australia (NSW) North Coast and Southern Cross University's response to the Draft recommendations, findings and information requests

This is a combined submission from Early Childhood Australia (NSW) North Coast region, which has approximately 110 members, and the early childhood education unit at Southern Cross University. Please find our responses in blue text following the finding/recommendations.

Chapter 3 Government involvement in the early childhood development sector

DRAFT FINDING 3.1

Though the implementation of the universal aspects of the early childhood development (ECD) policy agenda will be costly overall, the targeting of relatively small additional funding to certain aspects of the ECD workforce may deliver substantial additional benefits to the community.

DRAFT FINDING 3.2

Market pressures alone are unlikely to lead to the provision of quality ECD services. An appropriate regulatory system aimed at quality improvement and assurance is required.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 3.1

To assist parents' decision making with respect to their choice of early childhood education and care (ECEC) services for their children, governments should require ECEC regulators to publish all relevant information on service quality. Published information should be comprehensive, comparable across services, clearly explained and easy to access.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 3.2

To achieve the goals of the Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) ECEC reforms without disadvantaging low-income families through the anticipated increase in fees, governments will need to ensure that there is adequate financial support for such families.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 3.3

ECEC regulators should publish the number of service waivers granted, to whom they have been granted, and whether they are permanent or temporary.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 3.4

ECEC regulators should provide for ongoing consultation with stakeholders and timely dissemination of best practice. Governments should ensure that all ECEC regulators initiate robust evaluative processes so that regulatory impacts are minimised.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 3.5

Where voluntary committees currently manage ECEC services, governments should ensure that professional management support (such as cluster management or other shared services) is readily available to assist with management and leadership.

ECA_SCU Yes it is appropriate to have training available. But in creating available professional management support the government needs to be mindful that within voluntary committees there is often little expertise and knowledge regarding early childhood education and care. It is the trained teachers/directors of services that need to be involved in this training with the management committee to support effective communication and relevant roles and responsibilities of the committee and staff.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 3.6

In implementing the National Quality Standard, governments should ensure adequate resourcing for regulators to enable appropriate training of their staff in the new regulatory arrangements and their effective implementation.

Chapter 5 The preschool and long day care workforce

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 5.1

To assist in the transition to the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education, governments should permit:

- *any currently employed 3-year-qualified early childhood teacher to deliver the preschool program*

ECA_SCU: This is an unsatisfactory recommendation. This recommendation would continue to position early childhood educators as holding lower status and professionalism in comparison to primary and secondary teachers. International recognition of the importance of the early childhood years was identified within the COAG Report. With the growing professionalization of early childhood to deliberately reduce the training requirements to a level below that of other teachers would be detrimental to the goals of COAG. It is recommended that:

Three-year trained early childhood professionals must enrol in degrees to upgrade to 4 year qualifications by 2013 and show reasonable progress year by year, with completion in 3-4 years of commencement.

- *any 3-year-qualified teachers returning to or entering the workforce to deliver the preschool program, provided a plan is in place for them to upgrade their qualification to the equivalent of a 4-year degree.*

DRAFT FINDING 5.1

In order to attract and retain a sufficient number of early childhood teachers to achieve the National Quality Standard and the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education, salary and conditions offered by long day care centres will need to be competitive with those offered to primary teachers in the school sector. Community- and privately-managed preschools in New South Wales will also need to offer similarly competitive salaries and conditions for their teachers, which is already the case in other jurisdictions.

DRAFT FINDING 5.2

In order to attract and retain a sufficient number of workers with certificate III and diploma qualifications to achieve the National Quality Standard and the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education, wages for many workers will need to increase, particularly in long day care centres and community- and privately-managed preschools.

Chapter 6 The family day care workforce

DRAFT FINDING 6.1

To achieve the National Quality Standard, contact worker-to-child ratios for children under school age will increase in New South Wales, Western Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory. These changes are likely to lead to cost increases for family day care services in those jurisdictions, which may result in fewer children attending.

ECA_SCU: It is important to maintain the provision of quality care and family day care should be no exception

DRAFT FINDING 6.2

The National Quality Standard may result in fewer children attending family day care, and hence lower revenue for family day care schemes. In the case of the most marginal family day care schemes, coordination unit revenue could potentially decline below the minimum threshold required for ongoing operation of the scheme.

Chapter 7 The outside school hours care and occasional care workforces

INFORMATION REQUEST

The Commission seeks further information on outside school hours care and its workforce.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 7.1

Given the focus of outside school hours care on non-cognitive development through constructive play and socialisation, governments should not impose additional mandatory qualification requirements on outside school hours care workers.

INFORMATION REQUEST

The Commission seeks further information on occasional care and its workforce.

ECA_SCU: Children deserve to have a qualified member of staff who has studied child development to be supervising them in a before and after school age setting. Having no qualifications is unsuitable as group care often brings about issues that staff who are trained are better able to manage in the interests of all stakeholders.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 7.2