

The Queensland Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian

promoting and protecting the rights, interests and wellbeing of all Queenslanders under 18

Advice to: Australian Government Productivity Commission
Topic: Early Childhood Development Workforce Productivity Commission Draft Research Report
Date due: 31 August 2011

Thank you for providing the Queensland Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian with the opportunity to comment on the Productivity Commission Draft Research Report on the Early Childhood Development Workforce (the report).

The Commission commends the Productivity Commission for its comprehensive examination of workforce issues in the early childhood development sector. The Commission recognises that evidence has shown that the provision of high quality pre-school programs is related to social, behavioural and intellectual benefits for children.¹ Research has indicated that participation in quality programs has the strongest effect for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.² Other evidence has indicated that for a particular group of disadvantaged children, the effects of poor quality child care were more pronounced, suggesting that child care experiences, in both the short and long-term, have an even greater influence on some areas of development for children at greater risk.³ This highlights the importance of working to facilitate access to quality programs delivered by appropriately qualified and skilled staff, particularly for vulnerable children.

Summary of the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian's position:

1. The Commission notes and endorses the report's acknowledgement of workforce issues which impact on children from disadvantaged backgrounds, those with additional needs, children in rural and remote areas and Indigenous children
2. The Commission supports the report's recognition that priority needs to be given to workforce developments and additional supports to facilitate access to quality early childhood education and care programs for vulnerable groups of children
3. The Commission recommends that consideration be given to the explicit recognition of children in the statutory child protection system and the future workforce development needs required to deliver holistic and integrated early childhood education and care services that are responsive to their needs, and
4. The Commission suggests that further consideration be given to whether or not it should be a requirement for an integrated early childhood development services manager to hold any specific qualification.

¹ Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Taggart, B. (2004) *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Findings from Pre-school to end of Key Stage 1*, Institute of Education, University of London, p.1

² Melhuish, E.C. (2004) *A literature review of the impact of early years provision upon young children, with emphasis given to children from disadvantaged backgrounds*, Institute for the Study of Children, Families and Social Issues, Birkbeck, University of London, prepared for the National Audit Office, United Kingdom, p.3

³ Peisner-Feinberg, E.S., Burchinal, M.R., Clifford, R.M., Culkin, M.L., Howes, C., Kagan, S.L., Yazejian, N., Byler, P., Rustici, J., and Zelazo, J. (1999) *The children of the cost, quality, and outcomes study go to school: Executive Summary*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center, p.8-9

1. The Commission notes and endorses the report's acknowledgement of workforce issues which impact on children from disadvantaged backgrounds, those with additional needs, children in rural and remote areas and Indigenous children

The Commission welcomes the recommendations made in the report which seek to highlight and address workforce issues which have a particular impact on vulnerable groups of children.

The Commission is supportive of the report highlighting that early childhood development (ECD) services for children with additional needs, and for Indigenous children, are not meeting the standards commonly available to other children. Accordingly, the Commission welcomes the finding that it is essential that ECD workforce requirements for children with additional needs and Indigenous children are given priority, so that the gap between these groups and other children is minimised, not exacerbated.

2. The Commission supports the report's recognition that priority needs to be given to workforce developments and additional supports to facilitate access to quality early childhood education and care programs for vulnerable groups of children

The Commission is concerned that without prioritisation of initiatives to assist in enhancing access opportunities for vulnerable children, particular groups of children may be at risk of being excluded from quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) programs.

The Commission supports the report's recognition that parents of disadvantaged children are often low income earners, or in some cases may already be bearing the costs of raising a child with additional needs and that without further assistance these parents may reduce their children's participation in ECEC services in response to any cost increases.

The Commission is pleased that the findings in the draft report highlight the issues in relation to the likelihood of any increased costs being shared between governments and parents and that in the absence of appropriately targeted additional funding, the increase in ECEC costs will see some children have reduced access to, or be withdrawn from, ECEC services. The Commission notes the particular reference to the point that Indigenous children and those with additional needs stand to benefit most from ECD services that meet their specific needs. The Commission welcomes the recommendations which recognise the need for adequate financial support, particularly for disadvantaged families, to facilitate access to quality programs.

3. The Commission recommends that consideration be given to the explicit recognition of children in the statutory child protection system and the future workforce development needs required to deliver holistic and integrated early childhood education and care services that are responsive to their needs

The Commission urges the Australian Productivity Commission to give consideration to workforce developments and any further supports that may be required to facilitate

The Queensland Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian

promoting and protecting the rights, interests and wellbeing of all Queenslanders under 18

access to quality ECEC programs to meet the needs and best interests of children in the statutory child protection system.

The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children has identified the role of quality ECEC services in providing prevention and early intervention services to vulnerable families.⁴ Additionally, the National Early Childhood Development Strategy - *Investing in the Early Years* identifies that responsive early childhood development services will require improved supports for children in, or at risk of entering, the statutory child protection system.⁵ These children are a particularly vulnerable group of children and one which is likely to require additional supports and financial assistance. Children in, or at risk of entering, the statutory child protection system may exhibit challenging behaviours as a result of trauma or abuse and neglect and may require intensive, integrated supports to allow them to access and benefit from ECEC programs.

As at 30 June 2010 there were 37,730 children on care and protection orders across Australia, of these 25.2% were aged 4 years or under.⁶ This group of children are known to be at risk of faring poorly at school and may benefit significantly from educational supports at an early age. Studies have revealed that students living in care are often the most vulnerable students in the school system and are at greater risk of poor academic performance, grade retention and the need for special education services.⁷ Information from Queensland has highlighted that a smaller proportion of children in the statutory child protection system reach the national minimum academic benchmarks, with this disparity already apparent in the year 3 National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) tests where, for example only 64.9% meet the national reading benchmark in comparison to 87.1% of all students.⁸

The evidence highlights the importance of providing access to quality ECEC programs delivered by skilled and appropriately trained staff for these children. Maximising access opportunities for children who may be vulnerable to experiencing poorer educational outcomes later in life is important considering that some research has indicated that *children who attended higher quality child care centres performed better on measures of both cognitive skills (e.g., maths and language abilities) and social skills (e.g., interactions with peers, problem behaviours) in child care and through the transition into school.*⁹ Additionally, other research has shown that early childhood interventions boost

⁴ Council of Australian Governments (2009) *Protecting Children is Everyone's Business National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020*, p.29, 47 and 51

⁵ Council of Australian Governments (2009) *Investing in the Early Years – A National Early Childhood Development Strategy*, p.27

⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2011) *Child protection Australia 2009-10*, Child welfare series no. 51, Cat. no. CWS 39, Canberra, p.32 and 78

⁷ Fram, M.S., & Altshuler, S.J. (2009) *Social Capital Theory: Another Lens for school social workers to use to support students living in foster care*, School Social Work Journal, 33(2), pages 1-25 and Havalchak, A., White, C.R., O'Brien, K., Pecora, P.J., & Sepulveda, M. (2009) *Foster care experiences and educational outcomes of young adults formerly placed in foster care*, School Social Work Journal, 34(1), pages 1-28

⁸ Queensland Studies Authority, Department of Communities, Child Safety Services 2008-09 - *Child Protection Partnerships Report*, p.29

⁹ Peisner-Feinberg, E.S., Burchinal, M.R., Clifford, R.M., Culkin, M.L., Howes, C., Kagan, S.L., Yazejian, N., Byler, P., Rustici, J., and Zelazo, J. (1999) *The children of the cost, quality, and outcomes study go to school: Executive Summary*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center, p.1

The Queensland Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian

promoting and protecting the rights, interests and wellbeing of all Queenslanders under 18

*children's confidence and social skills, which provides a better foundation for success at school (and subsequently in the workplace).*¹⁰

The Commission notes that some of the recommendations deal with the financial supports that would be required for low income families so that these families are not disadvantaged by any increase in fees which may result from the implementation of the goals of the Council of Australian Governments' ECEC reforms. The Commission recognises that these supports may assist some children in the statutory child protection system and encourages the Australian Productivity Commission to highlight the issue of children in the statutory child protection system and how these financial supports could be made accessible to these children.

The Commission is currently undertaking work to identify factors which influence whether or not children aged 3 to 5 years in foster care in Queensland attend ECEC programs. This work is seeking information in relation to any barriers which may exist to accessing these ECEC services, including cost and the availability of suitable care.

4. The Commission suggests that further consideration be given to whether or not it should be a requirement for an integrated early childhood development services manager to hold any specific qualification

The Commission recognises the potential advantages of integrated services being available to vulnerable children and their families as a means of providing holistic responses to multifaceted issues. This is particularly important because vulnerable children may have complex needs in areas including health, education and social development and experience challenges such as developmental delays and behavioural concerns. The Commission welcomes the recognition the report gives to the benefit integrated services can provide to disadvantaged families.

To incorporate the necessary skills into the workforce in a systemic way, consideration may need to be given to the minimum requirements for managing an integrated ECD service. The Commission notes the recommendation on page 303 of the report that the *Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council should consider introducing VET qualifications:*

- *that focus on leading and managing integrated ECD services*
- *for contact workers at the certificate IV or diploma level.*

The Commission recommends that further investigation be undertaken into what level of qualification should be deemed necessary to fulfill the role of an ECD manager. If a minimum qualification requirement is to be recommended then this should be made clear in the final report.

Please do not hesitate to contact Clea Viney, A/Senior Policy Officer, Policy, Strategic Policy and Research Program (ph:07 3211 6954; e-mail Clea.Viney@ccypcg.qld.gov.au) should any aspects of this advice require clarification.

¹⁰ Melhuish, E.C. (2004) *A literature review of the impact of early years provision upon young children, with emphasis given to children from disadvantaged backgrounds*, Institute for the Study of Children, Families and Social Issues, Birkbeck, University of London, prepared for the National Audit Office, United Kingdom, p.3

References

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2011) *Child protection Australia 2009-10*, Child welfare series no. 51, Cat. no. CWS 39, Canberra

Baker, M., Gruber, J. and Milligan, K. (2005) *Universal childcare, maternal labor supply and family well-being*, Working Paper 11832, National Bureau of Economic Research, Toronto

Council of Australian Governments (2009) *Protecting Children is Everyone's Business National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020*

Council of Australian Governments (2009) *Investing in the Early Years – A National Early Childhood Development Strategy*

Melhuish, E.C. (2004) *A literature review of the impact of early years provision upon young children, with emphasis given to children from disadvantaged backgrounds*, Institute for the Study of Children, Families and Social Issues, Birkbeck, University of London, prepared for the National Audit Office, United Kingdom

Peisner-Feinberg, E.S., Burchinal, M.R., Clifford, R.M., Culkin, M.L., Howes, C., Kagan, S.L., Yazejian, N., Byler, P., Rustici, J., and Zelazo, J. *The children of the cost, quality, and outcomes study go to school: Executive Summary*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center

Queensland Studies Authority, Department of Communities, Child Safety Services 2008-09 - *Child Protection Partnerships Report*

Sammons, P., Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Siraj-Blatchford, I., Taggart, B., Elliot, K. and Marsh, A. (2004) *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Technical Paper 9 – Report on age 6 assessment*, Institute of Education University of London

Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Taggart, B. (2004) *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Findings from Pre-school to end of Key Stage 1*, Institute of Education University of London