



# **BIG STEPS**

in Early Childhood  
Education and Care

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# QUALITY MATTERS: INVESTING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

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2013 PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION INQUIRY  
**into childcare & early childhood learning**

SUBMISSION BY UNITED VOICE, February 2014.



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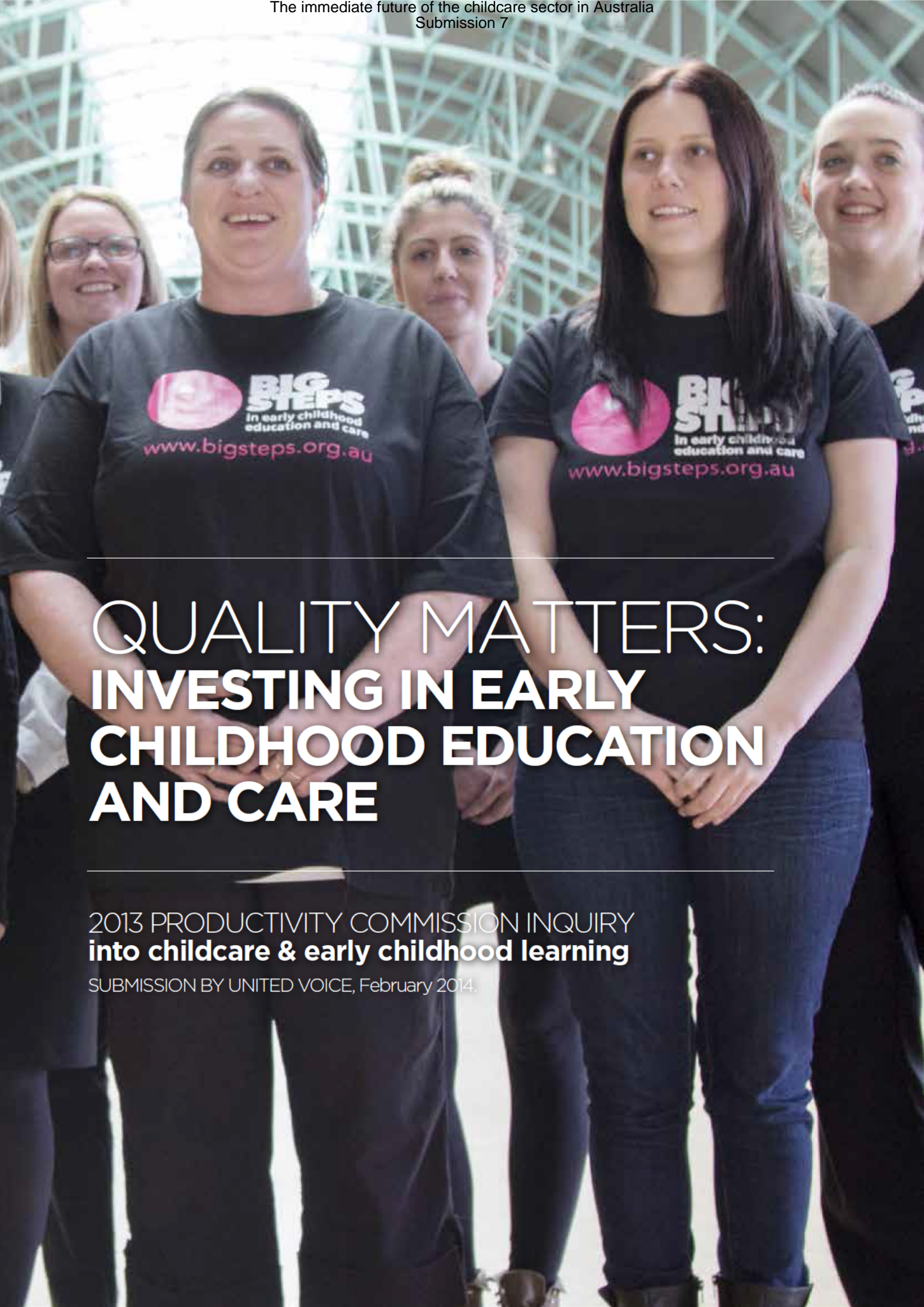
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Authorised by Louise Tarrant, National Secretary, United Voice – The Childcare Union, 303 Cleveland Street, Redfern, NSW 2016.







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# QUALITY MATTERS: INVESTING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

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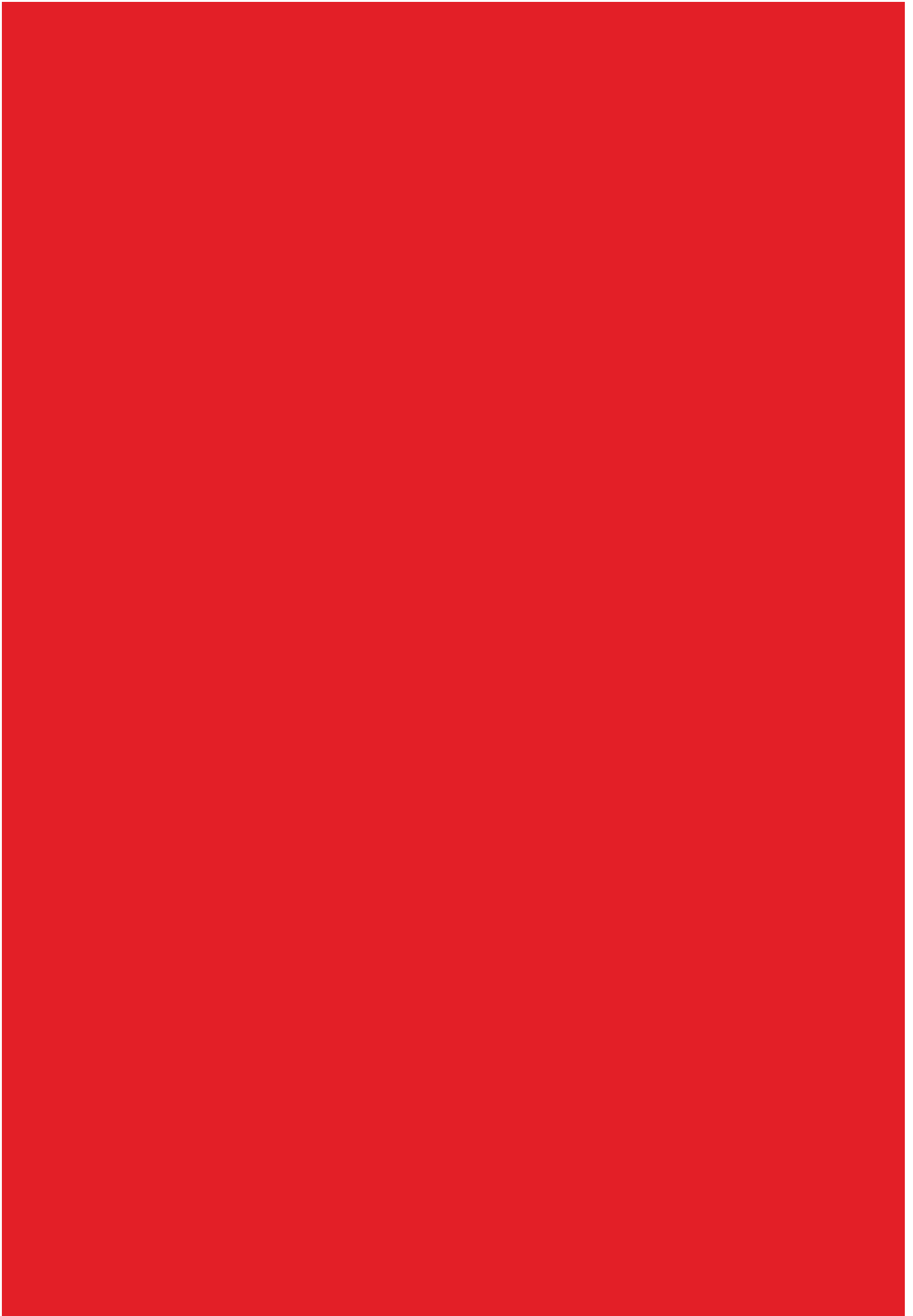
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Dear Commissioners

On behalf of 99,655 educators across the Australian Early Childhood Education and Care Sector, we are pleased to present our submission to your public inquiry into future options for childcare and early childhood learning.

Australian families and their employers are well served by a workforce of dedicated, highly trained, professional educators. We are proud of the work we do – educating 817237 young Australians and maximising the contribution their parents can make to the economy.

As the professionals working in centres delivering education and care every day, we have unique insights into the strengths and weaknesses of current policy settings. We very much welcome the Commission's Inquiry and look forward to working proactively with government and industry to implement recommendations that maximise quality early learning, the welfare of children and workforce participation.

Reforming Australia's early childhood education and care system is absolutely vital. Educators have been warning for some time about the looming 'triple crisis' of quality, affordability and accessibility. While the previous and current governments have taken some steps to address these problems, current trends suggest a likely worsening of the crisis.

Some have called for addressing affordability and accessibility at the expense of quality. But we strongly contend that is a false choice. Our extensive research demonstrates that quality is at the heart of parental confidence in the system. If quality declines, parental confidence will decline. This is especially the case amongst higher income more highly educated mothers who have greater economic and workplace flexibility and therefore a greater capacity to choose when and how intensively they return to the workforce.

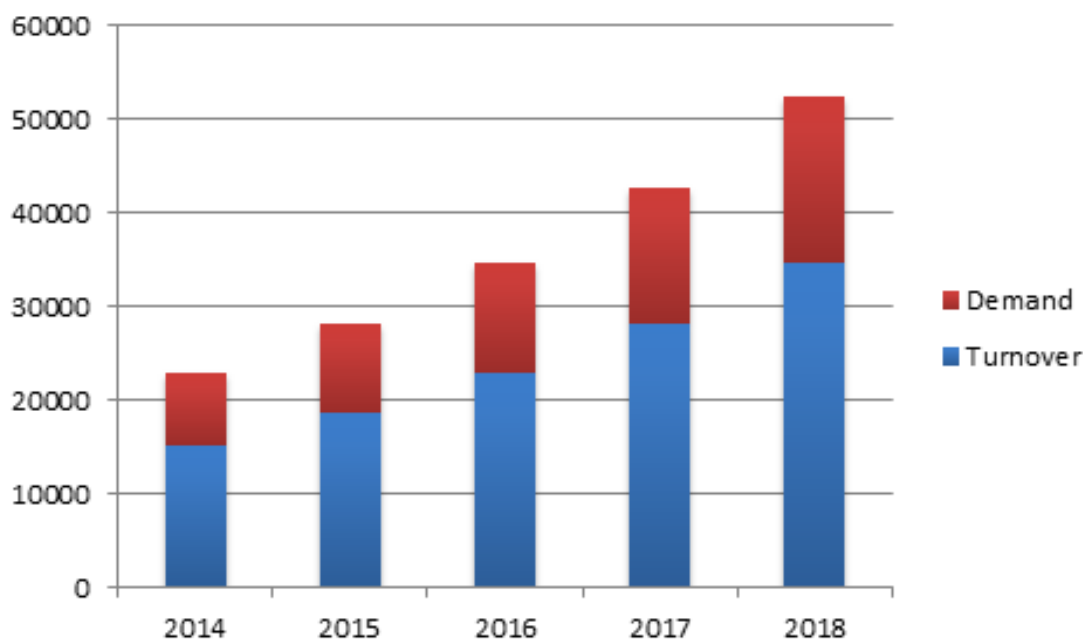
We encourage the Commission to focus its attention on addressing all three elements together, rather than the false choice of trading one against another. All three should be measures of successful policy. Substantial and mounting evidence suggests a looming catastrophe on all three fronts. Failure to address any one will hamper economic growth.



## WORKFORCE

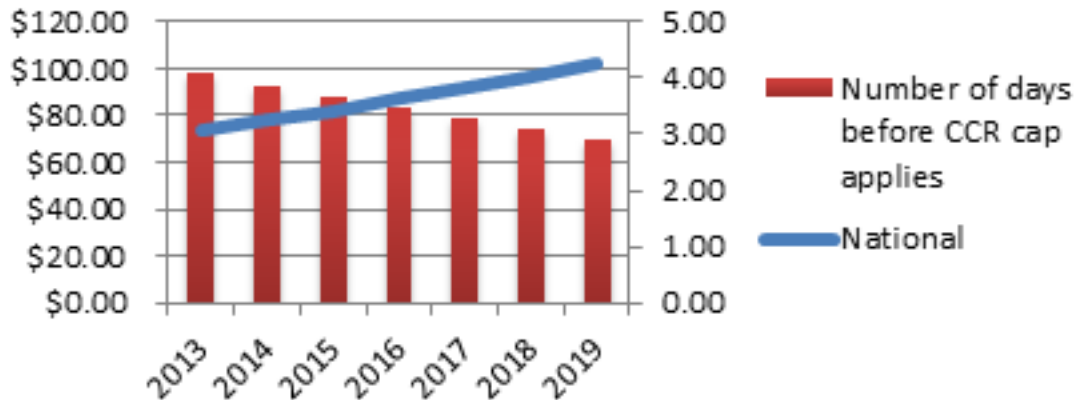
The key driver of quality from a parental perspective is highly qualified, professional educators. The Productivity Commission has alerted the Government previously of the looming shortage of qualified educators. The exodus of qualified staff from the sector continued throughout 2013. A disturbing 15.2 per cent or 17,400 educators leave the sector every year. We would need an additional 23,900 qualified educators by 2016 if demand stayed static (which appears unlikely given recent trends). Almost three quarters of services report unfilled vacancies, between 2011 and 2012 the proportion of child care worker vacancies filled declined from 61 per cent to 51 per cent, and the average number of suitable applicants per vacancy fell from 1.1 to 0.9. To address the quality crisis we must attract and retain educators better – a point supported by the Commission’s most recent work in this area.

**More shockingly, if current growth in demand and staff turnover continues we will need to recruit almost twice the entire current workforce over the next five years.**



## AFFORDABILITY

Average capital city daily rates for long day care continued to increase at more than twice the rate of inflation. In five years on current trends average rates across Australia will top \$100 per day, and up to \$120 a day in more expensive markets. **If the current \$7,500 cap on the Child Care Rebate remains in place the rebate will apply to less days per week.** This is likely to play an increasing role in limiting the number of hours primary care givers return to work.



## ACCESSIBILITY

The Productivity Commission has recently highlighted that 598,500 children need more formal care than they can currently access – almost one in every six children.

Clearly current policy settings are failing to adequately address the needs of Australian families. If action is not taken, growth in workforce participation is likely to slow. As educators we have insight into how each of these problems manifests in centres and in the lives of families we see every day. We urge the Commission to recognise that quality, affordability and accessibility cannot be disentangled. They must be addressed together through holistic, positive reform.

We look forward to engaging with you further as the Inquiry proceeds.

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# *Introduction*



## 1.1. INTRODUCING UNITED VOICE

United Voice, the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) union, represents over 90,000 childcare directors and educators across Australia. We have members in every state and territory working in both large organisations and smaller centres. Together we are committed to providing the best possible early education experience for Australian children.



## 1.2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In recent years, ECEC has gained recognition as an essential sector which fulfils key educational and workforce participation goals. Recent government quality reforms have raised expectations for a long-overdue overhaul of the ECEC system. Although a qualified workforce is widely recognised as key to ensuring high quality ECEC, educators continue to be underpaid while also suffering low status, lack of career paths and inadequate training opportunities. The sector's labour market is in crisis. According to the 2011 Productivity Commission report, centres struggle to retain existing staff or recruit new staff.<sup>1</sup> Continuity of care for children by qualified educators is a critical measure of quality. Therefore, ensuring a professional and stable workforce is a central aspect of achieving high quality child care and consequently long-term developmental outcomes.

At the same time, parents are having difficulty accessing childcare due to affordability issues and a lack of places. According to the ABS, in 2008 parents of 54,000 children not yet at school reported that they had an unmet need for formal child care, with 71 per cent of these requiring Long Day Care services.<sup>2</sup> The reasons for unmet need included a lack of available places and cost concerns. Our recent research has found that between April 2011 and April 2012 gross childcare fees (before subsidies) increased by 11.2 per cent across all states in Australia, from an average of \$63.21 to \$70.29 per day. These fee increases translate, on average, into an estimated \$3.54 out of pocket per day per child for *most* parents.<sup>3</sup> Australia has the second highest rate of parental expenditure for childcare in the OECD, with parents paying 48.6 per cent of the total cost of childcare against an OECD average of 18 per cent.

Effective solutions are urgently needed to reverse entrenched labour market failures. United Voice contends that in order to meet key policy objectives, workforce development challenges, including poor labour retention and staff and skill shortages, must be overcome. These solutions must include new ways of funding the sector, to raise wages through targeted funding in order to attract and retain staff. Sufficient and appropriate training and professional development opportunities need to be provided to childcare professionals on whom quality ECEC depends.

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<sup>1</sup> Productivity Commission, *Early Childhood Development Workforce: A Productivity Research Report*. Melbourne: Commonwealth of Australia, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> ABS, *4402.0 - Childhood Education and Care, Australia, June 2008*. Retrieved from <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4402.0Main+Features1June%202008%20%28Reissue%29>.

<sup>3</sup> United Voice, *Childcare Fees 2011–2012*, Sydney: United Voice, 2012.



### 1.3. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **RECOMMENDATION 1:**

##### ***Reform government funding to encourage effective, high quality ECEC***

ECEC is a vital service that fulfils key social and economic goals. Despite this, Australia has one of the lowest expenditures on ECEC services across the OECD. United Voice recommends that the government directs additional funding to the ECEC sector. We support a cost-driven funding model to ensure that government funds are spent effectively and transparently, while ensuring ongoing affordability for parents.

Research shows that ECEC funding is most successful at achieving workforce participation outcomes when it is combined with other parenting payments that together minimise the disincentives for the second earner to return to work. To support parents' choice regarding the mix of care utilised and facilitate their return to work, United Voice believes that early years funding should be considered holistically, and include other measures such as the family tax benefit and paid parental leave.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 2:**

##### ***Government should regulate the sector for quality to support child development and workforce participation outcomes***

High quality ECEC results in numerous benefits for parents and children. These benefits flow onto the broader community. Governments dedicate substantial amounts of funding to ECEC services each year. It is imperative that these funds are spent as effectively as possible to maximise the short- and long-term benefits derived from these services. United Voice supports a system in which government funding is directed towards services that provide both education and care, with government funding targeted to 'approved' providers, who utilise a play-based educational program (i.e. not just child-minding).

United Voice is broadly supportive of the recently implemented quality reforms and accreditation requirements. While there may be areas where these requirements could be streamlined, we believe that any changes to the current system must wait until ACECQA completes its review of the NQF in 2014. We note, furthermore, that there is broad support among providers and parents for the regulations.

**RECOMMENDATION 3:**

***Provide targeted funding for professional wages to ensure quality ECEC***

The ECEC sector currently struggles to attract and retain suitably qualified staff. This is due to relatively poor wages in the sector, accompanied by poor career progression and long working hours. United Voice believes that the current quality reforms cannot be fully achieved unless the working conditions of staff are addressed. Staff attrition across the sector will only be resolved if wages are commensurate with the skills, responsibilities and expectations required of the workforce and with the social value of quality care. For reform to be meaningful and lasting, wages must increase substantially across the entire sector.

A photograph of a classroom setting. In the foreground, a young girl with brown hair, wearing a blue t-shirt, is leaning over a table, focused on a task. To her right, a young boy with short brown hair, wearing a black t-shirt, is also looking down at the table. In the background, an adult woman with blonde hair, wearing a red t-shirt, is standing and looking towards the children. The room has blue storage units, a blackboard with colorful drawings, and various educational materials on the walls. The text "The importance of quality ECEC" is overlaid in white, italicized font across the middle of the image.

*The importance of quality ECEC*





ECEC is widely recognised as a vital service that fulfils key social and economic outcomes.<sup>6</sup> Not only does childcare fulfil a vital role in allowing parents to participate in the workforce, countless studies have shown the positive influence of quality early education and care on a child's ongoing learning and development.

The benefits from the provision of high quality ECEC do not cease with individual parents and children who avail themselves of these services. The benefits flow on to the broader community through returns from the increased workforce participation of parents, as well as from the effects of greater social inclusion. A recent UK study estimates a return of £7.20 from every £1 paid to a childcare professional, which is generated from parents' ability to engage in employment.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, a Quebec study found a return of \$6 from every dollar spent on ECEC.<sup>8</sup>

For these reasons, investment in ECEC is broadly recognised as a public, and not just an individual, good.

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*Some economic policies present us with a trade-off between growth and equality; investing in children appears to be a win-win situation.*

Australian Treasury Report.<sup>4</sup>

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*Higher investments in early childhood can save money later.*

European Commission Report.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> R Breunig, X Gong, D Trott, 'The new National Quality Framework: quantifying some of the effects on labour supply, child care demand and household finances for two-parent households', *Economic Record*; Council of Australian Governments, 2013. COAG, *Investing in the Early Years - A National Childhood Development Strategy*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> European Commission, *Early Childhood Education and Care: Providing all our Children with the Best Start for the World of Tomorrow*, Brussels, European Commission, 2011.

<sup>6</sup> OECD, *Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care, Volume 2*, Paris, OECD, 2006.

<sup>7</sup> E Lawlor, H Kersley, S Steed, *A Bit Rich: Calculating the Real Value to Society of Different Professions*, New Economics Foundation, 2009

<sup>8</sup> C Bouchard, *Un Québec fou de ses enfants*. Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, Québec, Ministère de la Santé et des Services Sociaux, 1991.

## 2.1. WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION

A key function of ECEC is to enable greater workforce participation. According to the ABS, 70 per cent of parents cite work-related factors as the main reason for using some form of childcare.<sup>9</sup> The role of childcare in encouraging workforce participation is particularly pronounced for women, who still bear the primary responsibility for child care. In fact, international research has found that the strongest determinant of female labour supply in industrialised countries is the level of childcare provision. Women will typically work shorter hours or remain out of the workforce to care for children if they are unable to access a childcare place that is of sufficient quality.<sup>10</sup>

The decline in female workforce participation after motherhood is particularly pronounced in Australia. While Australia has a relatively high rate of female workforce participation overall, there is a significant decline in the rates of workforce participation of women with young children, especially when compared to other countries in the OECD. A 2006 Productivity Commission study found that only 62 per cent of mothers with children under 15 were in paid employment, against an OECD average of 66.1 per cent. This decreased to approximately 30 per cent for mothers with their youngest child under three, placing Australia in the bottom four of OECD countries.<sup>11</sup> The Productivity Commission also noted that these figures overstate the effective maternal labour supply as they do not take into account the rate of part-time work among Australian women, which at 40 per cent is amongst the highest in the OECD.

Since the 1980s, increases in maternal employment in Australia have typically been associated with part-time work. The majority of mothers in the workforce report that they elect to work part-time in order to manage their use of non-parental care.<sup>12</sup> Extensive periods of part-time employment can have long-term economic implications for women due to an accumulated loss of earnings. This is due to a number of factors, including:

- Loss of pay due to occupational downgrading (women who switch from full- to part-time work typically to move into lower skilled and lower paid jobs);
- Lower career trajectories, marked by a relative lack of career progression and promotion opportunities.

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<sup>9</sup> Access Economics, *An Economic Analysis of the Proposed ECEC National Quality Agenda*, Canberra, Access Economics, 2009, p.47.

<sup>10</sup> W Van Lancker & J Ghysels, J. 'Who benefits? The social distribution of subsidized childcare in Sweden and Flanders'. *Acta Sociologica*, vol 55, no 9, 2012, p.127.

<sup>11</sup> J Abhayaratna, & R Lattimore, *Workforce Participation Rates - How Does Australia Compare?* Canberra, Productivity Commission, 2006.

<sup>12</sup> J Baxter, *Childcare Participation and Maternal Employment Trends in Australia*, Melbourne, Australian Institute for Family Studies, 2013.

Researchers have calculated that together these factors result in a ‘motherhood pay gap’ of between 6–12 per cent.<sup>13</sup> This leaves many women with less financial independence in retirement, with their total superannuation on retirement impacted by lower pay and shorter hours of work across their working life.<sup>14</sup>

The ‘motherhood pay gap’ represents a significant equity issue. It also has broader economic implications. The Grattan Institute notes that if Australia had the same rate of female workforce participation as Canada (i.e. an extra six per cent of women in the workforce), then Australia’s GDP would be about \$25 billion higher.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Skills Australia recommends that continued economic growth in Australia will require an increase in the workforce participation rate by four per cent over the next fifteen years, with a particular focus on sections of the population who are under-represented in employment, including women.<sup>16</sup> Policies to support more women with children to return to the workforce, or to undertake to work longer hours, will significantly improve Australia’s economic growth.

While a significant percentage of parents choose to stay at home to care for their children, the indications are that parents are more willing to work if a set of criteria is met. These include flexible work conditions, parental leave arrangements, and the availability of affordable and good quality childcare.<sup>17</sup> For this reason, United Voice welcomes the Productivity Commission’s decision to investigate the interaction between paternal leave, tax benefits and ECEC funding and provision, and their combined effects on workforce participation.

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<sup>13</sup> M Baird, J Whelan, & A Page, *Paid maternity, paternity and parental leave for Australia: An evaluation of the context, evidence and policy options*, Sydney, Women and Work Research Group, 2009.

<sup>14</sup> V Alakeson, *The Price of Motherhood: Women and Part-Time Work*, London, The Resolution Foundation, 2009; COAG Reform Council, *Tracking equity: Comparing outcomes for women and girls across Australia*, COAG Reform Council, 2009; S Connolly & M Gregory, ‘The part-time pay penalty: earnings trajectories of British Women’, *Oxford Economic Papers*, 61(suppl 1), 2009, i76–i97; K Mumford, & P Smith, ‘What determines the part-time and gender earnings gaps in Britain: evidence from the workplace’. *Oxford Economic Papers*, 61(suppl 1), 2009, i56–i75.

<sup>15</sup> J Daley, C McGannon, & L Ginnivan, *Game-changers: Economic reform priorities for Australia*, Melbourne, Grattan Institute, 2012, p.38.

<sup>16</sup> Skills Australia, *Australian Workforce Futures: A National Workforce Development Strategy*, Canberra, Commonwealth of Australia, 2010.

<sup>17</sup> H Penn, *Early Childhood Education and Care: Key Lessons from Research for Policy Makers*, Brussels, European Commission, 2009; OECD, *Doing Better for Families*, Paris, OECD, 2011; O Thévenon, *Drivers of Female Labour Force Participation in the OECD*, Paris, OECD Publishing, 2013.

The accessibility and affordability of ECEC does not in itself enable greater workforce participation. Recent research undertaken by the Australian Treasury has shown that women's workforce participation is also sensitive to non-price factors, with the quality of ECEC services as important as cost and availability in shaping women's decisions to participate in the workforce.<sup>18</sup> The importance of quality to parental childcare decisions varies according to the age of the children and the socio-economic status of parents. In her study of maternal decision labour supply and access to care, Boyd finds quality is a strong determinant of the number of hours mothers choose to work. While in the first six months following the birth of their child cost and accessibility are more important than quality in determining whether mothers return to work, once the child is 12 months old access to high quality care is strongly associated with their decision to work longer hours. In other words, while women may elect to return to work despite the quality of care, they are less likely to work longer hours if high quality care is unavailable.<sup>19</sup>

Parents must have confidence in the quality and integrity of the system to which they entrust their children. The role of government in ensuring quality in the ECEC sector, and providing the funding to support this quality, is therefore critical to encouraging greater workforce participation.

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<sup>18</sup> R Breunig, X Gong, J Mercante, A Weiss, & C Yamauchi, Child care availability, quality and affordability: are local problems related to labour supply. *Economic Record*, vol 87, no 276, 2012, p.109–124; see also D Baker, *Trouble with Childcare: Affordability, Availability, and Quality*, Canberra, The Australia Institute, 2013.

<sup>19</sup> W Boyd, Maternal employment in Australia: Achievements and barriers to satisfying employment, *Australian Bulletin of Labour*, vol 38, no 3, 2012, p.199–213.



## 2.2. CHILD DEVELOPMENT

In the past, childcare was understood as the provision of care and supervision in the absence of parents. However, there is growing recognition of the importance of early childhood education to children's development. Research across medical and social disciplines identifies a relationship between quality ECEC and improved social, psychological, health and economic outcomes. The research indicates that experiences in early childhood can have long-term impacts on health, learning and behaviour. This is particularly the case for children from disadvantaged or vulnerable populations.<sup>20</sup> The returns also stem from the short- and long- term benefits for child development, including:

- increased secondary school completion;<sup>21</sup>
- positive socialisation outcomes;<sup>22</sup>
- increased outcomes for girls;<sup>23</sup>
- a lack of year repetitions and reduced intervention;<sup>24</sup>
- more settled behaviours;<sup>25</sup>
- aspirations for education and employment, motivation and commitment to schooling;<sup>26</sup>
- the prevention of chronic delinquency<sup>27</sup> or crime/anti-social behaviour;<sup>28</sup> and
- increased benefits with longer periods of time in early childhood programs.<sup>29</sup>

Internationally, longitudinal studies have shown a significant achievement gap between the school performance of children who have attended formal ECEC programs, and children who had not attended any program. For example:

- A Melbourne Institute report shows improvements of 10-15 NAPLAN points in Year 3 for children who had attended a preschool program, against those who had not attended a preschool program.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>20</sup> COAG, *National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education*, Sydney, COAG, 2008,

<sup>21</sup> M Roderick, Grade retention and school drop-out: Investigating the association, *American Educational Research Journal*, vol 31, no 4, 1994, p.729–759.

<sup>22</sup> D Johnson, T Walker, A follow-up evaluation of the Houston Parent Child Development Centre: School Performance, *Journal of Early Intervention*, vol 15, no 3, 1991, p.226–236.

<sup>23</sup> MO Caughey, J DiPetro, & M Strobino, 'Day-care participation as a protective factor in the cognitive development of low-income children', *Child Development*, no 65, 1994, p.457-471.

<sup>24</sup> WS Barnett, 'Long-term effects of early childhood programs on cognitive and school outcomes', *The Future of Children*, vol 5, no 3, 1995, p. 25-50; FA Campbell, & CT Ramey, 'Effects of early intervention on intellectual and academic achievement: A follow-up study of children from low-income families', *Child Development*, no 65, 1994, p.584–698.

<sup>25</sup> KJ Rowe, & KS Rowe, 'Inattentiveness and literacy achievement: The interdependence of student and class/teacher effects', *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health*, vol 33, no 4, 1997, p.A20.

<sup>26</sup> M Rutter, 'Family and social influences on cognitive development', *Journal of Child Psychology*, vol 26, no 5, 1985, p.683–704; K Sylva, 'The impact of early learning on children's later development' in C. Ball (Ed) *Start Right: The importance of early learning*, London, Royal Society of Arts Manufacturing and commerce, 1994, p.1–18; K Sylva, 'School influences on children's development', *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, vol 35, no 1, 1994, p.135–170.

<sup>27</sup> H Yoshikawa, 'Long-term effects of early childhood programs on social outcomes and delinquency', *The Future of Children*, vol 5, no 3, 1995, p.51–75.

<sup>28</sup> Commonwealth of Australia (1999) Pathways to prevention: *Developmental and early intervention approaches to crime in Australia*. National Crime Prevention, ACT: Attorney-General's Office.

<sup>29</sup> AJ Reynolds, 'One year of pre-school intervention or two: Does it matter?' *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, no 10, 1995, 1–33; M McCain & J Mustard, *Reversing the real brain drain*. Toronto, The Canadian Institute for Advanced Research, 1999; B Kolb B 'Brain development, plasticity and development', *American Psychologist*, vol 44, no 9, 1989, p.1203–1212.

- The OECD Programme for International Student Development found that 15 year olds who had attended at least one year of pre-primary education (e.g. preschool) out-performed students who had not attended an ECEC program, even when socio-economic background was taken into account.<sup>31</sup>
- UK Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) Project found that by age seven, children who had attended high quality preschools scored significantly better on social and educational outcomes, including having a 7.8 month advantage in literacy when compared to children who had not attended preschool.<sup>32</sup>

The EPPE project found that the benefits of ECEC improve with the duration of attendance, with children's attendance in formal ECEC programs before the age of three linked to greater intellectual development, and to improved independence, concentration and sociability by the age of six.<sup>33</sup>

In assessing the benefits that accrue from ECEC, it is important to note that quality matters. Although the research points to the complex range of benefits that stem from high quality ECEC, these benefits are not associated with poor quality ECEC services. In fact, the European Commission found that "poor quality ECEC may do more harm than good and may increase inequalities".<sup>34</sup> The negative effects of low quality ECEC are particularly pronounced for children under two, with the potential for "long-term poor incomes [...] which can be costly to remediate (lower educational achievement and increased crime, for example)".<sup>35</sup>

According to the AEDI National Development Index, in 2013 22 per cent of Australian children were developmentally vulnerable in one or more developmental domains when they started school. Almost half of these children were developmentally vulnerable in two or more domains.<sup>36</sup> Access to high quality ECEC could address this issue and improve the transition to school for a large number of Australian children. This would result in long-term benefits for the Australian community including higher future tax revenues, greater workforce productivity, and reduced welfare dependency.

In assessing funding to ECEC programs against child development outcomes, United Voice believes that it is necessary to take an integrated approach to education funding, which sees ECEC funding in relation to a broader education system, including primary and secondary education.

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<sup>30</sup> D Warren & J Haisken, *Early Bird Catches the Worm: The Causal Impact of Pre-school Participation and Teacher Qualifications on Year 3 National NAPLAN Cognitive Tests*, Melbourne, MIAESR, 2013.

<sup>31</sup> OECD, *Pisa in Focus 2011/1*, Paris, OECD, 2010.

<sup>32</sup> K Sylvia, I Siraj-Blatchford, BTaggart, P Sammons, E Melhuish, & K Elliot, *The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) Project: Findings from the pre-school period*, London, University of London, 2003.

<sup>33</sup> K Sylvia, E Melhuish, P Sammons, I Siraj-Blatchford, & BTaggart, *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: The Findings from the Early Primary Years*, Nottingham, Surestart, 2004.

<sup>34</sup> European Commission.

<sup>35</sup> ECE Taskforce, *An Agenda for Amazing Children*, Wellington, ECE Taskforce, 2011, p.59.

<sup>36</sup> Centre for Community Child Health, & Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, *A Snapshot of Early Childhood Development in Australia: Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) National Report 2009*. Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009, p.5.





# *The ECEC workforce*







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*We are, for many parents, an extended family. We often double as support workers. There have been many times where I've actually helped first time, or single parents, who just aren't coping, deal with difficult children, or children who won't sleep. Our job extends far beyond everyday education and care.*

Shirley, Assistant Director, Tasmania

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As part of the daily work process, early childhood educators perform a variety of professional tasks integral to the delivery of high quality education and care. Workers educate children according to leading child development pedagogy, developing play-based educational programs that cater to each child's individual needs. Assisting with the daily design and implementation of programs, they offer guidance and reflect positive role models for children. Educators ensure high standards of quality, safety and hygiene in the centres, and exercise observation and evaluation skills to document, plan and report on the progress of children. They often undertake formal or informal mentoring of co-workers, while also engaging in routine cleaning tasks and making use of their creative abilities with arts and crafts activities for children. Educators also act as a referral service, and for many families they are the first reference point in the community.

The range of professional tasks performed by ECEC workers illustrates how children's services have been transformed from a profession of 'child-minding' to one of 'early child development, learning, care and education', as well as community support. This shift in work value has led to increases in responsibilities, accountability and workload for ECEC workers, in particular supervisors and directors.<sup>37</sup>

Despite the growing recognition of ECEC as an essential service, the paid *professional* work of educators remains socially undervalued and underpaid. As many ECEC educators are acutely aware, their wages and conditions are not commensurate with the qualifications and skills required in their roles and the responsibilities that they hold. All workers within the sector experience low pay, including centre directors, who have roles and responsibilities comparable to principals of small primary schools, yet whose pay is roughly *half* that of their equivalents in the school education sector. Low pay results in high labour turnover, leading to staff and skill shortages at a high cost for employers, parents and taxpayers.

**Section (2)** of this submission signalled quality as a key issue for United Voice. Research from Australia and overseas all points to quality ECEC being determined by stimulating and stable relationships between child and educator (see **Section (4)**). A high turnover of staff impacts on the ability of educators and children to form stable and nurturing relationships. At a fundamental level, therefore, issues of quality are workforce issues. Unless solutions are provided to the issue of poor working conditions and wages, quality ECEC will not be provided consistently. The necessary reforms to the funding system to ensure professional wages are outlined in **Section (5)**.

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<sup>37</sup> AIRC January 13, 2005 Decision, Australian Liquor Hospitality Miscellaneous Union re Child Care Industry (Australian Capital Territory) Award 1998, Children's Services (Victoria) 1998, p.93–94

### 3.1. LOW LABOUR RETENTION IN THE ECEC SECTOR

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*The turnover of staff makes families very angry. They often will remark “Who is looking after my child today?” or ‘Where are the other staff who my child is familiar with?’. When parents leave their children with people they don’t know, both the children and the parents become very emotional. Children become frightened of socialisation and parents will not trust anyone.*

Helen Crain, Group Leader,  
Sunnybank Anglican Early Learning Centre

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*Parents feel stressed when there is a turnover of staff, some children have difficulty dealing with these changes. I have had many comments from parents saying they are not happy with the centre their child is attending as there has been a high turnover of staff and now there are no original staff left, “Why is this happening?” they ask, “What do I do?”. I have seen first-hand children four and five years of age who have had difficulty coping with the changes in staff at our centre over the last 12 months.*

Heather Kilgour, Director, Campbelltown Community Preschool Inc

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*Retention of skilled experienced educators and carers in UNSW centres is directly related to the professional pay rates and the well-above award conditions that all the staff receive. With high retention rates we reduce the need to channel resources into recruitment, advertising, and induction. The fact our staff stay with us for many, many years allows us to achieve long-term goals year after year – rather than spend time building trusting and reciprocal partnerships and relationships (which is what early childhood centres are based on). Having long-term staff means the staff become extremely knowledgeable about the wider community which benefits everyone; the centres act as referral services for families to get connected with other community services. The staff get to go on a journey of professional development together at the same time reconfiguring the centre practices and constantly reflecting, reviewing and improving the programs and operations. With better conditions, salaries and recognition the staff are motivated to go on to further their education and up-skill, they mentor each other and encourage each other. Some of my staff are now writing papers for industry journals and presenting at conferences as well as lecturing at the local universities and TAFEs.*

Jemma Carlisle, General Manager, University of NSW Services – Early Years

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The last comprehensive study of the ECEC workforce revealed that most states experience an acute undersupply of staff, particularly in Long Day Care (LDC). According to projections from the 2006 National Children's Services Workforce Study there is a growing shortfall of workers in LDC which was expected to reach 6,490 staff by 2013.<sup>38</sup> According to this data, unfilled positions were highest for qualified workers in LDC, and over 35 per cent of services were using staffing exemptions to allow staff without formal qualifications to fill vacancies for qualified staff.<sup>39</sup>

Job turnover across all ECEC services stood at 32 per cent in 2004.<sup>40</sup> In 2005, the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations found that 50 per cent of job openings for childcare workers and 80 per cent for coordinators resulted from staff leaving their occupations,<sup>41</sup> whereas the 2006 Workforce Study found that of all ECEC workers leaving their jobs, 75 per cent were also leaving the sector.<sup>42</sup> We can extrapolate from these figures an estimated 15,000 childcare professionals leaving the sector each year. Significantly, qualified workers are just as likely to leave the sector as workers without a formal qualification, with job turnover rates only marginally lower for workers with higher qualifications.

The difficult conditions for workers choosing to remain in the sector are reflected in the results of the 2010 Workforce Study. It found that although there is a strong commitment to the profession, workers also identified pressures that made the pursuit of a career in childcare difficult and undesirable. In NSW, 89 per cent of workers agreed that they entered the sector because they had always wanted to work with children, but only 64 per cent agreed that they would recommend the career to others. Furthermore, 71 per cent agreed that the job is stressful, and 59 per cent agreed that job status and recognition was an issue for them. When asked what could improve staff retention, 96 per cent agreed that workers in the sector should have higher wages, and 87 per cent agreed on the need for paid in-service training.<sup>43</sup>

Low labour retention in the ECEC sector has a number of negative effects, including:

- *Effects on quality of service provision.* Quality of childcare is shaped by the capacity of staff to form stable and trusting relationships with children. For this reason, continuity of educators and coordinators is recognised as a key determinant of quality within the new National Quality Standards. Staff shortages and turnover disrupt these relationships, resulting in high levels of stress for

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<sup>38</sup> Community Services Ministers' Advisory Council, *National Children's Services Workforce Study*, Canberra, Commonwealth of Australia, 2006, p.5. It is possible that the workforce growth rate since 2006 may have been higher than this projection. The Workforce Study assumes a growth in LDC workforce supply of 1.4%, whereas ABS data reveals an average 3.74% growth rate between 2005 and 2010 for the workers in childcare professions as a whole.

<sup>39</sup> Community Services Ministers' Advisory Council, p.49.

<sup>40</sup> Community Services Ministers' Advisory Council, p.48.

<sup>41</sup> F Press, *What about the kids? Policy directions for improving the experiences of infants and young people in a changing world*, Sydney, NSW Commission for Children & Young People, 2006, p.43; Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council, *Industry Skills Report*, Industry Skills Council, 2005, p.53.

<sup>42</sup> Community Services Ministers' Advisory Council, p.54.

<sup>43</sup> Community Services Ministers' Advisory Council.

children, staff and parents. Children who spend prolonged periods of time in stressful environments develop either too high or too low levels of cortisol, which adversely impacts on their brain development and results in negative developmental outcomes: cognitive, social and emotional.<sup>44</sup>

- *Effects on profitability and sustainability of services.* Labour turnover imposes a significant cost on business, affecting the profitability and financial sustainability of ECEC services. Not only does high turnover involve direct costs, such as the need to fill-in vacancies with casual labour and select and recruit new staff members, but it can also result in intangible impacts such as the potential for lost business as a result of parents withdrawing children from centres concerned about the impact on their children. Based on previous studies involving workers in comparable sectors, the cost of turnover to employers has been estimated to be as high as 120–150 per cent of the annual wage of the departing employee.<sup>45</sup>
- *Effect on service affordability.* Parents indirectly subsidise the business costs associated with high labour turnover since these costs are typically absorbed into fee structures.
- *Effects on the efficiency of government spending.* The bulk of revenue for both private and not-for-profit childcare operators is derived from government-funded subsidies to parents. The cost of high turnover affects the efficient allocation of these resources. Furthermore, when qualified workers depart the sector, this imposes additional inefficiencies and wastage on government investments aimed at training and educating new childcare professionals.

United Voice has campaigned for many years to improve the structural conditions that lead to low labour retention and high staff turnover: low pay, chronic understaffing, high workloads and unstable care arrangements. Such conditions exacerbate stresses on the workforce, leading to even more dedicated childcare professionals leaving their occupations. To resolve the workforce crisis, targeted government funding directed towards workforce development is required.

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<sup>44</sup> Gunnar & White, 'Salivary cortisol measures in infant and child assessment', in L Singer & P Zeskind (eds), *Biobehavioural assessment of the infant*, New York, Guilford Press, 2001, p.167–1890.

<sup>45</sup> E.g. Pay and Employment Equity Unit, Department of Labour New Zealand, *Spotlight: A Skills Recognition Tool*, 2009; [http://www.orgmanagement.unsw.edu.au/contribute2/OrgManagement/ResearchCentres/IRRC/documents/ResearchReportandBibliography\\_000.pdf](http://www.orgmanagement.unsw.edu.au/contribute2/OrgManagement/ResearchCentres/IRRC/documents/ResearchReportandBibliography_000.pdf), p.34–35; and [http://www.orgmanagement.unsw.edu.au/contribute2/OrgManagement/ResearchCentres/IRRC/documents/UserGuide-IntroductionforManagers\\_000.pdf](http://www.orgmanagement.unsw.edu.au/contribute2/OrgManagement/ResearchCentres/IRRC/documents/UserGuide-IntroductionforManagers_000.pdf), p.13.

**3.2. LOW PAY AND A LACK OF CAREER PROGRESSION:  
A CAUSE OF LOW LABOUR RETENTION**

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*My personal view is yes, educators are not well paid and the newly professional standards that they have to reach are a great argument for them to receive more pay.*

Sussan Ley, 7:30 Report, 10 December 2013

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*With the pay rates so low, there is no real incentive to stay in the sector. My family has now grown up so I can afford to work in the sector, but there is no way you could support a family on it. There is also the prevailing perception that it's 'women's work' and not given the value in wages that it's worth.*

Bronwyn, 15 years' experience in the sector.

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The low pay of childcare professionals is recognised by governments of all political persuasions, industry and workers as an underlying cause behind retention issues in the ECEC sector. The Productivity Commission's final report into the Early Childhood Development workforce in 2011 affirmed that wages for ECEC professionals are not competitive relative to other sectors,<sup>46</sup> and that wages rarely exceed the minimum award rates to any substantial degree.<sup>47</sup> It accepted evidence presented by United Voice, as well as several large employers, that many workers do not find the benefits of additional qualifications to be worthwhile, since compensatory wage increases are too minimal.<sup>48</sup> The conclusions of the Productivity Commission have been reiterated in a recent survey conducted by United Voice of members who have left the ECEC sector. 33 per cent cited poor wages as a reason for leaving the sector.

We can define workers in the sector as low paid due to:

- Low wages and award dependency
- Absence of pay parity between the ECEC and the school sector
- Lack of opportunities for career progression
- Expectations for performing unpaid labour
- Lack of adequate programming and development time
- Inadequate sick leave
- Workers themselves being asked to pay for education and care materials

Furthermore, wages do not increase significantly relative to qualifications gained. Table 1 sets out the hourly differential in the *Children's Services Award 2010*, compared to the minimum wage.<sup>49</sup> As this table shows, the hourly differential between the rates of pay for diverse qualifications is relatively small, and there is little financial incentive for workers to up-skill.

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<sup>46</sup> Productivity Commission, *Early Childhood Development Workforce: A Productivity Research Report*, Melbourne, Commonwealth of Australia, 2011, p.39, p.64, p.109.

<sup>47</sup> Productivity Commission, *Early Childhood Development Workforce*, p.65.

<sup>48</sup> Productivity Commission, *Early Childhood Development Workforce*, p.71.

<sup>49</sup> Until 1 July 2015 when the transitional provisions expire rates will be different depending on the state or territory the work is performed in. However increments between qualification levels remain minimal in all states.



TABLE 1: Award Rates Relative to Minimum Wage

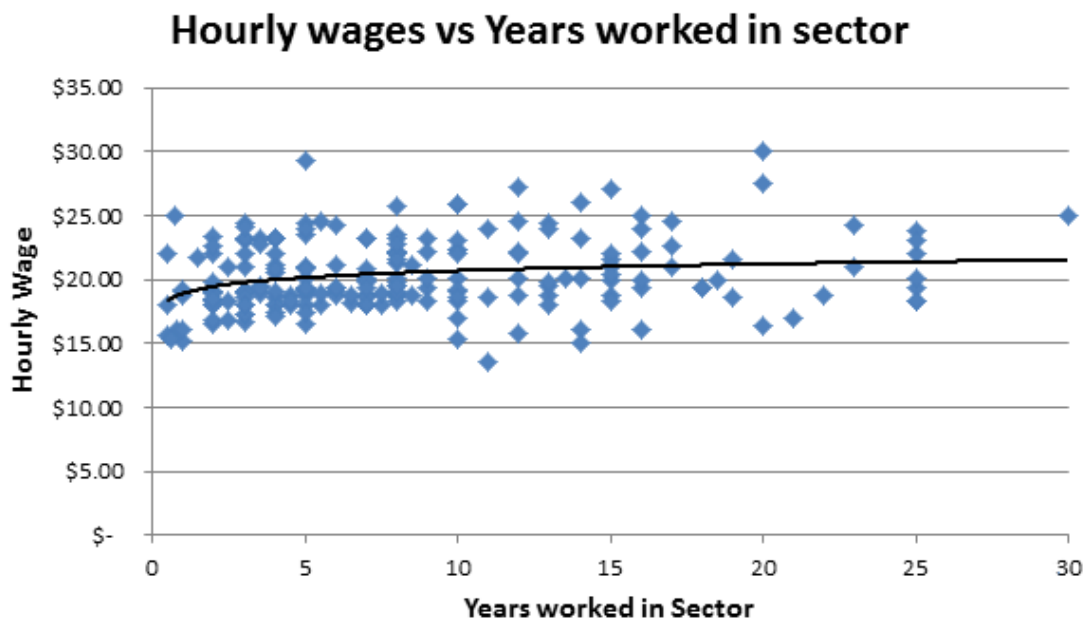
Level	FTE Weekly Pay	Hourly Pay	Dollar Amount Above Minimum Wage	Difference of Increase to Next Highest Qualification
1.1 (No formal qualification)	\$636.40	\$16.75	\$0.38	\$2.32
3.1 (Certificate III)	\$724.50	\$19.07	\$2.70	\$3.39
4.1 (Diploma)	\$853.40	\$22.46	\$6.09	\$4.62

Compounding the problem of low wages, the ECEC sector is marked by a flat career structure. A childcare professional's length of service does not determine wage earnings to a significant extent. In November 2010, United Voice surveyed a sample of 218 members from New South Wales, Tasmania and Queensland working within Long Day Care. All qualification levels were represented in the sample. The survey reveals that there is only a weak correlation between the numbers of years worked in the sector and higher wages:

TABLE 2: Relationship between Years Worked in Sector and Average Wage

Years Worked in Sector	Number in Sample	Average Hourly Wage
Under 2	12	\$18.47
2 to under 4	43	\$19.71
4 to under 8	62	\$20.19
8 to under 12	44	\$20.55
12+	57	\$21.10
<b>Total</b>	<b>218</b>	<b>\$20.31</b>

TABLE 3: Hourly Wages versus Years Worked in Sector



### 3.3. WORKING CONDITIONS: A CAUSE OF LOW LABOUR RETENTION

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*We're open 51 weeks of the year. On an average day, between office work, programming and time on the floor with the children I work from 8am–7pm. And yet I remain low paid. Nobody would expect primary school teachers to work under these conditions, yet I provide quality education to children too.*

Luke, ECEC Director, Tasmania

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The 2011 Productivity Commission report noted that the lack of pay parity and substantially poorer conditions in the ECEC sector has led to chronic shortages in Long Day Care teachers and reinforces the difficulty for the sector in attracting and retaining qualified staff. According to the Productivity Commission, degree qualified teachers employed in Long Day Care centres face significantly poorer wages and conditions compared to early childhood teachers employed within primary schools.<sup>50</sup> ECEC teachers in Long Day Care can be required to work up to 10 hours per day, with only four weeks off per year. By comparison, teachers in the school system work a mandated 7.2 hour day. In addition to shorter working days, teachers in the school system experience more holidays and greater preparation or non-contact time.

ECEC educators and teachers currently report that they have insufficient paid, non-contact hours in which to complete curriculum and observation requirements. As a result, these are often completed in their own time. The lack of paid time off the floor to complete these requirements exacerbates the already poor wages and long working hours experienced by workers in the sector. This situation has been exacerbated by the introduction of reporting requirements through the NQF.

This is not a reason to repeal these requirements. In their review of the NQF, ACECQA found that providers were broadly supportive of these additional reporting requirements, despite the additional workload.<sup>51</sup> Their support of the requirements stemmed from the recognition that these requirements are integral to quality, play-based education programs, and the effective provision of ECEC services. However, for these requirements to be sustainable in the long-term, any reform of the sector must provide sufficient funding and regulation to ensure *paid* non-contact time to complete observation and curriculum requirements. This could be legislated through the current teaching and educator awards to reflect the current situation in the school system. These changes would underscore the importance of learning and education in the early years, and intervene in the community perception of the sector as consisting of professional educators.

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<sup>50</sup> Productivity Commission, *Early Childhood Development Workforce*, p.98–101.

<sup>51</sup> ACECQA, *Report on the National Quality Framework and Regulatory Burden: Part 1. Research Findings Overview*, Sydney, ACECQA, 2013.



### **3.4. STRUCTURAL IMPEDIMENTS TO WAGE INCREASES AND IMPROVEMENTS TO WORKING CONDITIONS**

There are numerous structural and social impediments that constrain the capacity of workers to bargain for effective wage increases. These impediments to achieving wages that are commensurate with the skills, responsibilities and qualifications required are outlined in the remainder of this section. The implications of addressing these issues are outlined in **Section (5)**, which argues that a targeted funding solution is needed to ensure that sufficient funding is provided to wages, with the goal of ensuring a higher workforce supply, retaining existing educators and introducing wage incentives to improve overall qualification levels.

#### **3.4.1. GENDER INEQUALITY AND LOW BARGAINING POWER**

In the broader community, 'childcare' is still regarded by many to be associated with unpaid 'women's work,' performed in the home for free.<sup>52</sup> While such attitudes have been largely exorcised from policy debate in recent years, it is important to acknowledge that award dependency and generally low base rates of pay in the sector are attributable to this historical legacy of gender inequity. Labour markets remain strongly segmented along lines of gender and ethnicity, powerful factors which construct the relative levels of vulnerability in employment and bargaining power.<sup>53</sup> Understanding this legacy is crucial to explaining why the vast bulk of the workforce continues to remain at (or barely above) award level rates of pay. The social undervaluation of work performed by ECEC professionals persists, a situation reflected in the continued segmentation of labour markets along gender lines. In recognition of the historic undervaluation of work in the ECEC sector, on the 15th of July 2013 United Voice made an application to the Fair Work Commission to review the wages in Long Day Care. The implications of this case for the sector are discussed in **Section (5)**.

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<sup>52</sup> G Meagher, 'The Challenge of the Care Workforce: Recent Trends and Emerging Problems', *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, vol 42, no 2, 2007, p.152.

<sup>53</sup> R Cooper, 'The 'bargaining power' of women employees in the low-paid personal care sector: A brief review of the concepts and the evidence in Australia', Report prepared for LHMU, available as Exhibit LHMU 20, Fair Work Australia, 2010: <http://ww2.fwa.gov.au/manilafiles/files/s243/exhibitLHMU20.pdf>

### 3.4.2. LOW WAGES AND AWARD DEPENDENCY

ECEC educators are overwhelmingly award dependent, constituting a group with low bargaining power who face a variety of structural barriers preventing them from effectively bargaining for higher wages. Due to a number of structural impediments, rates of pay in the ECEC sector rarely exceed the minimum award rates to any significant degree. Bargaining outcomes for workers covered by collective agreements (which comprise a small minority of employment arrangements) are generally not much higher than minimum award rates. The following summary of national bargaining outcomes for entry-level Certificate III illustrates that bargaining has failed to ensure wages substantially higher than the minimum mandated in the relevant award. Note that the NSW rates reflect transitional rates in the State that are above those set down in the national award. From July 2014 these rates will be consistent with those in the award.

TABLE 4: Collective Agreements in Long Day Care: Average Bargaining Outcomes

State	Agreements Examined	Average Cert III (Equivalent to 3.1 in Modern Award) Agreement Outcome <sup>54</sup>	Average Per Cent Above Award Rate
VIC	9	\$20.18	5.8%
NSW*	13	\$19.87	4.2%
QLD	10	\$19.38	1.62%
ACT	4	\$19.48	2.15%
WA**	10	\$19.12	0.2%
SA	9	\$19.53	2.41%
NT	2	\$19.66	3.09%

**National average = 2.83% above Modern Award**

\* Transitional rates apply in NSW  
\*\* None of the EBAs selected include remote area loadings

<sup>54</sup> Table compiled from 56 current, randomly selected Enterprise Agreements. All EBAs are currently available on the Fair Work Commission website.

A number of structural barriers within the ECEC sector prevent effective bargaining and contribute to depressed wage outcomes. These include:

- *Fragmented ownership and workplace composition.* The ECEC sector is characterised by a large number of diverse small workplaces, with many workplaces having only a small number of employees. The small business model is dominant in the sector. Within Long Day Care, the ownership structure is characterised by one large employer, several dozen medium-sized businesses, and a multitude of small businesses. Goodstart Childcare Limited holds approximately 11.3 per cent of the national market share of licensed centres, whereas the next four largest employers hold just 2 per cent, 1.3 per cent, 1.3 per cent and 0.8 per cent respectively of the market share. Over half of workers are employed in small organisations where employers own between one and three services. This level of fragmentation combined with the large and growing number of services creates conditions where large-scale enterprise bargaining is not practical for achieving sector-wide increases in pay and improving the status of childcare professionals.
- *Marginal profit rates.* Government funding provides LDC services with a guaranteed source of revenue and has enabled the expansion of for-profit childcare. However, many businesses operate on tight profit margins – this is particularly the case with higher quality services (which may, for instance, choose to operate above the minimum staff to child ratios required by regulations). Where profit margins are tight, cost increases arising from increased staffing costs are more likely to be passed onto parents in the form of higher fees.
- *Most employers have little or no experience of bargaining.* With the bulk of the sector made up of small businesses, there is an overall lack of experience and knowledge amongst employers of collective bargaining processes. Employer associations are loosely federated state-based organisations which are split between the not-for-profit and for-profit sectors. While these organisations can lay claim to large memberships, they tend to have few staff and rely on voluntary labour from their members in order to function.

The lack of opportunity to effectively engage in enterprise bargaining has contributed to the ongoing undervaluation of employees' remuneration. Employees at all levels, and particularly at levels where employees hold tertiary and vocational qualifications, are paid significantly less than other employees performing similar or comparable work. With structural impediments preventing childcare professionals achieving effective wage increases through bargaining, government policy can play a strong role in supporting wage justice for workers with historically low bargaining power.

### **3.4.3. INADEQUATE FUNDING MECHANISMS**

Current funding mechanisms prevent ECEC professionals from bargaining for higher wages and entrench the structural disadvantage of the ECEC workforce. Government subsidies directed to consumers comprise the bulk of financing of the ECEC sector and therefore constitute the chief means by which employers' capacity to pay wages are enabled. With most Long Day Care centres operating according to tight profit margins and facing continuous pressures to maintain affordable childcare, educators are often placed in an untenable position where any claim for higher wages imposes additional costs on parents. In light of growing community concerns about the increasing cost of childcare, the existence of such a trade-off between consumer affordability and wage justice is not fair on either workers or the parents who are reliant on affordable childcare. When we consider these limitations inherent in the current ECEC funding system, it is in fact no paradox that the continuation of low wages can occur simultaneously with the continued undersupply of labour in a climate of growing concerns about the affordability of childcare.

### **3.5. RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Recommendation 1:**

Reform government funding to encourage effective, high quality ECEC

**Recommendation 3:**

Provide targeted funding for professional wages to ensure quality ECEC

United Voice advocates for a reform of the funding system to deliver professional wages. The principles that underpin these reforms are outlined in [Section \(5\)](#).









***Regulating for quality in ECEC***

#### 4.1. DRIVERS OF QUALITY ECEC

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*Quality in early education means having qualified skilled staff, staff collaboration, happy and engaged learning with children and educators. We believe quality is represented by competent and professional staff, punctual and regular attendance of the children at the service and good relationships with families. Quality educators should be able to assist in diagnosing any development issues in children, collaborate with other professionals within their community (like government agencies, schools, specialists etc.) and engage in ongoing professional development. Quality is shown when the children are demonstrating a progression of development, the provision of educational resources and a stimulating environments is occurring and educators are given adequate non-contact time to plan and reflect on the curriculum.*

Cyrene Adams, Group Leader, Goodstart Calamvale

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*It has been proven that children learn best when they feel safe and secure. If a centre experiences high turnover, this disrupts the bonds created with both child and family which then in turn disrupts the child's learning. High staff turnover creates distressed children, puts other educators under pressure to cope with not only dealing with the emotional aspect, but also trying to keep the learning going. Turnover doesn't just affect one child or family - it affects the whole centre and creates a lack of parent confidence not only with the centre but the system. High staff turnover can affect the ratios adding even more pressure with the element of safety standards not being met.*

Christine Bollangary, Assistant Director , Braypark Childcare Centre

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Quality ECEC is shown to have benefits for child development and workforce participation. A number of interrelated factors determine quality ECEC. These are broadly defined as either structural or process factors. Structural factors include the physical environment, adult-to-child ratios and the qualifications of adults in the sector. Process factors are those factors which relate to modes of engagement with children, and include the interpersonal relationships between educators and children, or between children, as well as the activities and learning opportunities available to children. Process quality cannot be improved without attention to structural aspects. International research shows clear links between the quality of interactions between educators and children and factors such as adult-to-child ratios and staff qualifications.<sup>55</sup> Specifically, this research finds that:

- The education of caregivers is the most significant factor affecting quality and the developmental outcomes of children.
- Improved adult-to-child ratios are associated with better outcomes for children, particularly for very young children and/or children from disadvantaged backgrounds. In smaller groups, children show greater evidence of autonomy and well-being.

International research has also shown that staff working conditions are a key determinant of quality ECEC.<sup>56</sup> Factors which influence the high turnover of staff (low wages, lack of career progression) negatively impact on the quality of ECEC provision. Where there is high staff turnover:

- children spend less time engaged in meaningful activities; and
- staff and children are less able to develop stable relationships.

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<sup>55</sup> For a review of this literature see: L Huntsman, *Determinants of quality in childcare: A review of the research evidence*, Sydney, NSW Department of Community Services, 2008; see also: LC Phillipsen, MR Burchinal, C Howes, & D Cryer, The prediction of process quality from structural features of child care. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, vol 12, no 3, 1997, p.281–303.

<sup>56</sup> L Huntsman; OECD, *Encouraging Quality in Early Education and Care*, Paris, OECD, 2010; J Shonkoff & D Phillips (eds), *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*. Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development, Board on Children, Youth, and Families, 2000.



#### 4.2. RECENT POLICY REFORMS TO REGULATE FOR QUALITY

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*The NQF gives the right for children to be children and learn without feeling pressured. Compared to the old system, there is less paperwork when the NQF is being implemented effectively which allows for more time with the children. The NQF has allowed for the whole country to be level with curriculum which allows for a child to learn consistently regardless of what happens in their lives outside the centre. This system has finally professionalised the sector, giving educators much needed professional recognition, taking us from childcare workers to educators.*

Christine Bollangary, Assistant Director,  
Braypark Childcare Centre

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*Our centre has hired an extra 'floater' assistant to cover ratios at busy times and provide cover for our assistant educators to have 'programming' time (equivalent to non-contact time for teachers in the Education Department). This means that every educator in the centre (who is assigned to a room) receives two hours weekly of programming time which has resulted in more personalised, interactive experiences being planned and extended upon. This can only have a positive impact upon the children who attend the centre.*

Kayleen Condrick, Assistant  
Director/Group Leader  
Educator, Brassall  
Childcare Centre

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Governments have a role to play in ensuring high quality ECEC, particularly in markets where there is a high percentage of for-profit providers.<sup>57</sup> The need to regulate for quality is particularly acute in Australia, which relies on a structural mix of services, including for-profit and non-for-profit providers. As noted by a PricewaterhouseCoopers' study, a mixed service environment that relies on both for-profit and non-for-profit providers:

*[...] requires an active role for government to use its full range of policy levers – including funding, regulating, planning and delivering services – to ensure that children and families receive high quality care.*<sup>58</sup>

Recognising this, in recent years Australian state and federal governments have made significant policy commitments to support the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector. This has included recognising ECEC as an essential human service with broad social implications for childhood education, welfare, inclusion and workforce participation. Since 2007, federal and state governments have embarked on a series of policy initiatives through the COAG process to support the vision that all Australian children have access to high quality education and care. These include the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and National Quality Framework (NQF).

The National Quality Framework and Early Years Learning Framework targeted a range of structural and process quality drivers, incorporating measures to improve adult-to-child ratios, to ensure minimum qualifications, and to improve curriculum and reporting requirements. The nationally consistent quality standards comprise a significant first step towards professionalising the ECEC workforce and ensuring high quality service provision. COAG's decision to improve ratios and to enshrine mandatory qualifications in the new national standards rests on evidence that shows skills, knowledge and professional practices are essential to maximising the capacity of ECEC services to provide high quality education and care.

These measures represent a significant transformation of the sector, and United Voice has strongly advocated for their development and implementation. While these transformations have posed a number of challenges for the sector, a review of the regulations by ACECQA shows that over 78 per cent of providers are supportive or very supportive of the NQF. The report finds, furthermore, that:

*Despite the frustration and stress driving the perception of burden around quality assessment and ratings visits, providers whose services have been quality rated are among the groups most supportive of the NQF. These providers also perceive a*

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<sup>57</sup> OECD, *Starting Strong II*.

<sup>58</sup> PricewaterhouseCoopers, *A practical vision for early childhood education and care*, 2011, p.24.

*much lower level of administrative burden, suggesting that as regulatory authorities engage more with providers about quality, and quality rate more services, support for the NQF will grow and the perceived level of administrative burden may reduce.<sup>59</sup>*

The results from this report reflect our discussions with educators. These experiences are reported below in the context of the more significant transformations associated with the NQF and EYLF.

Given the broad support of the NQF expressed in this report, United Voice believes that no changes should be made to the current system until the review of the NQF is conducted by ACECQA in 2014. United Voice has strongly supported the changes included in the National Quality Agenda. However, unless significant reforms to funding are implemented, the NQF will exacerbate structural issues in the sector and increase costs for parents. This should not be a reason for rolling back the implementation for the NQF, rather it points to the necessity of proper resourcing of the labour market to successfully enable the transition and to ensure the sustainability of the workforce.

Any reforms to the system must maintain those aspects which benefit the child by encouraging the provision of a quality education program that is informed by pedagogical research. Furthermore, any reforms to the system must not result in a weakening of quality requirements. As PricewaterhouseCoopers note:

*[...] the NQF quality standards are not ambitious. They fall short of precedents set by ECEC systems overseas in terms of the qualifications required by early childhood staff, and compare poorly with those quality standards that are taken for granted in the school education system.<sup>60</sup>*

Finally, we note that rolling back the regulations will have significant economic implications for the large percentage of centres which are already compliant with the regulations. In their reporting of accreditation procedures, ACECQA notes that the majority of centres are compliant at the time of review, with a large number of non-compliant centres compliant in all but one quality measure. Given this, we believe that any decision to roll back the NQF needs to take into account the significant expenditure of time and money by centres during the transition period.

The accreditation requirements implemented through the NQF are accompanied by a quality rating system. This rating system has the potential to improve the market provision of quality ECEC, by providing parents with objective information to assess the relative quality of individual ECEC services. As noted in **Section (2)**,

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<sup>59</sup> ACECQA, *Report on the National Quality Framework and Regulatory Burden: Part 1. Research Findings Overview*, Sydney, ACECQA, 2013, p.19.

<sup>60</sup> PricewaterhouseCoopers, p.25; see also M Fenech, J Sumsion, G Robertson & J Goodfellow, 'The regulatory environment: a source of job (dis)satisfaction for early childhood professionals?', *Early Child Development and Care*, vol 178, no 1, 2008, p.1–14.

parents place a high value on quality ECEC, with the perceived quality of services impacting on parental decisions regarding workforce participation and the number of hours children are in formal care. However, research has consistently shown that parents have difficulty in objectively assessing the relative quality of services.<sup>61</sup> The provision of additional information will allow parents to make more informed decisions regarding their children's care, and allow services to compete on quality as well as cost and accessibility.

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*The National Quality Framework started off with a bang and lots of centres feeling scared and not ready, however I believe it is a framework that needs to stay in place for centres to show their quality ratings and to assist families in feeling safe and supported within the centre their child attends. This is also increasing the safety, wellbeing and care that is being provided to the children; who begin learning from birth and therefore need to be supported from this age.*

Kelly Brookes, Educator, not-for-profit centre

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<sup>61</sup> J Plantenga, 'Local providers and loyal parents: Competition and consumer choice in the Dutch childcare market', in E Lloyd & H Penn (eds), *Childcare Markets: Can They Deliver an Equitable Service*, Bristol, The Policy Press, 2012.

**4.2.1. NATIONAL QUALITY FRAMEWORK: BETTER QUALITY ECEC  
THROUGH STAFF QUALIFICATIONS**

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*People think you can just walk off the street and do this. You can't.*

ECEC Educator, Roundtable on the NQF and EYLF,  
Victoria December 2013

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*When I first began working at this centre in 2010 the staff turnover was very high. [...] Since the introduction of the NQF in 2012, I have had only two staff members leave, because they were moving to another state and I have had two others relocate through the company into higher job roles as they have developed their professional skills. I think the NQF has allowed us to consolidate the level of skills required for these roles and accordingly ensure that the right people are doing the right roles.*

Cyrene Adams, Group Leader, Goodstart Calamvale

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*Since the introduction of the NQF I personally have seen great change occur within our centre. Our centre has pushed the NQF as a standard with our education and practices within the centre and we have been able to up-skill our educators to what we believe to be a much higher quality. This is shown through their understanding and implementation of education at the centre, the retention of educators with high quality skill sets and the involvement of the educators within the centre, the community and the professional society.*

Elizabeth Robbie, Director, Goodstart Junee

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International research has shown that staff qualifications are one of the strongest determinants of high quality care. In particular, it finds that staff qualifications:

- improve the types of engagements that educators have with children; and
- give educators the resources to implement effective play-based education programs that are responsive to the needs of individual children.

In recognition of the value of staff qualifications to ensuring high quality ECEC, the National Quality Framework introduced minimum qualification requirements across the ECEC sector. As of the 1st of January 2014, Long Day Care and preschool services with more than 25 places were required to employ a full-time early childhood teacher. Furthermore, 50 per cent of staff were required to be working towards an approved diploma level course, with remaining staff required to be working towards an approved Certificate III education.

United Voice conducted roundtables with educators and directors regarding their impressions of the NQF and EYLF in December 2013. There was consensus amongst educators that qualifications improved the quality of ECEC provision. In addition to the benefits outlined above, our members report that the qualification requirements have stabilised staff turnover in their centres.

United Voice strongly supported the introduction of minimum qualification requirements for ECEC. We argued that qualifications supported the ongoing professionalisation of the sector, highlighting the role of the sector in providing a quality *education* for children and not just child-minding. We note, however, that these qualification requirements have the potential to exacerbate already existing staff shortfalls in the sector.<sup>62</sup> The Australian Government set aside significant funds to assist staff to acquire qualifications. However, this does not address one of the primary disincentives to obtaining qualifications, namely, the flat career structure within the sector that provides negligible remuneration when compared to the work required to gain those qualifications.

We argue, however, that this should not be a reason to repeal the qualification requirements. The current qualification requirements are below the standards required in similar ECEC systems (e.g. Canada and New Zealand). Instead, the funding system needs to be reformed to ensure professional wages that reflect the level of qualifications required. This will encourage newly qualified staff to the sector, in particular bachelor qualified teachers who would otherwise work in the schools sector. It would also act as an incentive for staff in the sector to obtain a qualification or improve their existing qualifications.

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<sup>62</sup> Productivity Commission, *Early Childhood Development Workforce*, p.93.

#### **4.2.2. NATIONAL QUALITY FRAMEWORK: BETTER QUALITY ECEC THROUGH ADULT-TO-CHILD RATIOS**

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*The change to 1:4 ratios for birth to two year olds has given us more time to have quality interactions with all the children. We are able to support children with their social skills and provide emotional stability. The new ratio has enabled a true sense of belonging in our environment to happen, as the consistent enrolments have seen our birth to two-year old room become a family with a diversity of ages. Toileting routines are shorter with less children, thus other routines are relaxed and not hurried, allowing time for one-on-one intentional teaching moments.*

Jennifer Tranby-Hunter, Director,  
Freckles Kindy and Learning Centre, NSW<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Early Childhood Australia, *Our Future on the Line: Keeping the Early Childhood Education and Care Reforms on Track*, (nd). [http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/pdf/our\\_future\\_on\\_the\\_line.pdf](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/pdf/our_future_on_the_line.pdf)

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*Better ratios mean calmer educators which in turn leads to calmer children and a calmer environment which encourages exploration. Better ratios means quality 1:1 interactions in which educators can be available to scaffold children's learning through intentional teaching. Better ratios means educators form stronger relationships and partnerships with parents by allowing them to have incidental conversations with them during pick-up and drop-off times and giving families and children the security by knowing their primary caregiver is more likely to be available to meet their individual needs.*

Sharon Murphy, Educator, Adelaide

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Higher adult-to-child ratios improve quality by giving staff more time to engage with individual children. With higher adult-to-child ratios less time is spent completing tasks such as toileting and feeding. This in turn leaves more time for spontaneous interaction between educators and children. These interactions are the basis of effective play-based early years education. Without these interactions, services struggle to achieve more than child-minding.

In recognition of this, the NQF introduced improved ratios for children, making ratios consistent across the country. The table below indicates the state ratios that were in place at the time the NQF was announced, comparing these to the final ratios set down in the national framework.

TABLE 5: Existing Adult-to-Child Ratios Prior to Implementation of NQF

Age	NQF Ratio	ACT	NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA
0–2 YRS	<b>1:4</b>	1:5	1:5	1:5	1:4	1:5	1:5	1:4	1:4
2–3 YRS	<b>1:5</b>	1:5	1:8	1:5	1:6	1:10	1:5	1:4	1:5
3–5 YRS	<b>1:11</b>	1:11	1:10	1:11	1:12	1:8-1:10	1:10	1:15	1:10

As Table 5 shows, a number of states in Australia were already operating at or above the ratios set down in the NQF in one or more of the age groups. In fact, in response to calls to repeal the requirements, the Victorian Education Minister stated:

*Much of the reform agenda is about bringing the rest of Australia up to the high standard set in Victoria, which we are committed to not only maintaining but improving.<sup>64</sup>*

The majority of these requirements came into place from the 1st of January 2012, with a minority of states given until the 1st of January 2016 to implement the ratios for 2–3 and 3–5 year old children. Discussions with educators and directors regarding the implementation of the NQF indicate that providers have begun phasing in the new ratio requirements ahead of the 2016 deadline.

United Voice supports the recommendation of our members that the ratio requirements of the NQF be retained. As these educators note, at lower ratios educators spend almost all of their time completing compulsory tasks, with less time dedicated to involvement in children’s play. In response to calls to return to previous ratios we reiterate the assessment by PricewaterhouseCoopers that the current NQF targets are not ambitious and below international benchmarks.<sup>65</sup> However, these ratios are not sustainable in the long-term unless the problem of attrition in the sector is addressed through a funding system that mandates for improvements to wages and working conditions.

<sup>64</sup> <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/state-politics/states-resist-coalition-childcare-moves/story-e6frgczx-1226749284410#>

<sup>65</sup> Price Waterhouse Coopers.



#### **4.2.3. EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK: A REFLEXIVE CURRICULUM FOR BETTER QUALITY ECEC**

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*NQF is essential to the ECEC sector as it guides educators to extend and enrich children's learning from birth to five years and the transition to school. The NQF supports professional practice, especially in aspects in building and nurturing relationships, curriculum decision making and teaching and learning. The NQF allows the expression of personality and uniqueness as it caters to each individual child whilst acknowledging that educators are professionals taking them away from the 'babysitter' persona. The paperwork allows us to show our parents the professional role we have in educating their child and displays a portion of the knowledge that is being imparted and also learnt by each child each day.*

Fiona Micallef, Supervisor, Goodstart Warner

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The Early Years Learning Framework was introduced in 2009 following extensive consultation between state and territory governments working together with the Federal Government. Entitled *Being, Belonging, Becoming*, the EYLF recognises that children learn from birth, and was intended to “extend and enrich children’s learning from birth to five years and through the transition to school”.<sup>66</sup> The framework outlined a set of principles, practices and outcomes that educators were to use to build their curriculum. It drew on extensive international research which showed that quality ECEC environments involve staff-child interactions that include both teaching and play, and which are responsive to the individual needs of children.<sup>67</sup>

A study of a trial of a draft EYLF across 28 early childhood settings found the following benefits accruing to staff and children:

- It provides a common language for supporting educators across states and territories.
- It provides consistency across the variety of settings that make up early childhood education.
- It acts as a tool for educator self-reflection and readiness for more widespread adoption of contemporary approaches to early childhood learning and teaching. In particular, it provides an “educative focus for staff who had not previously been accustomed to it”.<sup>68</sup>

The research also found that the EYLF also promoted the ongoing professionalisation of the sector. The framework positions all staff as pedagogical leaders, emphasising their role as educators rather than carers. Through the introduction of a reflexive pedagogical practice, the EYLF encourages educators to engage with current and cutting-edge research on early childhood pedagogy and to reflect on the practice of teaching in an applied context.<sup>69</sup> Rather than relying on chronological developmental milestones, educators are expected to develop individualised and emergent curriculum which are targeted towards individual children. These curricula incorporate daily observations of children by staff to respond to the changing interests and learning of children.

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<sup>66</sup> Productivity Agenda Working Group. *A national quality framework for early childhood education and care*, Canberra, Productivity Agenda Working Group, 2008.

<sup>67</sup> S Edwards, M Flear, & J Nuttall, *A Research Paper to inform the development of An Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*, Melbourne, Office for Children and Early Childhood Development, 2008, p.5.

<sup>68</sup> M Flear, *Final Report: Baseline Evaluation of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)*, Melbourne, DEEWR, 2011.

<sup>69</sup> Flear. For more research on professional development and the use of research in applied contexts see: AB Smith, B Grima, M Gaffney, K Powell, L Masse & S Barnett, *Strategic research initiative literature review: Early childhood education*, Wellington, Ministry of Education, 2000; I Siraj-Blatchford, K Sylva, S Muttock, R Gilden, & D Bell, *Researching effective pedagogy in the early years*, Department for Education and Skills, United Kingdom, Research report RR356, 2002; L Mitchell & P Cubey, *Characteristics of professional development linked to enhanced pedagogy and children’s learning in early childhood settings: Best evidence synthesis*, Wellington, Ministry of Education, 2003.

The EYLF represented a major transformation of the sector, and posed significant challenges for both staff and centres. The reflexive components of the EYLF required a significant investment of time by educators to become familiar with the new requirements. It was particularly challenging for those ECEC staff without a qualification, and those who were “accustomed to a less demanding account of child development based on traditional chronological and psychogenetic milestones”.<sup>70</sup> However, with the EYLF principles and practices beginning to be incorporated in tertiary ECEC courses, qualified staff entering the sector will already share a common pedagogical language with staff already in the sector.<sup>71</sup>

The curriculum and observation requirements of the EYLF place additional burdens on staff, with workers reporting that they are often required to complete child observations in their own time, due to a lack of paid time off the floor in which to complete their reporting. Despite this, United Voice members remain broadly supportive of the EYLF as it ensures the provision of quality ECEC and recognises the value that ECEC staff bring to the sector as actively engaged educators and pedagogical leaders. However, without significant reforms to the sector to ensure professional wages and paid time off the floor in order to meet the requirements, the benefits accruing from the EYLF will only ever be partially achieved. Although staff report greater job satisfaction stemming from a greater engagement with their work and other educators through the reflexive reporting practices, this is unlikely to lead to significant staff retention unless accompanied by improvements in wages and staff working conditions.

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<sup>70</sup> Fleer, p.23.

<sup>71</sup> The EYLF has been included in current textbooks. See for example: L Arthur, B Beecher, E Death, S Dockett & S Farmer, *Programming and planning in early childhood settings*, 5th ed, Melbourne, Cengage Learning Australia, 2012.

#### 4.2.4. BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTING THE NQF

The COAG quality reforms require a large-scale increase in total staff numbers and a comprehensive transformation in the profile of the workforce. To achieve these goals, the Australian Government committed \$126.6 million over four years to remove TAFE fees for diplomas and advanced diplomas, create additional university places for early childhood teachers, and subsidise the HECS-HELP debt of teachers working in areas of high disadvantage. Unfortunately, these measures did not support workers needing to undertake Certificate III training, the new minimum standard for those working in the sector. The 2011 Productivity Commission draft report on the ECEC workforce notes that while the NQF is supported by workforce initiatives focused on improving the availability and affordability of training, these “may not be sufficient to attract the required number of qualified staff to the sector”.<sup>72</sup> Failure to increase the supply of qualified staff across the sector holds grave implications for the successful transition to the NQF.<sup>73</sup>

While in the short-term, adequately resourced initiatives to train and up-skill the current workforce are critical to meeting the NQF targets, without measures to ensure the stability of the workforce in the long-term the aims of the NQF cannot be met. In order to meet these standards, initiatives need to be developed to address the underlying causes of poor recruitment and low retention in the sector, including:

- the low wages of underpaid childcare workers;
- lack of support for training and professional development; and
- the low status of the profession.

United Voice argues that a proper resourcing of the labour market is necessary for a successful transition to the NQF, and to ensure the ongoing sustainability of the workforce. Quality ECEC provision through the successful implementation of the NQF will only occur through workforce initiatives aimed at the provision of professional rates of pay. Finally, we call on the Government to wait until the completion of the 2014 review of the NQF before making changes to the current system.

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<sup>72</sup> Productivity Commission, *Early Childhood Development Workforce*, p.39.

<sup>73</sup> Productivity Commission, *Early Childhood Development Workforce*, p.5.

### 4.3. RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation 2:**

Government should regulate the sector for quality to support child development and workforce participation outcomes



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In Australia, ECEC is delivered by a range of (for-profit and not-for-profit) providers, and offered through a variety of service types (Preschool, Long Day Care, Family Day Care, Outside School Hours care, etc.). The diversity of the sector offers parents a degree of choice and flexibility in determining the type of care that is suitable. However, this diversity also poses a number of challenges that need to be addressed. These include:

- the uneven availability of childcare, with limited places available in some geographic areas and for infants and additional needs children;
- the limited quality of some ECEC programs, which includes a lack of qualified and experienced staff;
- an ability to attract and retain staff; and
- increases in childcare fees at rates significantly higher than CPI.<sup>74</sup>

In order to address these challenges a significant reform of the current funding system is required to ensure a high quality and effective ECEC system that meets the needs of parents *and* children. United Voice believes that an effective ECEC system must take into account both the economic gains from increased parental workforce participation, as well as the long-term social and economic benefits of improved child development outcomes. These dual outcomes will only occur through an ECEC system that is sufficiently regulated and funded to ensure quality.

United Voice acknowledges that in recent years Australian state and federal governments have significantly increased funding to the ECEC sector. Despite this, Australia has one of the lowest expenditures as a proportion of GDP of all countries in the OECD. It spends 0.45 per cent of GDP on ECEC, as compared to the OECD average of 0.6 per cent of GDP. It is important to note, furthermore, that this average falls well below those countries whose systems are considered best practice, and which have been selected as study comparisons in this inquiry. For example, New Zealand currently spends approximately 1 per cent of their GDP on ECEC services.

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<sup>74</sup> Baker, 2013; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2011.

## 5.1. REFORMING THE CURRENT SYSTEM

There is broad consensus that the current funding to the sector is insufficient, especially given the increase in wages required to attract and retain sufficient staff in the sector.<sup>75</sup> As outlined below, the current shortfall will be exacerbated by a positive decision in response to the current application to increase wages across the sector, lodged with the Fair Work Commission in June 2013. Unless additional funding is allocated to the sector, parents will bear this increase in costs, and ECEC services will become increasingly unaffordable for many parents.

Given the underfunding of the sector relative to international benchmarks, United Voice strongly advocates for additional funding to be allocated to the sector. United Voice does, however, recognise that the Productivity Commission has been tasked with reforming the system within the current funding envelope. Thus, it welcomes the Commissioners' decision to consider Early Years funding holistically, taking into account parental leave, tax benefits and ECEC to develop a system that supports both child development and workforce participation outcomes. Furthermore, we note that the current funding envelope is not fixed. The cost of the sector has increased at a rate significantly above CPI. It can therefore be argued that short-term spending on the sector to alleviate some of the most critical challenges (e.g. qualification shortages), may still see savings in the long-term if the funding system is significantly reformed. Given the limited funding to the sector, and evidence that a number of disadvantaged children are missing out on ECEC due to cost, it is critical that the effectiveness of each dollar spent is maximised.



### **5.1.1. ADDRESS THE INFLATIONARY NATURE OF THE CURRENT SYSTEM TO IMPROVE AFFORDABILITY**

Government expenditure on ECEC has increased substantially over the last decade. Between 2007–08 and 2011–12, real expenditure increased by 62.7 per cent nationally, from \$3.71 billion to \$6 billion in 2011–12. In 2011–12, \$4.18 billion was paid in the form of parental subsidies, through the Childcare Benefit or the Childcare Rebate. Childcare costs have increased at rates significantly above inflation since the early 1990s, with a significant percentage of these costs borne by government through interventions such as the introduction of the Childcare Rebate. Despite the increases in government funding to the sector, increasing numbers of families report difficulties with the affordability of childcare. In 2008, 22.5 per cent of children did not access the care required due to cost. This had increased to 24.5 per cent by 2011.<sup>76</sup> This figure includes children who did not attend any formal care, as well as those who did not attend formal care services for as many hours as required by their parents. This has significant implications for workforce participation, with 51.1 per cent of parents citing work-related reasons as the primary driver of their need for additional childcare in 2011.<sup>77</sup>

The introduction of parental subsidies in 2000 and their expansion in 2007 and 2008 saw dramatic improvements in the affordability of services. This fuelled demand for ECEC, enabled the rapid growth of the sector and assisted many lower-income families with access. However, the reliance on a single mechanism for financing ECEC – subsidising the sector through partially subsidising parent fees – has failed to ensure ongoing affordability. According to modelling conducted by United Voice, gross childcare fees (before subsidies) have, on average, increased by 11.2 per cent in the year between April 2011 and April 2012 across all states in Australia, from an average of \$63.21 to \$70.29 per day. Over the last quarter of that period (January 2012 to April 2012) fees increased by an average of 3.5 per cent, from \$67.95 to \$70.25 per day.<sup>78</sup>

The increase in childcare fees is responsible for the significant increases in government funding to the sector through the Childcare Rebate (CCR). The CCR covers 50 per cent of the gap between total fees and the amount covered by the Childcare Benefit (if any), up to a total of \$7500 per annum. While the CCR cap had previously been subject to annual increases, the indexation of the cap is currently on hold until 2017. While only 7.5 per cent of parents hit the cap in 2011-12, that number is expected to double by 2017.<sup>79</sup> Given that the cap on the CCR predominantly affects families where both parents are working full-time, the decrease of the cap in real terms, and relative to overall increases in childcare fees, will impact on these parents' decisions regarding full-time work.

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<sup>76</sup> Productivity Commission, *Report on Government Services 2014*. Melbourne, Commonwealth of Australia, 2014.

<sup>77</sup> Productivity Commission, *Report on Government Services 2014*.

<sup>78</sup> Baker, 2013.

<sup>79</sup> <http://www.news.com.au/finance/money/kate-ellis-reveals-150000-families-face-childcare-pain-in-budget/story-fnagkbpv-1226645940621>.

Faced with having to pay 100 per cent of childcare fees above the cap, many parents will opt to reduce their hours of work. Reforms to the funding system must remove disincentives for parents to increase their hours of work, in order to increase the workforce participation of the second earner. These reforms include reducing out-of-pocket expenses for parents. We note that despite increases in government funding in recent years, Australia still has one of the highest rates of parental expenditure in the OECD, with parents providing approximately 48.6 per cent of the cost of care. By comparison, New Zealand parents pay approximately 17.1 per cent of the cost of care.<sup>80</sup>

United Voice argues that it is necessary to reform the current funding system to improve affordability for parents while providing greater transparency and cost-effectiveness for government. United Voice supports the recommendations outlined in the PricewaterhouseCoopers report that the funding system must shift from a fee-driven to a cost-driven model. As in the case of the New Zealand, this would be based on a 'child per hour' rate.<sup>81</sup> We acknowledge that there have been criticisms of this approach in New Zealand, which have focused on the tendency to under-estimate the true cost of providing ECEC services. United Voice recognises that calculating the cost of childcare is complex, and determined by a number of interrelated factors. For example, remote centres may face additional costs to attract and relocate staff, while metropolitan centres will face significantly higher rents. These factors mean that the cost of providing ECEC services can vary significantly between different services. United Voice notes, therefore, that unless a suitable system is developed to assess the cost of childcare, there is a risk that these estimates will significantly under-estimate the actual cost of care, with parents responsible for the gap between ECEC fees and government funding. Furthermore, any cost-driven approach must provide additional incentives to ensure that currently under-represented groups access quality ECEC services.

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<sup>80</sup> <http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/indicators/data/resource/public-expenditure-on-early-childhood-education-ece#table8>

<sup>81</sup> PricewaterhouseCoopers, p.28.

### **5.1.2. A FUNDING SYSTEM THAT ENSURES EQUITABLE ACCESS TO QUALITY ECEC**

In their analysis of the current, fee-driven funding system, PricewaterhouseCoopers found that the current fee-driven funding system has led to a number of market failures, including:

- Access to childcare places is not consistent across service areas. Particular areas (e.g. inner metropolitan and remote areas) currently experience significant shortfalls in available childcare places, while there is a glut of places in other areas.
- A lack of incentive for services to provide places for 'more-expensive' children (e.g. babies and those with additional needs).
- A lack of incentive to provide higher quality services that employ standards above the minimum required under the regulations.

Given these issues, they argue that in a mixed ECEC market governments need to provide incentives for the market to provide higher cost places and to encourage the provision of quality services.

As argued above, United Voice supports a cost-driven funding model, where the cost of childcare is assessed with a view to providing equitable access to quality ECEC. Any determination of costs will therefore need to recognise that costs can vary significantly between children and between service areas. To this end, United Voice supports a system similar to that deployed in New Zealand, which is based on a base unit per child rate plus additional loadings that reflect diverse cost factors. These loadings may reflect:

- the additional costs of providing services to infants;
- the additional costs of providing services to children with additional needs; and
- the additional costs of providing services in particular areas (e.g. remote communities and inner city areas with high rentals).

In Australia, particular groups of children are under-represented in quality, formal ECEC services. These groups include children from non-English speaking backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children from socio-economically disadvantaged families. These groups are, furthermore, those who stand to obtain the greatest benefit from high quality ECEC. In order to reduce the barriers to these groups accessing ECEC services, we propose that the 'child per hour' rate also include additional equity payments, similar to those applied in New Zealand. These payments are intended as incentives to encourage disadvantaged children to access childcare. The loadings would take the form of additional payments that would further decrease the gap between child care costs and fees, and would be provided in addition to cost loadings to meet the costs of providing care to children with additional needs.

Finally, the calculation of a child-per-hour rate may include further calculations regarding the proportion to be met by government and by families. Fees would then be charged by the service, taking into account this amount. Services may choose to charge higher fees depending on additional services offered. However, as parents are responsible for 100 per cent of the gap, this model reduces incentives for price increases that are substantially disproportionate to the relative cost of services.

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*The Fair Work Commission is now in the process of determining professional wages for the sector – that’s a good thing. I’ll acknowledge that there are issues about pay in the childcare sector. I visited about 200 centres in my time as opposition spokesperson. That’s why I’m very pleased that it’s now going where it needs to go, to the FWC. [...] Finally United Voice took this to the FWC where they are able to secure a lasting, permanent wage increase.*

Sussan Ley, press conference  
announcing the cancellation of  
EYQF – 10 December 2013

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### 5.1.3. FUND PROFESSIONAL WAGES TO ENSURE QUALITY ECEC

ECEC is a highly labour-intensive sector – labour comprises between 73 per cent and 82 per cent of total costs in Long Day Care centres.<sup>82</sup> Yet the massive expansion in government funding in the last 15 years has done little to facilitate workforce development. Between 1996 and 2001, the proportion of degree qualified staff fell by 50 per cent, as many employers increasingly saw opportunities to cut the costs of quality provision in favour of improving profits.<sup>83</sup> During this period government funding to ECEC more than doubled whilst significant reforms were made to the funding system. These included the abolition of operational subsidies and the transition towards a system of financing childcare based almost entirely on subsidising parents' fees. Since then fees (and the amount of government subsidies to parents) have increased at a rate exceeding the inflation rate. Between 2005 and 2009, Australian Government spending for childcare increased from \$2.02 billion to \$3.7 billion, an increase from \$3,430 to \$5,187 per licensed place across all service types. During the same period fees increased by an average of 34.9 per cent – more than 2.5 times the headline inflation rate during this period. Despite these spending increases, a Certificate III qualified childcare professional typically earns an hourly wage just \$2.70 above the minimum wage.

The wages of ECEC staff are not commensurate with the qualifications and levels of professionalism required for the job. As outlined in **Section (2)** the reasons for this wage disparity are complex and historical and reflect the structural impediments to bargaining that exist in the sector. In recognition of the changing value of the work of childcare professionals, and the historical undervaluation of their work, United Voice has lodged an application to the Fair Work Commission to review the wages in Long Day Care. If successful, this will lead to an Equal Remuneration Order to increase the wages of all Long Day Care staff.

United Voice is confident that the Fair Work Commission will support our application for increased wages throughout the sector when they decide on the application in mid-2015. Our modelling suggests that a win in this case will cost an additional \$1.6 billion across the sector in 2015-16. This will significantly impact on the overall affordability of childcare for parents, unless the additional costs of professional wages are taken into account in reforming the current funding system.

The current funding system of subsidising parents ensures an intrinsic trade-off between parental affordability and the wages of educators. Demand-side subsidies do not rise in accordance with the costs of operation. Within the context of the current funding system small wage increases contribute to upward pressure on fees.

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<sup>82</sup> Allen Consulting Group, *Children's Services Regulation 2010, Draft Impact analysis*, Sydney, Allen Consulting Group, 2010, p.15.

<sup>83</sup> Meagher, p.156.



As argued above, United Voice supports a funding system in which funding levels are determined by the *actual* cost of high quality service delivery, rather than price indexation. To ensure the viability of the sector, and ensure that wage increases are cost neutral for parents and employers, the determination of costs under the new system needs to be based on the provision of professional wages for all ECEC staff.

For educators, the benefits of funding model that acknowledges and funds professional wages would be immense. It would allow the existing workforce to realise their ambitions of building a lasting career in the sector and encourage new high quality entrants to take up the profession. For parents, such a funding scheme would encourage greater workforce participation, as they would be assured that their children are entrusted to a professional and stable workforce. For children, the benefits would include improved child development outcomes due to improved and long-lasting relationships with staff due to a more stabilised workforce. Together, these immediate effects would have significant impacts on the country's economic performance.

#### 5.1.4. MAINTAIN FUNDING ALLOCATION TO ‘APPROVED’ PROVIDERS ONLY

The majority of parents cite work-related reasons as the primary reason for using non-parental care. Between 1984 and 2011, there was a substantial increase in the percentage of children using formal day childcare services. In the 0–2 age group, childcare usage increased from 10–20 per cent, while for the 3–5 age group usage increased from less than 10 per cent to approximately 30 per cent. The majority of this increase was in Long Day Care services.<sup>84</sup> The growth in the use of Long Day Care services reflects the changing work patterns of Australian parents. With Long Day Care services typically operating from 7:30am to 6pm, the hours of operation of these services more closely match the working hours of parents.

Despite the increase in the use of formal childcare arrangements since 1984, the majority of families with one or both parents employed utilise a mix of formal and informal childcare arrangements. According to the Institute of Family Studies, the use of informal child care “continues to be an integral part of childcare in families with employed as well as unemployed mothers”.<sup>85</sup> Almost 50 per cent of informal care is provided by a child’s relatives, with 35 per cent of care provided by a child’s grandparents. A further 5.6 per cent use babysitters or nannies for at least a portion of work-related care. The relatively high use of informal care may reflect parents’ belief in the value of relative care. However, the majority of parents cite the cost of additional hours or difficulty in matching required hours of care to available hours of care as the primary reasons for utilising informal care.<sup>86</sup>

Internationally, governments have developed different strategies to support parents’ use of diverse forms of care, and enable greater flexibility of childcare provision. In New Zealand, this has included the expansion and greater regulation of in-home care.

The New Zealand Government has supported the expansion of in-home care from a Family Day Care model to include individualised services in a child’s own home. However, recognising the importance of both *education* and *care*, the New Zealand Government has made the provision of funding to in-home care services contingent a qualified teacher overseeing the program, and the provision of an individualised education program tailored to each child’s needs, and which complies with the national curriculum *Te Whāriki*.

United Voice supports the rights of parents to make decisions about the non-parental care of children. However, we believe that in a limited funding environment government funding must be directed as effectively as possible. The funding of care must therefore not solely focus on workforce development outcomes; it must also consider child development outcomes and the effects of different forms of care on those outcomes. As argued by PricewaterhouseCoopers, while parental workforce participation is an important goal, children should not be developmentally disadvantaged by non-parental care.

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<sup>84</sup> Baxter, p.12.

<sup>85</sup> Baxter, p.28.

<sup>86</sup> R Wilkins, *Families, Incomes and Jobs, Volume 8: A Statistical Report on Waves 1 to 10 of the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey*, Melbourne, Commonwealth of Australia, 2013, p.10.

Furthermore, if ECEC services are to be expanded to reflect changing business practices, then business should be expected to contribute to meeting the costs of this increased flexibility.

While we broadly support the decision to support working parents through the provision of in-home education based programs, we note that to be successful in achieving the dual outcomes of child development and workforce participation additional investment in the ECEC system will be required. Currently, New Zealand ranks in the top group of OECD countries in terms of both its per child public investment in ECEC and the proportion of total public spending allocated to ECEC.<sup>87</sup> Public expenditure on ECEC per full-time equivalent child (FTE) increased from \$5,700 per FTE in 2002 to \$9,600 per FTE in 2012.<sup>88</sup>

We note, furthermore, that concerns have been expressed regarding the quality of care provided by in-home providers. For example, in their review of the NZ ECE sector, the 2011 ECE Taskforce stated:

*Our understanding of the notion of quality leads us to have some concerns about the quality of education and care that can be provided by home-based service providers under current arrangements. While home-based services have some strong quality characteristics, such as small group sizes and low ratios, they do not have a qualified, professional workforce, which we regard to be essential to good outcomes from early childhood education. Instead, up to twenty educators without high-level early childhood education teaching qualifications are supervised by a single qualified teacher in the role of the network's coordinator.<sup>89</sup>*

Given these concerns, United Voice argues that any expansion of in-home care in line with the New Zealand model needs to ensure that the sector is sufficiently regulated to ensure the quality provision of care. We supported the extension of the NQF requirements to Family Day Care as it ensured that parents could trust the quality of the care provided, whether services were offered in a centre or home environment. We believe that any expansion of in-home care to provide greater flexibility in the provision of care needs to retain these quality standards. For this reason, we do not support the removal of the distinction between 'approved' and 'registered' care. The current distinction allows a small minority of families to receive support for informal care, only in situations where no other form of care is suitable. It in turn ensures that other families are encouraged to use some form of formal, accredited ECEC.

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<sup>87</sup> Education Counts, *Public expenditure on early childhood education (ECE)*, Wellington, Ministry of Education, 2010, p.1.

<sup>88</sup> Education Counts, p.2.

<sup>89</sup> ECE Taskforce, p.45.

## **5.2. PROPOSED FUNDING REFORMS**

The current system needs to be reformed to ensure an effective ECEC system that is of high quality to ensure child development and workforce participation. United Voice recognises that the Productivity Commission has been tasked with reforming the system within the current funding envelope. However, United Voice calls on the Productivity Commission to recognise the relative underfunding of the sector compared to international benchmarks. United Voice proposes the following principles which we believe should guide any reforms to the current system:

### **Principle 1: Ensure certainty for families and government on expenditure**

Government must ensure that funding flows to where it is needed to ensure universal access to quality ECEC services. Restructuring funding away from subsidising market price to subsidising costs, combined with the necessary increases to funding levels, could ensure certainty of government expenditure and maintain affordability for parents.

### **Principle 2: Deploy funding mechanisms that encourage quality provision**

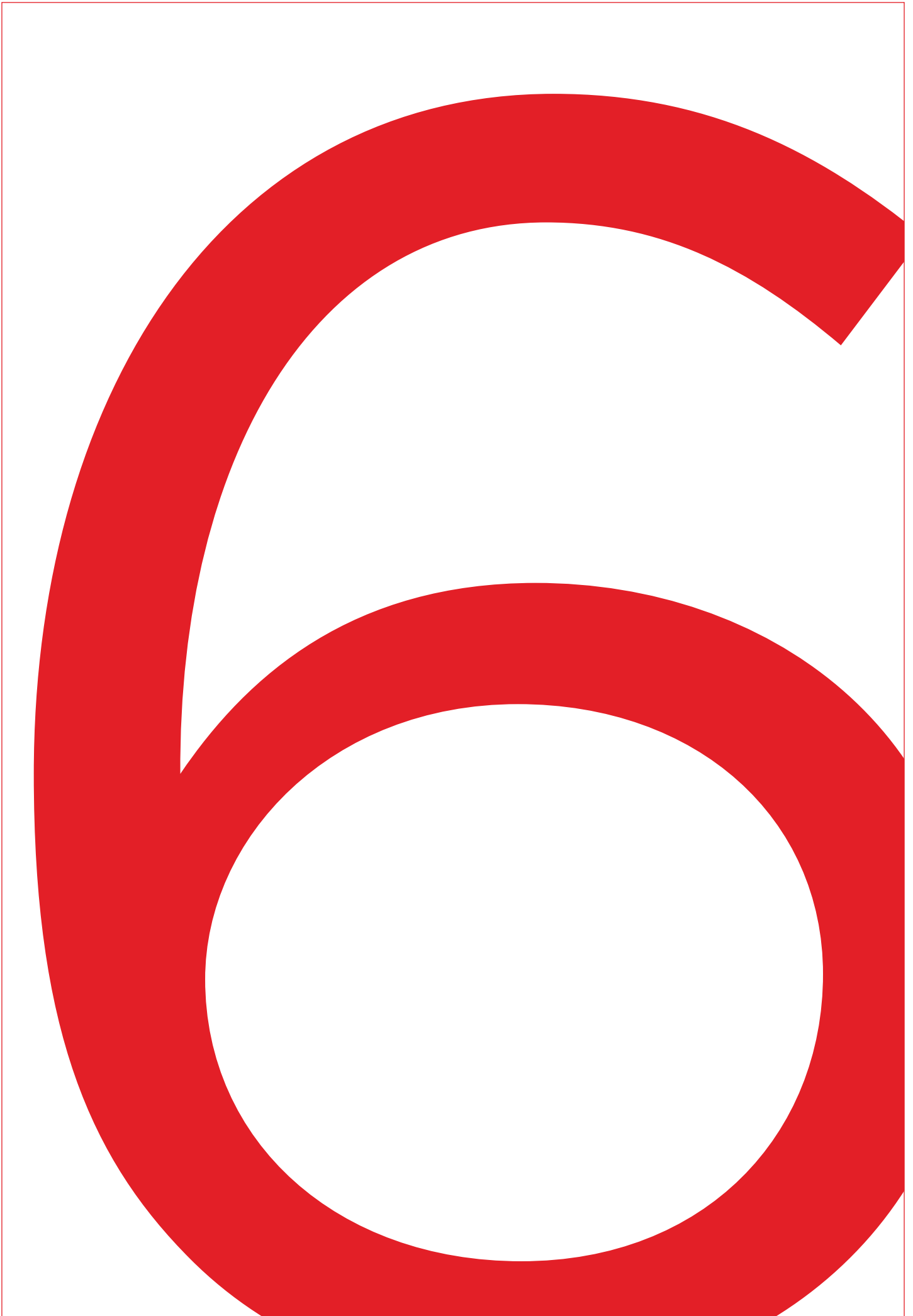
Funding for quality requires dedicating resources to compliance with quality regulations by providing adequate funding for staff to have time off the floor to complete requirements that are of benefit to children and parents. United Voice supports a cost-driven funding model, which uses weighted loadings to encourage quality provision and ensures that the additional needs of particular 'high-cost' groups are met.

### **Principle 3: Funding for professional wages**

Quality ECEC provision will not occur unless the workforce is stabilised through the provision of suitable wages. Any reform of the funding system must ensure that sufficient, targeted funding is allocated for professional wages. Without funding for professional wages, the aims of the NQS will not be met.

### **Principle 4: A holistic early years funding system to encourage workforce participation**

Research shows that ECEC expenditure is most cost-effective when combined with other measures, including paid parental leave and family tax benefits that encourage second-earners to return to work. Funding reforms should remove disincentives for second earners returning to work, while recognising parental choice in determining how to combine parental and non-parental care. United Voice supports the Productivity Commission in their decision to consider the range of support offered to parents as part of an integrated early years funding pool.





# *Appendix*

## **UNITED VOICE POLICY LEADER VIEWS**

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### **Michelle Baker, Director, Goodstart Early Learning Alfred Cove**

I have worked in the early childhood education and care sector since 1986, when I began straight out of high school. I worked full time during the day and then went to TAFE at night to obtain my qualifications. Over the past 27 years I have had the honour and privilege of educating children aged six weeks to five years of age. It is a rewarding, challenging and exhausting job. We are required to develop individual learning plans for every child who attends each week, evaluate and further plan for each child developmental progress and provide written observations, developmental checklists, portfolios, daily journals and twice yearly parent meetings for each child with only two hours of paid programming time each week. Many educators spend a lot of their own personal unpaid time ensuring that all of these records are maintained and completed to ensure quality learning is happening so that every child benefits and develops to the best of their ability whilst in the care of their early learning centre. These educators are paid \$19 - \$24 an hour, they struggle to move out of home, pay their bills and to even have their own family. The most ironic thing I hear all of the time from my staff members are that they care for other people's children but can't afford to have their own child on the wages they earn. As a Director of a large centre we are lucky that we don't have a large turnover of staff. However I have had a staff transfer five months ago as she moved and have not been able to fill the position. This means our centre is using relief staff, these educators are not of the quality and standard that we expect or the children we care for deserve. The poor wages in our profession don't allow us to attract quality staff members; we have to make do with just mediocrity sometimes. There are good and bad in both services, quality and staff, however without professional wages we will never be able to retrain and attract the best, no one great wants to work for peanuts. As a Director of a large centre I am the second highest paid worker at my centre, earning \$30 per hour. In the sector, this is not a bad wage...but if you consider the work that I do and the study I have done to do it, it is not just. I have still completed three years of full time study and am responsible for 180 children, 111 families and 19 staff members, adhere to all regulations and ensure that we meet NQS and EYLF standards and my ECT teacher who only looks after 20 children per day earns more than I do and has only a fraction of the responsibility that I have.

We work incredibly hard at our early learning service to ensure that we provide a quality service where every child, parent and staff member feels like they belong, that they have a voice and that they contribute to our service. We have long waiting lists and usually if a child has not started with us since birth they will not usually be able to obtain a place at our centre. We pride ourselves on our reputation in our community and look in dismay at other centres in our area whose standard of care reflects badly on our profession. The regulatory body required to ensure regulations are at a minimum standard don't have enough staff to ensure regular visits, so that better quality services are present. If those centres were made to come up to standard this would provide parents with better opportunities for accessible and flexible care.

Another way of ensuring that we can move our profession forward is to provide recognition of prior learning and a bridging course for Diploma trained educators to complete the ECT and then ensuring that educators can fill the much needed roles of ECT in their services, therefore ensuring higher qualification standards.

All of these suggestions should be a minimum, children and families deserve an early learning service where learning happens everyday in an environment where the teachers providing that learning are qualified, well paid and aren't weighed down by paper work that takes them away from actually interacting with the children. Parents struggle with having to leave their child in the care of people due to financial issues, however when I speak with them they all say the same thing when they look for early learning centres, quality staff who have knowledge and experience and who have been at their service, they hate the high turnover of staff.

The NQF was set up based on research in the best practices of ensuring children are provided with the best learning opportunities in the first five years of life, the key time of learning for all children to set up the foundation of learning for the rest of their life. It has sound practices, it is far from perfect but has great foundations for the sector, but the amount of paperwork to complete the framework is time intensive and cumbersome and all of the educators in my service say it takes time away from the children, who should and are the focus of our role. Changes need to be made in consultation with the people who should have the most say educators and families.

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**Wendy Johns, Assistant Director, Marjorie Mann Lawley Day Care Centre**

As a Director, I welcome the changes of the NQF. Lower child staff ratios equal higher quality for children and educators. This gives educators more time to spend quality time with one to one interactions with the children and devote more time to all of the children in their group. It is also beneficial to educators, as with a lower child/educator ratio it gives them more time to focus on the day-to-day job they have to do without feel so stressed. This in turn enables the children to feel more secure, safe and confident to go about their day and explore, learn, create and develop.

In my sector, qualifications matter. Educators who have a Certificate III or a Diploma have knowledge and knowledge empowers people and enables them to provide quality learning programs, experiences and care. Educators with knowledge and qualifications are accountable for their actions. We need a stable qualified workforce, which will give the kind of continuity of care children in all centres need to learn best. Educators in our centre support and wish to retain staff having to have a Certificate III and a Diploma.

While increasing the amount of teachers in a room is a good idea, to improve the quality of education we don't want to see teachers just being dropped into a centre to do a job that we have, in everything but name, been doing for years. Instead, let's try to bring in a bridging course, (by a reputable training authority) and let us do RPL and upgrade our skills. University fees are well out most educators' price range but they would love to find a way of upgrading their skills to perform the role of early childhood teacher, without the exorbitant cost. If we have to have teachers, we have the right to attract teachers who are wanting to work in day care, rather than treating their position in a centre as a stop gap until they can get a 'real' teaching job with better wages and conditions. That is not quality for our children. How does this go for continuity of care? We need the right people for the job we do, working in day care is a passion.

Research has shown children develop well when they have a strong attachment to their educators. A stable, qualified workforce, that are respected and treated as professionals will lead to quality continuity of care for our children. If educators are recognised and respected for the job we do by a professional wage, educators will stay in the field.

Staff turnover has a huge impact on children and families, but it also has a huge impact on the educators left behind. I know of so many centres that loose far too many fantastic educators because although they are passionate about ECEC, they can't afford to stay in the sector and need to leave to get a better paid job with less stress and paperwork.

The unfortunate thing about high staff turnover is how it affects those left behind. We all know the work we educators have to do, to make the children and families feel welcome and happy to leave their most prized possession in our care. To gain their trust and have them feel confident at leaving their children in our care.

How do the children feel if every time they come to day care, they have a different person looking after them - how unsettling is that for them?

The other issue of staff turnover is how it affects the educators left in the room. The educators have to go through mentoring a new staff member and invest a lot of time and energy to getting them to know the routine and how things run, the programming system - as each centre can be quite different. Having different educators all the time is a stress to the educators, children and families. They need to know who is looking after their child each day. Then there is the problem of finding a new educator to replace the one who is leaving - this can take quite a while to find the right person.

When it comes to the NQF and EYLF, I believe that the new system has definitely improved the sector as we now have a framework to follow, but it has also made a lot of educators leave the sector due to increase in paperwork and more pressure of a new system is too much for some. The framework calls us professional educators, but we are not looked upon as professionals nor have the wage to back this up. If we had professional wages and recognition it would guarantee that more of the educators would not leave ECEC.

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**Kate Hodgekiss, Early Childhood Teacher, Centre withheld**

I have worked in the sector for 16 years, having been an ECT for seven of those. I have worked in many capacities, but perhaps the biggest eye opener was working as a Regional Manager overseeing seven early childhood services ranging from 39 places to 90. Trying to staff seven centres with quality early childhood educators is near impossible. It has been well established in research that the first three years of life are the critical years for learning and development. It goes without saying that early childhood educators are looking after the most important person in a parent's life. Furthermore, anyone who has worked the floor in an early childhood service will say that you have to be a jack-of-all-trades to work successfully in the sector. So why is it that early childhood educators are payed as little as \$19 an hour? Why is it that the person scanning your groceries at the supermarket is earning more than the person looking after, loving and educating your child?

In order to set a child up as an active participant in society we need to have high quality early childhood educators who understand the National Framework and the EYLF. They are more important than anything else in the sector. It is the men and women working directly with the children that earn the least, and yet are the most instrumental in creating a high quality early childhood environment which can foster children's autonomy and set them up as a life long learner. But how are we supposed to entice people into the sector for \$19 an hour? And why would anyone train for two years to earn a measly \$24/hour, let alone going to university and actually becoming an early childhood teacher for an extra dollar or two on top of that?

I ask, how is it that someone with a degree to educate our future can be earning the exact same amount as his or her sibling who has no training and also works in the care industry? It is these sort of injustices that drive people away from our sector. I myself have an immense passion for the industry, and yet I have considered leaving it on occasion, because despite my university degree, despite the hours of professional development and the progression up the sector ladder, I will never be able to afford to buy my own home in Sydney. It simply isn't a goal I would ever aspire to on the wages that I earn. For a person with 16 years experience in the sector, a degree, and in a position like a regional manager role (which took me away from education and everything I have trained in), the most I have ever earned has been \$80,00 p.a. At centre level the most I have earned is \$30/hour and that was still in a management role. A fellow colleague worked as an accountant 10 years ago and was on \$120 000/year and now as an early childhood teacher with a three year degree, ten years on and she is earning less than half that amount because of her career change!

Finally, it should be recognised that the introduction of the National Quality Framework has been the best development in the sector in the 16 years. I was proud to have been a part of it. From the professionalisation of language, the expectations around qualifications, to the fact that for the first time we have a national curriculum, these policy changes have made a real difference. Let's keep moving forward in the early childhood education sector.

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**Stephanie Kemp, Director, Goodstart Early Learning Pimpana**

I have worked in this sector for 13 years now. When I started at the age of 17, I earned \$5.90 an hour. When I first begun it was not about money, I worked for the love of the children, watching them learn and grow in front of your eyes. Our role is so important in shape children's lives, giving them stability, love, education and life skills.

The government want more children in rooms with less staff, how will this provide the best care for children? The government want staff with less qualifications, how is this best for children? How can we leave children in care with people with no education and experience?

How can we expect staff to stay in a highly stressful job when they get paid less than a check out chick who stands there all day and is not responsible for children's lives and education?

If you want the best Australia and high educated Australian's you need high education from the first five years of a child's life.

Over my 13 years I have seen so many staff leave due to high stress and low pay, I think about leaving all the time but I stay because I love educating and giving children the best and I spend my own money on resources for children even though I am already underpaid and do many hours of unpaid work a week. I manage 14 staff and look after 136 families, yet a man with similar levels of qualifications gets \$10 an hour more for his job. Why is our pay so low? Is this because we are women?

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**Natasha Campbell, Educator, Chatterbox Childcare Centre Carina**

I have been working in the sector for seven years now, as I love being able to play such a big role in helping to support our young children by guiding them and encouraging learning. This job is no longer "just a babysitting service" where children come to play while their parents work. We observe children everyday and take documentation on learning that is taking place through learning stories, overviews of the day, taking photos and writing in reflective diaries. Our centre does yearly report cards on the children, explaining what areas of the development we have seen, and provide the parents with evidence of this in a portfolio full of their child's learning. Also at our centre every year we do two all day professional development classes and all keep our first aid up to date.

We have all studied our Certificate III or Diplomas in children services and understand how children learn and how we can support them. We put thought into what we do everyday regarding activities and experiences always looking at extending on children's interests and focusing on encouraging different areas of development.



A quality educator's role is to meet parents and children's needs everything from children's rest, food, intellectual, social and emotional needs. Educators play such an important role in a young child's life, we are there to provide a happy and loving environment where we encourage children and provide opportunities for children to explore and learn. We are the first step for children before they attend school we provide them with a great learning environment and one that also boasts children's self confidences.

Over the years, I have seen a number of different issues within the childcare sector. The most obvious is the high staff turnover. I think the main reason for high staff turnover is some people don't realise how physically and emotionally demanding this role can be. With not only supervising children, making sure their needs are met, cleaning and load of paperwork staff are getting burnt out and know they can leave and find a job that pays better and that is less stressful and demanding.

Recently I have had two educator friends leave the sector to work within the fitness industry instead as they get paid better and the work is more flexible. Staff leaving the industry really affects families and children as they form close relationships with their educators. Children become unsettled and parents feel worried and experience anxiety about leaving their children, sometimes even causing parents to quit their jobs or work less days. Staff members become more stressed; as they have to wait weeks before a new staff member is hired and while waiting they usually have to take on their co-worker's paperwork.

I have worked in all age groups from babies to four year olds and every staff member will say the same thing, we need more people. Making sure all children's needs are being met as well as supervising children, comforting those who are sad, finishing the required paperwork, cleaning, and providing educational experiences is a struggle. We need more educators but cannot attract them to work here with our low wages.

Every age group should have two staff at all times including the rest period, as not all children sleep especially once they are three or four years of age. Being in a room of 24 children where only a handful of children sleep can be stressful as you have to supervise those in the bathroom, those resting while also completing cleaning and paperwork.

I am still amazed that one staff member can have four babies to herself, it becomes hard when two are crying, one needs a nappy changed and one needs to be fed. Believe me it does happen, and it's not fair on the staff, the parent or the child.

My centre does pay above award wage when I had my Certificate III I was on \$21.82 an hour now I have my Diploma I'm on \$22.30 an hour. There is only 50 cents difference and, sadly, the pay-off is not really worth the cost of completing my Diploma.

My partner is a fitter and turner by trade and completed his Certificate III and he gets paid a minimum of \$30 an hour. I struggle to see how that is fair.

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**Felicity Bryan, Educator, Centre withheld**

I believe the sector is exploitative in that the pay is exceedingly low for the level of care and commitment to children's care and education that is required.

Resources and opportunities to complete the paperwork are inadequate, which means that the sector is relying on the altruism of workers to complete (unpaid) work in their own time in order to comply with requirements and unrealistic expectations. This leaves staff stressed and exhausted which in turn can only impact negatively on the care that they are able to provide when they are so overstretched. Despite having recently completed my diploma, I am considering a new career path for many of the above reasons. I am saddened by my disillusionment, as early childhood is such a worthwhile field. I hope the government bodies will consider why such high levels of paperwork are required and why a predominantly (female) work force should be content with the pay and conditions. Let's put the children's needs first in future by aiming to attract and keep quality staff ensuring consistency for families, by markedly improving pay and conditions and freeing workers to care for and educate children.

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**Trisha Morrissey Brown, Educator, Charlestown Early Learning Centre**

I have worked for in childcare for 12 years now, the last five years I have spent in my current centre.

I have seen many employees come and go in my time working as an educator, and the number one reason they leave is the inadequate wages compared to the enormous responsibility and workload we take on every day. Early childhood teachers are lost to primary school education; we see certificate III trained employees not wish to complete their Diploma because the reality of caring for small children and the corresponding wages does not make it worthwhile. Surely the low pay is also the reason we so few male staff.

I continue to work in early education because I am passionate about the care and education of young children but sadly I see so many educators simply 'burnt out' and despondent as they struggle with the increasing rules and regulations, programming, portfolios (most of which are done in their own time) and the inadequate support provided for the increasing amount of children we see with behavioural problems.

When will we be recognised for the invaluable time and energy we contribute to nurture and educate our pre-schoolers.

Our low wages reflect a society that, on the one hand, demands cheaper fees and more availability but is totally disinterested in the quality and conditions of the people who look after their children!

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**Sharyn Bucknell, Educator, James Cahill Preschool**

Even though we have had recent pay rises the wages are still far below the average wage for this level of TAFE qualification that we require and for the amount of work that we do. In my centre, we work a lot of overtime and undertake unpaid work, like extra training and Saturday seminars and after work in-services to stay in touch with the changes that come into force. We cannot afford the children's toys or equipment in our regular budget; instead we have to hold fundraisers, which take even more time out of our day. That is how we get our equipment for the children and centre

We have a lot of responsibility, we need to know how to do first aid, tube feed, medicate children, monitor for seizures or an anaphylactic reaction or asthma. People trust us with the most precious possession in their life every day. We do this all for a bargain price of \$21 an hour. Before tax.

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**Janelle Murphy, Room Leader, East Lismore Community Preschool**

I have worked in the preschool area of early childhood education for 28 years, during this time the wages have always been considerably low and have continued to stay that way. The responsibility of the early childhood educator has grown immensely during this time as has the responsibility with little monetary recognition, with educators working on their written records at home in their own time.

Early childhood educators have been complacent in the battle for recognition and better wages but have reached the point of fighting for rights and wages they should already have. Many quality, highly experienced educators are leaving the field and young people are not interested. Morale is low and educators need to be recognised.

I am a room leader with a Diploma and I have two staff with me with Diplomas, I receive the same wage; there is no recognition in the award for the position of room leader and the extra responsibility attached to the role.

When the director is absent, I am the temporary authorised supervisor. There is no financial recognition in this circumstance either.

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**Denise Stanistreet, Educator, Centre withheld**

Quality education and care comes down to the experience, education and quality of the staff at the centre. The only way to keep experienced quality educators is to value the very important job that they do. The best way to show educators that they are valued is to pay them a professional wage. Children will benefit from educators feeling valued and enthusiastic when it comes to work, instead of feeling under valued, over worked underpaid and unhappy. We need professional wages now.

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**Leann Slade, Educator, Dapto Community Child Care**

I come from an administration background and have worked in child care for four years. I am appalled at the working conditions and pay of qualified staff who are dedicated and very hard working individuals. As a result, many of the staff, including long-term childcare workers are seeking employment outside of the industry. I am just one of them, I hope to return to admin ASAP. The revolving door of educators makes for a lack of continuity of care, a very sad truth for the children and families that we care for.

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**Rebecca Sterry, Coordinator, Duncraig Early Learning Centre**

I have worked in the early childhood sector for ten years. The industry has changed dramatically in that time. The quality of care and expectations placed on educators has increased each year. To me quality care is always putting the children first. This priority is only possible with dedicated educators who work hard and have a passion for children. Finding educators who are passionate and good at what they do is like looking for a needle in a haystack. Great educators are hard to find and even harder to keep.

Part of the reason we lose good educators is due to the pay rate. We have educators with families who live overseas who they are not able to visit and other educators who are not able to purchase a home because our pay rates are so low. Staff turnover disrupts the room team, centre team, the families and the children. Parents and children lose educators that they have a close bond and special relationship with. Often resulting in upset and sometimes angry families.

The EYLF and NQF have really made our centre strive for excellence on a daily basis. We are passionate about up-skilling our educators and require them to do at least two lots of professional development a year. We also encourage the educators to further their study. We have four educators up-skilling at the moment.

We have had educators in the past stop studying because the extra work and responsibility are not worth the extra \$2 an hour.

In order to keep great educators we need to be able to offer better wages. We need to offer educators a decent wage so that they will stay in the industry. We have also lost good educators because it is more financially viable for them to stay at home with their child rather than return to work. It worries me that the government does not see educators pay rates as important. We have one of the most important jobs in the world guiding and caring for the next generation. Our pay should reflect our level of expertise and how valuable we are to the children and their families.

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**Hayley Davis, Director, The Northern and Eastern Tasmania Productivity Commission Inquiry Working Group**

This submission is on behalf of the entire working group. Introducing early childhood education and care educators from regional Eastern and Northern Tasmanian services. This working party is made up of approximately 91 educators representing the Long Day Care facet of Early Childhood Education and Care. These educators range in qualifications from Certificate III in Children's services to higher tertiary education qualifications such as Bachelor of Education (ECT). As experienced, qualified early childhood educators we are passionate in our beliefs and professional knowledge of the importance of early childhood education and care. Each educator with this group has experiences as early childhood educators, teachers, centre directors and outside of school hours educators.

The role of Early Childhood Education and Care in a child's life has grown dramatically; from the necessary need for care to a recognition of the importance of early childhood education in the first five years.

"Early childhood services are evolving and changing as we learn more about the importance of the early years and the contexts in which we can best support a child's development."

The role of early childhood education and care has been changed to focus on the role of education as research continues to shape the importance for the first five years. Dramatic changes to Early Childhood Education and Care were undertaken in 2010 as COAG introduced ACECQA and the National Quality Framework to formally recognise the vital role Early Childhood Education and Care plays in the role of children. This Recognition is best summarised by Early Childhood Australia: "promoting children's health and safety and ensuring their total wellbeing— including their physical and psychological welfare— requires that educators think critically about the routines, environment and relationships in their setting. In particular, educators need to get to know each child and their life circumstances

so that they use these understandings in their work. Educators use this knowledge to provide each child with a sense of place and importance within their setting, and they support children to build upon their current knowledge, skills and abilities as they gain increasing independence in caring for their own and others' welfare." Owens, A. 2011

The role of the educator now demands more experience, training and professional knowledge. As Sims, 2010 states: "Research demonstrates that higher levels of training improve service delivery (Campbell and Milbourne, 2005; Pianta and Hamre, 2009). Early childhood staff with more training engage in warmer and more responsive interactions with children, leading to improved child outcomes (Connor Son, Hindman and Morrison. 2005)

An educator in our group has observed this first hand; "Educators are so important in the lives of these children. Sometimes these children see the educators more than their parents. Educators are the one teaching children the necessities of life these days; like how to ride a bike, say thank you and how to feed themselves."

Educators involved in Early Childhood Education and Care often put their relationships with children before their own families and personal lives as they recognise the importance of their roles. "I have two children under five and I'm a diploma qualified room leader. I work full time and even with the staff discount what I earn in 3 days working is enough to cover my fees. I only take home two days pay out of five. That needs to cover groceries, petrol and everything else. Every time I get my payslip I wonder if it's worth it. I could just stay at home and claim benefits, I wouldn't have as many expenses and I definitely wouldn't have as much stress."

This passion and 'love for the job' is often underestimated by other educational professionals; "Teachers regularly come into our centre and see the programming and learning stories and everything that we do and they are blown away by how much work we do. We have some parents who are teachers who are taking the things that we do with the children back to their classrooms. Now the Early Childhood teachers in schools are doing Early Years Learning Framework and they are learning it from us."

This dedication to the children continues to have detrimental affects on work lives despite the passion for the children as summarised by one of our educators; "Most people that I went to TAFE with to study Early Childhood Education and Care, some of them are now stay at home mums and some have other jobs. Most left because it wasn't what they expected when they went into it, it wasn't just playing with children, and some left because it wasn't worth the stress."

Other educators state; "I wanted to be a teacher when I was younger. I got into the sector as I saw it as a step on the ladder. I would work in Early Childhood Education and Care for a while and the eventually go to uni. It's harder than I



thought. I'm always tired and I do so much paperwork. I haven't thought about going any further for a while, it takes up so much time and energy just to get by."

"There's no point to me getting a diploma and becoming a room leader. I see the stress that the room leader goes through. I help out by trying to do as much as I can so she can get the paperwork done, but she still takes some home. Why would I take on that extra responsibility and stress for an extra 90c per hour?"

"I often find it hard to get the paperwork done at work. I get allocated 2 hours per week but sometimes if we are short staffed even that doesn't happen. Programming and reflecting on what we have done is important to me, it helps me make sure that all of the children in the room are developed. I often have to take it home though and that causes its own problems. My husband is supportive but sometimes it's too much."

These issues that early childhood education and care educators face are varied and broad. However they are often left at the gate as educators push through their stressors to attend to the children in their services as they understand the value and the importance of their roles. With quality educators who are qualified and dedicated to their profession, we recognise the essential role that strong relationships with children play in their development. These relationships then assist us in being able to cater to the developmental needs of our children, thus providing them with high learning outcomes. It is the time and level of expertise in our educators that enables them to distinguish this need, demonstrating their high level of professionalism.

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### **Melissa Hurry, Assistant Manager, AEIOU Sippy Downs**

I have worked within the early childhood sector since January 1992 spanning 22 years. Childcare has grown and developed over that time from a babysitting industry into an early childhood education profession, as viewed by the public. It has been a rewarding career the past few years, finally having the recognition from Parents, peers and government for the passion, dedication and training I have achieved and the education and care I have given to each and every child in my care.

I believe this is largely due to the current wages, which sit at \$25.10 an hour, qualifications and legislation requirements. This change of attitude has led to other professionals entering this important industry and ensuring educators are providing a quality program. Early childhood educators support young minds with educational experiences, recognising and valuing children's own awareness, interests and knowledge, using positive guidance to help and build a strong foundation for the future learning and growth. I believe this quality of care can

only occur when you have happy, inspired educators who are supported by management and government with quality working conditions, i.e. wage increases, staff to child ratios that ensure time to have 1 on 1 teachable moments with each and every child.

High turnover is a huge issue in childcare largely due to the high stress environments and little support and low wages. Within a 5yr period working in a previous service we lost over 200 staff, which largely effected the children and other educators to create a positive learning environment. It takes weeks to replace each member of staff, placing more responsibility and stress on other members of staff.

I believe the NQF and ELYF are two very important documents supporting and directing staff, parents and children towards a safe, productive and quality run environment. The NQF gives the service clear guidelines and information to successfully achieve a centre of quality.

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**Amy Bodel, Director, Active Kids Early Learning Centre Mt Gravatt**

When I finished school I knew exactly what I wanted to do. I had done my work experience, I'd achieved an outstanding achievement in early childhood studies at school and I was ready to go. I marched around to every child care centre in my area until someone would sign me up to a traineeship. Finally someone said 'yes' and I was so excited about the opportunity that I never stopped to ask about wages or job perks or anything like that so when I sat down on my first day to sign my contracts (and the extensive list of duties, responsibilities and requirements that went with it) you can imagine my surprise to see a figure of around \$10 an hour staring back at me! This wage had to support me as well as fund additional and ongoing costs like blue card renewal, first aid training, fire safety training, child protection training, food handling training... The list went on and on and all of those expensive trainings and renewals were supposed to come out of my \$10 an hour?

I started that very day and for the first few weeks I really thought I would throw it in because I needed more money and I knew I could make it down the road at Woolworths or Coles. But by the end of my first month I was hooked! I absolutely loved my job, I loved working with children, I loved throwing myself into my studies, I just loved going to work every day :) And by the end of my first year there was no turning back. I became very passionate about ECEC and no amount of money would make me change my mind!

So I stayed, I furthered my skills, I renewed those blue cards and those first aid certificates and I struggled financially for many years. I never complained because I had made a choice about a career that made me happy but when all of my

friends were settling down and buying houses, having babies or planning holidays I would always think 'how do they afford it!'. I never had spare money for holidays or house deposits or new cars. I rented in a share house and paid my bills and spent my spare time researching and planning for my work because it was what made me happy and I had no money to do anything else!

Over the past 13 years, it has been rare to come across educators with an outlook like mine. People who choose happiness over money, people who will commit to ECEC regardless of the poor wage. Of the 200 educators I will have worked with in my time I would say around 50% of them have left the industry due to poor wages. Of that 50% I would say only 20% of them were dedicated and passionate educators like me. These are sad numbers for a few reasons. The number of passionate educators we lose due to poor wages is devastating! Now as a director it is hard to come across great educators and whispers of them leaving for greener pastures leads to sleepless nights! But to me the low number of dedicated educators is even more upsetting and truly disappointing and I believe a direct result of the low wages we are offered.

I believe that the wage we are paid encourages people with no knowledge of the industry to believe that it is an easy job of little importance that they can just walk in and out of. People will say "I don't know what I'm going to do for work, if I can't find anything I'll just get into Child care or something". It's the ultimate insult but one that unfortunately is driven by the lack of support and respect we receive from our own governing bodies.

On top of that, the costs and stress involved with introducing the NQF and EYLF over the past couple of years has really put a strain on our industry as a whole and after the EYQF debacle it is likely to lead to further stress and resignations in the near future.

I believe to achieve quality care the government needs to stop paying high wages to the 'government workers' who are assessing our competencies and pass them onto the people on the floor who are working hard to raise and educate the future of our communities and our nation. Of course they would argue that they are the ones keeping us in line and ensuring we uphold the law and regulations but as a centre Director and Educator I can guarantee that WE are the ones educating ourselves and relying on our close support networks to get through these changes. We are the ones training our staff and supporting each other through the ongoing change and stress induced by the NQF. We are the ones who have to deal with every new regulatory amendment and every new health and safety requirement regardless of the implications it has on our services and our business and we get by knowing that we are contributing to education and supporting the families of our community because we care.

At the end of the day we can and have adapted to the changes over the years and will continue to do so but the government cannot expect a nation to support an industry as important as ECEC if they won't get on board themselves.

I fully support the NQF and strongly believe it has made huge (and much needed) changes and improvements to the ECEC industry as a whole. It has been very hard work and has come at a cost both financially and emotionally for a lot of our staff. But the Government just need to leave it alone! Lets stop reviewing it, stop adjusting it, stop amending it and just let us get our head around teaching it and adjusting to the changes (and the disappointment of the removal of our EYQF contracts) before we go introducing more change and anxiety for us all.

I get paid \$28 an hour to run an ECEC Long Day Care service licensed to care for 56 children. I am responsible for 75 families and 12 educators who rely on me to have all of the answers and solutions to the 'problems' injected into this industry by the government. Staying positive and relaying the positive aspects is getting hard for all of us... We need some answers and action...

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**Jessica Fox Roome, Assistant, Pimpama Child Care**

So much time is spent finding staff members to replace those that have quit because of the poor wages in childcare, staff are constantly on the phone or doing paper work and not enough time is focused on children. We are rushed and stressed and children are not getting the attention they need and deserve. If wages were put up more childcare workers would be willing to stay in this industry to help children through there future journeys, more staff would hold higher qualifications and parents would feel more safe and confident in the environments in which they leave their children in.

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**Caitlin Deakes, Manager, Tallowood and Boronia Child Care Centre**

This submission is on behalf of my centre. This is my 23rd year in the industry and my tenth year as educational leader/manager of two early childhood facilities. Why do I stay in this industry? It is certainly not for the money. Is it for the recognition? We are not recognised for the vital work we do from the government, the community or families. The only reasons I stay in this thankless industry is because I am a passionate, dedicated educator and believe in the importance of quality education from birth to six years. I have watched so many good educators leave the industry over the last 23 years because this passion and commitment doesn't pay the bills, put food on the tables and clothes on their backs.

It concerns me greatly the level of staff coming through our industry and their incompetence. I am insulted that some choose to study child care just because they can't get into another industry or they look at our work as babysitting. The crisis in childcare is to blame for this short fall. I applied to do my Associate

Diploma in education in 1992. This required me to submit a thorough application, I then went for an interview and then a second interview. I was successful and enrolled to study for two years on a full time basis, I also had to complete four practicums each for four weeks. Now if you pay your money you have access to the Certificate III or Diploma qualification you can complete your studies within six months. There lies the issue that staff are fast tracking their studies and completing this within six months with very little knowledge of child development.

I am a very passionate educator but it is heartbreaking to watch the quality of staff come into an industry that I have dedicated 23 years of my life to, I constantly educate staff, parents, community and the government, there needs to be financial recognition for the work that we are doing.

The government keeps treating us like 'babysitters' so I would like to see the level of documentation reduced so staff can truly provide quality care and spend time with the children and not on computers mass producing documentation. Staff are not given enough programming time and are expected to take it home to complete. My staff are fortunate with the time that they are allocated but they still take work home. Until the current government acknowledges the important work that we do every single day- things will never change and I will continue to watch the industry I love deteriorate.

Educators are drowning in paperwork and the question must be asked when do the staff spend time with the children? Staff are stressed as they haven't had time during the day to do their 'what we did today' communication for the families as they have been settling in the children who are building strong attachments with the staff. Some of the children scream or cry as soon as their core staff member moves away to attend to another child. All of these expectations are put in place on a daily basis and staff are juggling to meet all these requirements. My question to the government is, if we are merely 'baby-sitters' why is there so much paperwork involved in the implementation of the National Quality Standards?

Quality care is working with a team of professionals that are educated and knowledgeable about their industry; they share the passion and dedication of implementing quality programs and are willing to attend workshops to obtain new knowledge. We are a professional unit that is recognised for the vital work that we do. We are laying down the foundations so our children can make a successful transition from early childhood education and care to prep, to school, to high school, university and our children can make a positive contribution to the workforce and contribute to the community, which they belong.

Quality care is not having eight babies per day in a room with two staff. I watch my staff each day struggle to meet all of the requirements/needs of these babies and then they go home and beat themselves up because they know that they have not provided a high quality program. I see my dedicated team doing the very best that they can under very difficult situations. I often counsel my staff on how to deal with eight babies wanting to be fed at once, or a sleep, or a nappy change,

or a cuddle. I tell them to treat each situation like a road accident, as a First Aider you need to do an assessment of the casualties and determine who needs immediate assistance, this is the same when working in a nursery. My staff can only do so much - how is this quality care? I would like to see this ratio changed immediately for the sake of the children, the staff and quality care and education. Why are we not making this a priority?

From January to March this is an intense time for my staff as they settle in new children and begin to form strong attachment relationships with the children and their families. The work load is both physically and emotionally draining and my staff are already exhausted. It is a very difficult situation when you as a Manager are trying to support your team but your hands are tied due regulations and the logistics of working in our industry. We do not have the same luxury as some staff in other professions. Some staff have the opportunity to slowly transition back into work but for my staff on their first day back it is full steam ahead with parents waiting at the gate at 7:30am ready to drop their children off for the day.

The first years of a child's life are now considered some of the most critical in determining their future development and health. We need a system where early childhood education is valued and recognised just as the school system is. There appears to be an invisible bridge between early childhood and school and we should be making this bridge more visible. We should be creating better partnerships between early childhood and the schools. We need to be recognised as providing educational programs that set up the foundations for later learning. We should all be working together for the greater good of our children and their families.

There has been much debate about 'how do we fix the crisis in early childhood?' One fix was to employ kindergarten teachers in our industry. The kindergarten teacher will be employed to educate the children but we have been educating the children for a very long time and found this to be such a slap in the face. I support kindergarten teachers in our industry but not to fix the crisis. We have a situation at the moment in childcare settings where kindergarten teachers are working in our industry purely because they can't get a job in the school system. We need passionate kindergarten teachers that have sound early childhood backgrounds and can implement a kindergarten program and not try to implement prep or a primary school program. They also need to have solid knowledge to be able to implement the kindergarten curriculum guidelines so they truly understand early childhood education and care. Kindergarten teachers also need to be paid for their qualifications but due to working in early childhood settings they are not paid the same as a teacher in the school system. In order to keep our good kindergarten teachers this needs to be look at as well.

More staff training has been another suggestion for fixing the crisis in care. I can tell you from my years of experience - wage increases are what educators want and not more training/workshops. My staff attend regular workshops and training days and would benefit from staff wages that can help pay their bills and have some quality of life.



It is imperative that there is a review of staff wages and the government looks at ways to subsidise these increases. Families cannot afford to pay for these wage increases that are necessary to keep good staff in our industry. Staff are leaving the industry because of the low wages and recognition. If we were paid for the work that we do it would make a significant difference and stop passionate staff leaving our industry. It would give families more confidence as there would be less staff turnover and more continuity and consistent care.

I am concerned about the high level of staff turnover in our industry. I want to see Australia as a leader for early childhood education. Denmark, Finland and Sweden lead the way with their staff to child ratios and government assistance. One of my passions, which I explore further in my lectures at QUT, is “Establishing Attachment Relationships with Children and Families”. It is so disturbing to hear from my colleagues and families that staff are frequently leaving our industry on a weekly basis as they can’t pay their bills or are ‘burnt-out.’ John Bowlby, an early childhood theorist, has described “attachment theory as the dynamics of long-term relationships between humans”. Its most important tenet is that an infant needs to develop a relationship with at least one primary caregiver for social and emotional development to occur normally. Infants become attached to individuals, who are sensitive and responsive in social interactions with them, and who remain as consistent caregivers for some months during the period from about six months to two years of age; this is known as sensitive responsiveness. When the infant begins to crawl and walk they begin to use attachment figures (familiar people) as a secure base to explore from and return to. Caregivers’ responses lead to the development of patterns of attachment; these, in turn, lead to internal working models which will guide the individual’s perceptions, emotions, thoughts and expectations in later relationships.” How can we possibly be providing quality care when there is massive staff turnover in our industry? These impacts weigh heavily on the child, further pressure on the staff member who has to support the children and the new staff member in the room, families and the community.

How can our Early Childhood Education and Care Industry improve?

- Improvement means looking after the educators that implement these amazing programs for the children. Giving them the recognition and respect that they deserve by paying them wages that equates to this.
- A review of the Training organisations - ensuring that there is quality and substance to their studies because at the present moment staff are completing their courses with not a great deal of knowledge and understanding of our industry and more importantly child development.
- A review of the ratios particularly for the Nursery age group - it is not quality care to have eight babies cared and educated by 2 staff.
- Kindergarten teachers need to be paid the same as in the school system but centres can’t afford this. Why are they not subsidised like the teachers in the school system. They are registered with the Queensland Education Board.

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**Rebekah George, Director, Goodstart Early Learning Ormeau**

I started working in the early childhood, education and care industry ten years ago as an assistant in a room of 16 children. I had no qualifications, no experience but thought it would be a fun job to try. Ten years later, I have my Advanced Diploma in children's services, have been a director for six years and currently run a centre with 70 children daily and 14 educators.

I am very passionate about early childhood and the importance of this industry in the lives of not only my children but also every child that walks through the door. We are paving the way for these children to be our future leaders, and we don't take this job lightly.

It is no secret that the children of Australia are struggling in schools. We have children who are getting to grade seven who don't know how to read and write, but yet my one year old can count to 10 and my three year old can count to 20. This is not by accident. This is because of the experiences they are exposed to on a daily bases by my hard working educators.

Children are constantly learning. They are confident and capable of learning amazing things. If we miss the boat in the vital years of between 0- 5, we are creating an environment of children who will struggle through their schooling years because the foundation wasn't established in their early years.

Yet, my educators who are given this amazing opportunity to instil a love of learning in these children are paid minimum wage, some as low as \$16 an hour. They work hard to complete the necessary qualifications that provide them knowledge and confidence to be able to teach the children and they receive an extra \$1.00 an hour.

I believe that the early childhood, education and care industry is one of the most important industries in Australia as it is our children that will be our future. If we don't have the qualified educators, or financial backing from the Government our children will continue to struggle throughout their schooling life. It is also vital to have the National Quality Standards and the Early Years Learning Framework as a benchmark from which we teach.

The children are the most important people in their parents' lives. Parents are partnering with educators to raise and educate their children. If we don't place value in the importance of the educators roles in these children's lives we are essentially saying to parents that their children are not of any value or worth. Educators must be qualified and must be paid accordingly. If they aren't, the early childhood, education and care industry will sadly decline to the point where our children will be left in the care of workers without any passion or drive to see our children excel in their future.

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**Gloria Bainbrigg, Supervisor, Montessori Garden Early Learning and Childcare Centre**

I have worked in ECEC for over 22 years. I own my own centre. During this period I have worked in the rooms with the children and staff as well as in the office in the managing role. It is very stressful working in this sector, especially with all of the changes in recent years. I feel that I have less time for the children, this being sacrificed for paperwork. I entered the industry to work with and educate children, not to do reams of paperwork. If that was my goal I would have worked in an office job.

Quality is having qualified, experienced staff who interact with the children and families and ensure that the child develops to his/her full potential in a warm, caring and fun environment. Quality is also having the parents appreciate what the educators are doing with their children. Quality is also being able to individualise your centre and cater for alternative methods of education to suit the needs of the families and the abilities of the children attending.

I believe that if qualification requirements for educators are wound back that there will be a lowered level of quality education and care for children. The education of educators ensures that they have a background knowledge and understanding of children's development, interests and needs. Children's readiness and preparedness for school will be compromised if staff do not have qualifications.

Increase in staff child ratios will decrease the quality of education and care provided. This will allow the educators less time to program for individual children according to their needs and abilities. Increased ratios will also cause the educators to have an increased workload in reference to observations, portfolios, programming etc. This will in turn lead to higher stress levels for educators, and/or a decrease in quality education and care for each individual child.

At our centre we have had staff reduce the number of days they work due to increased requirements of NQF. Two staff have left the industry because of the onerous nature of the implementation of NQF.

Staff who have qualifications that are not mainstream are being required to gain more qualifications that overlap and are often inferior to their original qualifications. Alternative qualifications need to be given recognition and consideration for RPL.

In Queensland we cannot delay having qualified ECTs in services as the QLD government requires all children to have access to a Kindergarten program in the year before school. The delaying of having to have ECTs in centres will have no impact in QLD.

Alternative methods of education are not widely recognised or supported despite their being an increased demand. Our centre follows the Montessori method of education. We are the only centre within the area that does so, as such we have over a 2 year waiting list, despite other centres in our area not having a waiting list at all.

Many of the Certificate III and Diploma courses in early education and care have dropped their standards of education and this is detrimental to our quality of education and care. We have recently had a student complete her placement at our centre for a Certificate III. It was a three month course. Her trainer expected my assistant director to teach the student everything. The student attended classes only one day per week in that period. She was unable to follow hygiene requirements, change a nappy and interact in an appropriate manner with the children. The trainer instructed my assistant director that it didn't matter, to sign her off, she could learn everything when she got a job. My assistant director refused.

More support and funding needs to be supplied to services for children with developmental and learning delays. Qualified staff are needed for early intervention with these children so that they are able to receive appropriate levels of care and education before beginning school, which will give them the opportunity to begin mainstream school. ISS funding should be increased, made more accessible and require less red tape. Qualified staff do not wish to work for between \$16 and \$17 per hour. At this centre we pay the staff in line with their qualifications but ISS staff are paid far less. We pay the shortfall in hourly wages and we also pay for extra hours that the ISS child is in the centre. For some of our ISS children we paid for an extra educator in the room before funding was approved.

At this centre we are fortunate to have long term staff so we do not have to deal with a high level of staff turnover. Even if one staff member leaves here the parents question us extensively as to why the staff left. It does affect the families as well as the children.

If funding cuts are made to CCB and CCR this will increase financial pressure on families and the centre. Some families already struggle to pay fees in order to keep working. If the funding they receive is reduced I believe this will force some parents to stop working or reduce their hours. This will cause more financial strain on the families. If the funding is slashed will this force more families to use 'backyard care'.

I believe that nannies/relatives should not be subsidised by the government unless they meet the same qualification requirements and police checks that educators in centres are required to meet, this also includes asthma, anaphylaxis, first aid and professional development. They should also be expected to meet the same paperwork requirements. This would ensure that children being cared for by nannies are also being educated. What checks will be done to ensure the government is not subsidising someone to do housework?

Providing families with flexible care options is a very good idea. Unfortunately to execute this there are many factors to consider. Some of these factors are: security at night, costs of wages for people working nights and weekends, availability of transport for educators at unusual hours, availability of quality staff willing to work unusual hours.

Lower wages mean that ECEC is not seen by many as a viable career path. Young people feel that they will not be valued by society as a whole and will not be able to earn enough to sustain a family and mortgage. There is a limited career path unless employment is gained with a large organisation that has many centres. Higher wages will ensure more quality people will want to be in ECEC but the problem then is the increased fees that would have to be levied to cover this. Any funding downgrade therefore must be looked at as being detrimental to the quality of ECEC and of course would lead to increase of fees.

The CCR and CCB should always be paid to the centre. This would assist centres in alleviating some of the burden of families who do not pay fees. It is not fair that CCR is paid to families who have not paid their fees. Under the current system checks should be done with centres to ensure fees have actually been paid up to date before the parents receive their CCR. The government is currently losing money in cases where parents receive CCR but have not paid their fees.

We feel that an advisory council for the industry should be convened at a minimum of quarterly. Six monthly is not adequate to meet concerns of the industry. This industry advisory council should also consist of educators who still work in centres and with children on a day to day basis. Does the Minister have any background knowledge or experience in the ECEC sector to be able to understand the complexities and difficulties of the industry? Does the Minister have respect for the educators working in this sector?

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**Ciara Donnelly, Early Childhood Teacher, Tigger's Honeypot, University of New South Wales**

Thank you for the opportunity to make comment in relation to the Childcare and Early Childhood Learning Inquiry. I want to work in a sector that is able to provide every child in Australia access to affordable high quality early childhood education.

Early childhood education needs to be funded directly and I believe that Australia should pay for a world-class early education and care system that is capable of being admired and revered internationally.

I have witnessed highly qualified early childhood educators leave the sector due to poor pay and being unable to afford childcare fees for their own children. We must pay our educators and our teachers salaries that allow them to have their own children and remain in the early childhood work force. We want the importance of our role recognised.

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**Sharon Sharp, Group Leader, Goodstart Early Learning Pimpama**

Working in early childhood education and care is fun and nice to have a family feel where I can see children grow and develop like my own. I do think there is a lot of pressure put on educators making sure all individual needs, paperwork and centre requirements are in place. Quality to me as an educator is to make sure the children are cared and educated for in a safe and happy environment and that they feel loved, and go home with smiles and stories to tell. You can tell the quality of a place immediately, it is shown through your first impressions of the centre and staff. I think improvements are made by always working together in the care and education of the children.

Professional wages would help ensure quality by stopping high turnover of staff at the centre. It would motivate educators to work with all aspects of the role involved.

High staff turnover impacts children. The children are more unsettled on a regular basis. It makes parents uncomfortable and not sure if the centre is a good one.

The NQF plays a role on achieving quality by making sure all centres are to the same standard and offers families and children what they need. In my opinion there are many different formats of paperwork in centres. It would be nice if all centres use the same.

To improve the quality in the sector I think it's important to make sure that there are a number of staff to help with all areas of the centre. Being able to clean, play and have one on one with a child because you know someone else is there. Having more resources available and having uniformed paperwork would help with time.

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**Sylvia Micallef, Room Leader, Goodstart Early Learning Ashfield**

I agree that everybody should have the qualifications to work in this sector, yet the pay does not match our qualifications and we are not seen as professional educators, only as babysitters. We are passionate about our sector and would like to see the pay conditions change to be recognised as professional educators.

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**Denise Stone, Director, Goodstart Early Learning Chatswood**

Having been a member of the early childhood sector for over 18 years. I decided to join the industry after my children had started school and I have been on a learning journey ever since. I had no qualification in the beginning therefore had to start with Certificate III then Diploma followed by Advanced Diploma. I wanted to be a part of young children's education and work my way up to management eventually.

Since joining the industry I have worked in three different states and several cities



including Brisbane, Sydney, Dubbo, Mt Gambier and then back to Brisbane. I have experienced many different childcare frameworks in both private, council and not for profit Long Day Care and Occasional Care environments. There have been many changes and all have been towards a better outcome for children. With this in mind there are always areas for improvement when the focus is on early education and care of children.

All staff are child focused and as such take pride in performing their duties and providing a learning environment which is rich in educational experiences for all children. Supporting all families, building relationships within the community and across all cultural environments is a high priority. If we are to be acknowledged for our contribution to early childhood education and our study, the government needs to recognise our important contribution to children's education. At present the childcare sector is not recognised and treated equally with other industries and this is reflected in the low wages and high staff turnovers in our profession.

With the introduction of the Early Years Framework and the National Quality Framework the general public slowly understand that we are not just baby sitters but we are educators. These frameworks are producing a higher quality environment for all children attending and a better outcome for them. With their introduction the industry has become more accountable for the Education of children and they have been embracing the changes. We are now known as educators and are proud to be a large part of children's lives knowing that in the first five years we can have a profound influence on their lives. It has a positive outcome for children and families now that all educators are required to hold a qualification or required to be working towards qualification because educators can stand proud that they are

What I believe is the government should invest more in meeting the cost side for families so that each child no matter their circumstances can access childcare and providing affordable care for working families so out of pocket costs are reduced. Investing in our children's futures should never be compromised.

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**Louise Melvin, Group Leader, Goodstart Early Learning Helensvale**

I have been in the sector for 12 years. Working in ECEC is hectic, stressful, underpaid, fun and active all at once. Quality in ECEC is more support for children who need it, adequate resources and time to do the paperwork. Quality also means that we have competent casual staff. When we have to use relief staff because people drop out, it creates extra work and stress for current staff members and affects the children. I would like more time to get things done and to spend with the children. Professional wages would help to compensate for the money I spend on resources. Getting that pay would help compensate for the extra time I spend out side of work.

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**Denise Davies, Group Leader , Goodstart Early Learning Helensvale**

Working in early childhood education and care is a really rewarding job, it is wonderful to be able to watch children grow and encouraging them to expand on their skills.

Quality is me is good resources which educators can access to provide stimulating activities as well as child and parent input. Professional wages would play a role in ensuring quality and parent confidence as it would enable educators to stay in the childcare sector, staff with experience provide knowledge and stability. Staff turnover impacts children and families. There is loss of confidence from children and parents, disruption a dumpster when staff regularly leave.

The NQF plays a role in achieving quality. It is a good guideline, which we can follow to provide quality care and education. My experience of the paperwork that goes with it is that some of it is important to show parents their child's individual achievements and milestones. ECEC could be improved through good quality staff that are paid what they deserve. Educators do just as much as teachers but don't get the credit...after all we are nurturing and educating the next generation of doctors, nurses and even politicians!

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**Melissa Weare, Educator, Goodstart Early Learning Pimpana**

It is a wonderful experience working with children and being a part of their learning and development. To me, quality ECEC is being aware of the routine in rooms and having the resources to complete what needs to be done, such as cameras in rooms and adequate computer time (our regional policy requires that we do a daily story of what each child has done throughout the day that is emailed to parents. There is no time allocated for this so we complete these during our lunch breaks).

Professional wages would help make staff happier and less stressed about the time we put in that we receive no extra pay for. Staff turnover has an impact on children and families. Children become unsettled when there is a new educator, who is unaware of their routines and requests from families.

In my experience there is not enough time allocated to complete the "paperwork" electronically that is required under the NQF. ECEC could be improved by allowing time for us to complete the requirements, which are good for the children and families, instead of in our lunch breaks.

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**Lauren Stanyer, Educator, Goodstart Early Learning**

I started my career in the early childhood education sector in 2005. I was fresh out of high school and while I didn't yet hold any formal qualifications, I wanted to pursue a career working with children and making a difference in their lives through early education.

As an 18 year old first year assistant, I earned \$8 an hour and had to work a second job so that I could remain in the industry and pay for my studies which I commenced shortly after starting work.

I wanted to support the families of the children in my care, whilst providing a safe; nurturing and educational environment for the children. Sadly quality was not a focus for the industry as a whole, let alone my centre and with this came mountains of paperwork, no work-life balance and less time to spend with the children.

I remember many obstacles that I faced as an educator at this time but they all seemed to link back to the same underlying issue. This was the lack of care or consideration for the educators. An industry where the staff play such an important role, but were so grossly undervalued –an issue that is still present today.

These obstacles included unqualified educators with little or no experience; high staff turnover due to poor working conditions and little pay; high ratios, meaning less interactions with children - and sadly the most heartbreaking the fact that families did not see us for the important role models and educators that we were and still are. Without the respect and recognition from the families, it made our jobs increasingly hard.

Now over time we have worked hard to re-educate the families on our roles, and really show what we do and what our responsibilities are every day. Similarly there have been changes over time to reduce the ratios and improve working conditions in small ways but these changes are nothing without the professional wages that support and retain staff for long term careers in the industry.

The NQF has played a huge part in my role as an educator and has definitely made the educational program and workplace environment of a higher standard. With more time to interact and build relationships with the children and families, as well as a platform for making connections with our community and make resources of our fellow educators (i.e. health professionals, indigenous groups, leading members of the community). We now need long-term educators who can uphold these standards and help to create a better future for our industry.

I believe we need to strive for quality in the early childhood education sector and recognise the hardworking individuals for the jobs they do. They educate the future generations, and at the most crucial time no less. There are endless studies supporting the FACT that the first 6 years are the most important to a child's development and the early childhood educators play such a huge role in this. So don't offend us by calling us any less. We are NOT merely "carers". We are not glorified babysitters. We work hard and should be recognised for this.

Quality means happy families. This is achieved by staff consistency and this means families see their children thrive, by getting support from experienced educators. You can do this by paying professional wages, retaining staff long enough for them to get the experience and knowledge to support the families, and ensuring the consistency children need to thrive. Long-term staff means building relationships with families, knowing the needs of the children, and being able to provide high quality programs to ensure all children get access to an early education.

The children of today are Australia's future, and if we don't do the right things now, then who is going to pay the price of the repercussions years down the track? If qualification requirements are no longer, if ratios go back to the way they were (or worse, more children per educator), if centres are open longer and staff are expected to work more hours with more stress and less pay, what do you honestly think will happen?

Sure parents might be temporarily happy. Sure centres might be able to afford to reduce fees or cater for parents who need longer sessions of care. But I can guarantee this will be short lived when the families realise the negative effect high turnover of staff, the lack of qualified educators and the long days of care have on their children.

It will be a nightmare for anyone working in the sector let alone the children and families who attend the services. Children are people too. They deserve the respect and consideration for their best interests. Having ever changing "carers" with no education or experience will lead to poor quality in the industry, unhappy uneducated children and thus unhappy families. Having to be in a Long Day Care setting would undoubtable be exhausting and would undoubtable lead to negative outcomes for the child and subsequently their family - challenging behaviours and separation anxiety being two of the leading stresses the parenting has in regards to their children. We need to focus on retaining staff and supporting the high quality areas that the NQF addresses.

Value the backbone of this industry - the educators - for the outstanding and important job they do. Pay professional wages. Support quality outcomes for early childhood care and education. Invest more money in this highly important area.

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**Kelli Swanson, Director, Goodstart Early Learning Helensvale**

I have been a director for seven years and in the industry 20 years, having a four year break to have my children. Working in ECEC is enjoyable. It's a privilege to work with the future generations. I feel like an important part of the community that makes a difference. Being a part of the first five vital developmental years of a child's life is important to their future. More professional people who understand the significance of these years are needed within the industry. Quality ECEC to me is professional and knowledgeable educators offering a stimulating and well rounded educational program in a safe and healthy environment. To be professional means a deeper understanding and more in depth qualification requirements. A deeper theoretical understanding of the developmental milestones needs to be incorporated within studies. Strong mentors with solid theoretical knowledge and practical experience is also needed to guide educators entering and progressing through the industry.

Quality ECEC is also having an understanding of the family, society and community links. Being able to identify milestones and communicate confidently to parents is important, as is knowing the tools and services available to parents for support. For example, from a Parents Evaluation of Development Status (PEDS) we can identify a suspected developmental delay such as a speech problem, we can refer the parents to a suitable support service, then further work with the child, parent and service to meet their developmental milestones in preparation for school. Quality also means having the available time to spend with children e.g. a child with behavioural problems requires more one on one focused attention which is difficult with current ratios. Quality ECEC for children is more one on one and small groups that allows focused attention from the educators.

Increased qualification requirements and more in depth study requirements to reach certification would increase the quality of ECEC and outcomes for children, as would lower ratios to enable more quality relationships/interactions between educators and the children. Increasing the pay for educators will attract and retain higher quality people into the industry. Parents' confidence is higher when longer relationships are allowed to develop when their children are educated by knowledgeable and confident educators. Increased wages would reduce staff turnover and the negative effects it causes, such as: increased separation anxiety for the child, reduced parent confidence in the service, developmental delays brought on by lack of relationship with and knowledge of the individual child.

I am a big supporter of the NQF and the increased qualification and lower child to educator ratios it prescribes. These changes support quality in the sector. The framework is about "real life" and is as close to home as possible. It's about families and communities working together. The paperwork is more relevant than before and I believe the it's done for a reason and allows for flexibility.

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**Starr Strowger, Director, Mike Reynolds Early Childhood Centre**

This is submission on behalf of the whole centre. Our centre has a team of dedicated educators, a number who have worked in the industry for over two decades. During this time our staff have seen and been a part of positive change within the sector. There has been a greater importance placed on staffing qualifications, which we believe is a crucial part of providing high quality care to young children. We also believe it is essential to keep qualifications as part of staffing employment criteria. Our staff are all either qualified for the position they hold or over qualified and therefore adjusted to the National Quality Framework with minor disruption.

As we are a community based centre we find we have a low staff turnover as our staff are permanent employees and are not sent home when the numbers of children are low. This along with our staff's qualifications creates stability and gives our parents confidence leaving their children in our care. We are concerned that should the qualification standards be lowered in order to keep wages (and therefore child care fees) down, all that we have worked for will be undermined. What does this imply to the importance placed on our children's care and development in their first 5 years, which has been documented to have a huge impact on their future?

Our staff are proud of the work we do, we have all studied while working and have all embraced the changes required by the NQF. We are dedicated about the standard of care we provide and all feel that we deserve to be paid at the same level as other workers who need a Certificate or Diploma to do their job. We are comfortable that the current level of care we provide in this centre is high quality. Our programs are educational, fun and play based. Our children are happy to be here and our parents are happy with the care we provide. We have very few complaints from parents and those few are usually minor. This is evident whenever we issue a survey asking for improvements as we only receive about 10% back. We have an extensive waiting list with 44 babies wanting care this year alone (and little chance of any but a few of them getting care here). More than a quarter of those parents are keen for care here due to our reputation.

We as a staff feel it is imperative to keep the quality of care in Australian centres high. We have worked with the current child-staff ratio's and feel they are fine for this centre. We have all worked hard to gain our qualifications; we have embraced the NQF and other changes. We believe centres and Family Day Care schemes need staff who are well qualified and paid well. We believe this will provide a stable workforce and ensure high quality care is provided in centres throughout the country. Our children deserve this.



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**Patricia Mary Murphy, Educator, C&K Newmarket Community Child Care**

In 1975 I completed my then called (childcare training kinder craft). I, along with my group that completed our training that year, were told "At the moment childcare workers are not paid well and in the near future will be a respected and well paid industry." I'm still waiting.

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**Tim Horozakis, Educator, Goodstart Early Learning**

Working in childcare is hard and stressful and the complexity of the job is not reflected in our pay. We work hard and don't get paid enough. I get paid \$20 an hour as an assistant. With wages so low, it's no wonder educators leave the industry. Staff turnover can be an issue for families and their children. Just as soon as a child settles in with their primary caregiver, that caregiver decides to leave the sector, as their wage is too low to support their family. This affects the child's development, as continuity of care is central to learning. The NQF has been put there to help achieve better quality in the care and education of the early childhood sector. There is lots of paperwork to go with the NQF but it's worthwhile; I just want to see a match in my pay with the amount of serious work I do. Overall we need to be recognised as teachers and the first step for this to occur would be to have professional wages.

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**Kymerly Jarvis-James, Director, Goodstart Early Learning Browns Plains**

I have worked in the early childhood education and care sector for 15 years. I have always been passionate about children since I was 12. I used to look after my baby cousins and would be very excited when I was able to spend time with them. I knew from a young age that I was bound to work with children.

I finished year 12 and went straight into a traineeship the following week. I was so excited. Little did I know what I was in for. I was an unqualified assistant working in the nursery by myself with no qualification. I worked for a private centre and was treated like a slave. Luckily for them I had a passion for children and had lot of experience in my teenage years babysitting. Unlucky for me, I lasted three months before I was turned off by the centre and left the childcare sector. I went to work at KFC for a few years. The pay was better.

It wasn't till I had a baby when I was 19 and was offered an assistant job from a friend who managed an early childhood centre that I returned to the sector. I was excited as I could take my baby to work with me. I was back working for a high quality centre this time, doing what I loved. The best bit was still being able to be with my baby. I studied part time and paid for all of my studies. I completed

my Certificate III, Diploma and Advanced Diploma all whilst working full time. I worked my way up in the childcare sector from assistant, group leader, assistant director and I'm now in my seventh year as a director.

As a centre director, I can't tell you how many passionate, dedicated high quality staff who have left the industry to find a job that pays better wages. It's sad to see. I currently have an employee now that is paid more working behind the bar pouring drinks than she does educating young children. It's hard for her as she has to work two jobs to survive. I'm always lost as to how we struggle to look after the people whom are looking after the little people of our future. Why does our government not recognise the hard work we do?

Quality early education for me is when we have staff members who are happy to work in the childcare sector and passionate about working with our children. Unfortunately I'm losing employees to better paying jobs. When an employee leaves, my families are upset as are the children. Our children become attached to their educators. With high staff turnover children become unsettled and so too does our whole centre.

Separation anxiety occurs enough in our centre when parents and children are leaving each other each morning. It's even worse when we don't have continuity of care. How can we provide high quality care when our staff members are constantly leaving?

I believe if we value our educators and recognise them by paying the professional wages they deserve they would stay in the childcare sector. Our families would be more confident and our children wouldn't have to experience so much separation anxiety. Our little people would be feeling safe and secure in the environment. When our little people feel safe and secure they are free to learn and develop. The first five years of a child's life a critical for development. The experience children have in these years help from the adults they will become. A warm and loving relationship with families/educators is the most important experience for our children, shaping the way our children learn.

Please start to recognise our educators and pay the wages they deserve so they can continue to work in the Childcare sector.

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**Samantha McAllister, Early Childhood Teacher and Acting Director, Goodstart Hassall Grove**

I have a long list of qualifications, adding up to nearly \$20 000 worth of education specific to early childhood education and care. My wage does not reflect this commitment to ensuring I am in the best position to provide quality experiences for children and their families during some of the most important years of their lives. This problem of low wages is why it was difficult to attract a quality early childhood teacher to our centre when we needed one. Early childhood teachers are attracted more to teaching in primary school due to the significant difference in wages. If we do not attract quality educators, we are not able to ensure we are providing quality for children. We were fortunate to finally attract a quality early childhood teacher who recognised the importance of the early years for children to join our team. The result of quality educators can be seen when children transition to school and are comfortable and confident in their learning. Families return to thank us for the hard work we did for them and their child. They often share their child's successes with us and recognise that we played an important role in building the foundation for their child's achievements.

Our team recognises that quality needs to be ensured and worked on everyday. We actively reflect upon our practice in relation to the NQF and we use it as a tool to strive for continual learning and development to ensure that we are providing quality experiences for children and their families. We have found, if we are reflective and smart about how we work within the NQF, the paperwork is not too excessive. Setting professional goals allows us to not only strengthen QA7 but also build our competence within other quality areas of the NQF. I have seen the benefits of educators being responsible for their own practices and that of others: we make quality and quality improvement a part of our culture in the workplace.

Quality ECEC is linked to attracting quality educators who understand and appreciate the benefits of providing quality education and care for children under five years old. Many educators have qualifications over a Certificate III and wages need to reflect this in order to keep educators in ECEC. ECEC needs to be competitive to 'get into' because children are disadvantaged when just 'anyone' can get a job because not just 'anyone' is able to provide quality for children underpinned by extensive research in the field of early childhood development and education. Everything we do (including everything we don't do) has an impact on both a child's and family's future outcomes. I see this and I hear this from families, especially those with a low-income. These are the ones that need quality educators and quality ECEC to help them overcome disadvantage. ECEC should not only be attracting quality educators through professional wages, it needs to be affordable for families. ECEC has life long influences on children and their families and quality should not be a luxury; it should be a standard in the lives of Australian families. Government funding professional wages for ECEC educators should be seen as an investment into the future and be considered an essential service just like a doctor, primary/secondary school teacher and even a politician.

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**Sharron Hillman, Educator, Banora Point Early Learning Centre**

I get paid \$19.22 per hour. Despite working for three years in this sector, I have seen this wage decrease which does not help me manage my living expenses. While ratios are a good idea, they are hard to meet in my centre because we cannot attract enough staff to work here. This means no one can be sick and if this happens then you have to remain at the centre on duty until a replacement is found and available. Meanwhile the person who is unwell has to remain alert to the needs of children while also being concerned that their illness is not affecting them.

I cannot understand why my wage decreased and my director simply states this is the award. We have had numerous staff leave the centre in the last few months causing upset to families, children and staff.

My hours are varied, some weeks receiving full time work and other weeks I'm lucky to get nine hours a week. I'm getting to a point where this type of work is not conducive to my life style as my rent and other bills remain the same and I have to pay them on whatever pay I receive.

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**Venetia Redman, Educator, Eagleby Children's Centre**

I have worked in Early Childhood Education and Care for the past six years.

In these years I have come to know the families and the programming that helps teach and guide the children to help them be more prepared for going to prep and school. We as educators endure a lot more than what a schoolteacher would have to put up with. We also help parents with any learning curves that may develop along the way and guide them to getting the correct procedures that their children may need.

It has come to my attention that the LNP policy sees that child early childhood educators are just babysitters. I can tell you now being a parent myself there is no way I would pay \$66 a day or more for some one to just watch my child play. I as a parent pay the child care centre to educate my child in his life milestones which include his social, emotional, cognitive, fine and gross motor skills which help prepare my child for school.

We work just as hard as any schoolteacher, if not harder, as we get the children from six weeks to 12 years old. By the time these children make it to school they already know their colours, counting, alphabet and can write their own names.

We need a fair wage as much as any worker does. Don't take away the progress we have made in this profession: ratios, qualifications need to be kept and respected.

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**Amy Brady, Educator, Chinese Australian Early Childhood Centre**

I feel that my position as a diploma qualified early childhood educator is one of (if not the most) important jobs in our society. Our important role provides children and families the opportunity to master a variety of skills before the venture into formal schooling. Children who attend early education are more confident and able to better integrate into formal school life. We provide that important first step towards children becoming valued members of their future communities as well as valuing and supporting them as they take their initial steps away from their families in the world around them.

The studies that I undertook provided me with a basic understanding of what a role as an educator entails. However, I found that many areas of this study did not adequately transfer into my daily role. I also find that when I am assisting newer educators into this important field that the people who teach the course (while often educators at some point in their careers) do not have a full comprehension of what the role entails today. I feel many of them could benefit from returning to a current role to better enable them to provide relevant course information.

The pay that I receive for the valuable position I hold does not adequately reflect the value of my role. Each week I document the learning of up to 50 children. I am also on the floor with these children actively engaging with them in their learning journeys. On top of this I also need to find the time to maintain routines such as toileting, meals, and rest periods and ensure that the room is cleaned up after experiences, meals, etc. Currently I receive 10 hours non contact time (shared with another educator) each week to document the learning of the children, plan the extensions of these learning experiences, evaluate all the learning journeys and programs that I have presented to the children and reflect on everything that I do each day. When you look at the number of children that are in the room alone each week you can see that when an educator is provided with this non-contact time it is often not a long enough period of time to complete all relevant paperwork and documentation, especially since the introduction of the NQF. I feel that this has been a welcome addition to ensuring quality; however, it has at least doubled the amount of paperwork that I am required to complete. I find that I am often required to complete documentation when I am at home. I receive no income for this extra time spent outside of my normal hours in the centre but I find that if I do not dedicate myself to this the learning of the children is not adequately reflected in their documentation. My partner is a truck driver and he receives a higher pay than my own just to drive around our local community and deliver stock. How can it be that a person who has had to undertake no extra study to complete their job and has little contact with other people in their daily role can be paid a higher wage than someone who has undertaken 4 years of further study and is required to undertake a university course to further their education to climb within their chosen career path and improve their own future? I understand the importance of requiring ECE's to study and achieve qualifications in this all important field to ensure quality of the program and education that we provide, however I still find that when their courses are completed the wage does not adequately reflect this dedication to their extremely important position

within our society. Early Childhood Education and Care should be adequately acknowledged for the important contribution that we make to improve our society for these very important young people each and every day. Many of us give up our own time to ensure that the quality of the education we offer to these young minds. Why is my role not seen as being important enough that my wage can support me to live and not just survive?

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**Kirstie Fildes, Group Leader, Goodstart Redbank Plains North**

I want to take the opportunity to convey to you my experiences of early childhood. I have worked in the industry for approximately fourteen years and I will tell you that working this long in the sector is a very rare thing indeed. Over the years it has been with much sadness that I have seen many of my colleagues walk away from the sector to go and pack shelves because it pays more wages, I have seen colleagues burn out due to working more than one and in some case more than two jobs and I have seen successive Governments highlight the crisis in childcare and then do nothing to address the problem.

Working in childcare is an honour. We are in care of the nation's greatest potential treasures. Each day has its challenges and its rewards. It has evolved and changed from untrained women to the highly skilled professionals that we see in centres today. As trained professionals we need to be respected and although we have acceptance and respect from the community in which we work it is disheartening to see the disrespect and disregard that the Federal Government has shown us over the wage dispute. With the introduction of the new curriculum our workload doubled and many of my colleagues find themselves taking work home to complete, taking away precious time from their own families not mention the unpaid hours of work that is expected to be completed or we are fined for not meeting components of the new curriculum. In some centres staff are even purchasing resources out of their own inadequate wages in an effort to meet these requirements. All these things are expected of us as early childhood educators and yet we are not financially compensated for the amount of time and work we are expected to put in each and every day.

The new curriculum despite the extra workload is a positive thing for Australian children. It ensures care of the highest quality. It gives children a voice in how and what they want to learn. A quality centre is a centre that has professionally trained staff, has good resources and above all has happy and engaged children. So how do we achieve this? The Abbott government must keep the basic qualifications for early childhood educators in place, it must make funding for resources for all services mandatory and above all it needs to honour wage increases scheduled under the Gillard/Rudd Government and as sign of good faith extend these to all educators in the field not just some, not just Union centres, not just the large



organisations like Goodstart but to every educator in Australia.

Professional wages would ensure the retention of great staff and keep them engaged in the industry. At present approximately 150 early childhood professionals a week are leaving through burn out or no longer being able to financially support themselves in a profession that they are dedicated too but undervalued in. Professional wages also ensure that a new generation of early childhood professionals will be drawn to engage in the industry. School leavers may choose to train in other industries that are financially more rewarding as they look to have a better quality of lifestyle as they mature. At present I would share with the Commission that on more than one occasion I have had parents at my children's school approach me knowing that I am an early childhood educator and asking me talk their daughter out of studying childcare. That is not right on any level. Can you imagine being approached and asking you to talk their child out of being on the Commission, out of business, out of law, out of politics? The staff turnover negatively impacts on children and families as it is emotionally distressing on children and this leads on to a drop of productivity in the workplace as a worried parent is not going to be as productive as other workers.

While I acknowledge that the NQF is a positive influence on the industry, bringing new levels of qualifications and new ways of thinking, there are elements of the paperwork that are to be quite frank unrealistic in an early childhood setting. While I acknowledge the fact that I need to keep documentation on children's development I resent the fact as an educator that I am asked to keep a Critical Reflective Journal. This Journal is intrusive, time consuming and gives one a feeling of trying to catch the educator "out" as it were. They have little to do with how the children are interacting in the room and serve as a critique of the educator rather that anything positive I doubt I would be the only educator that feels this way. Given the small amount of time we are given to get the paperwork completed (usually during sleep time after we have cleaned and providing none of the children of woken up) it often gets overlooked, a scant two or three lines written in it or the educator takes more work home to complete.

In conclusion I believe that the early childhood education sector can be improved: professional wages must be paid to all educators now - not in three months, next year, in instalments (if you want the best outcomes for our children you need good wages to retain and attract the best educators in the field), an introduction of a monthly RDO would help combat the burnout element in the sector, the inclusion of paid overtime would also help retain staff, the amount of paperwork expected needs to be reviewed and finally the Abbott Government and private stakeholders need to stop seeing the sector as inferior, unprofessional and unworthy of support. They need to stop thinking that we are bunch of uneducated women who need to shut up and do it for the "love of the children" and give us the respect we are due. Take a moment to think about what would happen if levels of staff fell to such a dramatic level that many centres had to close making it even harder for children and families to find quality child care.

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**Angela Turner, Group Leader, Goodstart Redbank Plains North**

I am 31 years old and I have worked with children since I was 21 years old. I started working with children in special needs as a teacher aid and ventured into childcare when I was 23 years old. I have never looked back and have thoroughly loved my career choice and love working with young children. I feel as I have gained my Certificate III in Children Services and moving onto Diploma in Children Services. Starting as assistant, group leader float and moving upwards to group leader. I feel by being qualified makes me more respectable in the professional world and often believe I am a teacher just not paid teacher wages. That needs to change.

As an educator, I am a multi tasker, I am a teacher, organiser, counsellor, second mother, nurturer and cleaner. I listen to parents when they ask for my help and also spend time researching anything for the parents when asking for help either behaviour or toilet training issues. It is a thoroughly enjoyable career and job. The best feeling you get is walking into a centre and all the children run up to you and give you a hug and you know you have made their day. Don't get me wrong it is a hard job not for all people you need patience with the children and parents, you need to be flexible and problem solve for any issues or change of routine could occur and toilet training can be very messy. You have to clean up poo, wee and vomit every day and look after children when they have separation anxiety, emotional issues if families are going through a parent breakup or behavioural issues every day. It is a tough job and we really do not get recognised for the multi tasking we do everyday. On top of all that we also program for the children often managing our program in our lunch breaks as rest time is spent cleaning the room or supervision or settling the children down if they aren't sleeping well. We also have to check that our program reflects on what the children are learning and how we are encouraging their individual developments. All of this is time managed every day and not a minute is spare to sit down and relax, if lucky maybe half our lunch break is spent relaxing before going back into work mode.

Higher wages and professional wages will give us more respect in the community and parents respect. Most people who do not understand what goes into childcare and being an educator think 'childcare is baby sitting'. I have two diplomas (in Children Services and Community Work and Certificate III in Children Services) I also have over nine years of experience in childcare and I only get paid \$23 an hour. We need to keep people like me in the industry but to do that we need to be paid what we are worth, at least in the high \$27- \$30 mark. It can be very hard for the children if a staff member leaves whom they have bonded with, as it will cause the child to fear abandonment and separation anxiety and trust issues. A good centre will try to keep the good staff and it is hard to keep good staff when we get paid so low for what we do. It is a high turnover industry due to the workload and physical and emotional draining job it can be. We need to encourage staff to stay in childcare instead of moving onto other careers.

I believe NQF plays one of the most important parts in child care as it helps us to keep a high standard of care for the children and helps our career to stand up as

a career instead of just babysitting. I am proud of the NQF standards and I believe it helps centres to achieve high care for the children and gives us as workers the pride and respect we value and need in our job.

Without childcare how would our children have a future? Australia needs stronger education for children and that starts with childcare. Mothers and fathers cannot work if we do not open and it will come to a stage where enough is enough and great staff will leave and the future of our children's education will be affected. We need to avoid this by better wages, more recognition for our career and job and more support from the community and politicians.

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**Trudy Elkin, Educator, Goodstart Early Learning Fairfield Heights**

Working in early childhood education is many things: rewarding, fulfilling, exhausting and challenging. We can often be heard saying there are simply not enough hours in the day to achieve all that needs to be done, particularly in a busy centre like ours. I have personally worked in the sector for more than 20 years. Most of us work in early education because we are dedicated to making a difference, but it is a well-known fact that being undervalued financially for such expertise.

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**Debbie Lucas, Team Leader, North Buderim Early Childhood Centre**

I came over from England in 2005 where I worked as a Family Day Carer, but once here and looking around I decided to work in the Long Day Care sector, as I felt there was a lot of quality and dedication given to the children and their families. After eight years in the same centre I still feel the same but certain areas have changed and it is becoming more of an education facility than a care centre, which is wonderful but at the same time we are not always recognised for the work we do, either in terms of the respect we garner or our levels of pay.

I'm diploma qualified and would love to be able to go on to do more qualifications, but time and money will not allow for this right now. I have been lucky to work in a centre where most of our staff love doing their job, have great rapport with the families and our community, but the turnover of our casual staff is a worry sometimes, as they are younger and don't have a partner to help support them or are single mums where they love the job but have to go to a better paid job. This also affects the children as they know the staff and want to know why they aren't here any more. We need people to recognise the hard work and dedication shown from workers in this industry and pay us accordingly.

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**Kym Cook, Director, Swallow Street Child Care Association**

Our centre has been providing the community with quality child care and education for nearly 40 years. The centre is situated in a low socio economic area, with over 80% of families from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background. The street on which the centre is located was once identified as the poorest urban street in Queensland. Many of the children have speech and language delays, a significant number have disabilities, and many are under child safety. Several staff members at Swallow Street have been here for many years. We strive to provide children with a safe, supportive and caring environment. We believe children deserve quality education and care and that this is best achieved by qualified and skilled educators and parents sharing this responsibility, sharing their relevant skills and information.

As the director at Swallow Street for the past ten years, with over 15 years experience in the sector, I have worked in child safety in both Australia and overseas, and have a Degree in Education and Social Work and a Diploma in Early Childhood. Reflecting on the changes in the sector over this period, I believe the National Quality Framework (NQF) and National Quality Standards (NQS) most importantly increased qualification requirements, and have, and will continue to make the most significant and positive changes for the outcomes of children, their families, and the broader community. In my experience, parents are looking to ECEC providers for more than just a baby-sitting service. They are looking for quality care for their children, as well as increased educational outcomes for children.

Quality ECEC requires a number of elements, including teamwork; qualified staff; continuity of staff; low child-to-educator ratios; and most importantly, developing strong relationships between staff, children, families and the community. Lower ratios have a lot to do with quality outcomes for children. For example, there was a time when the ratios in the babies' room was five children to one educator. Would you look after five babies at home? There's no time for quality interaction. How about safety?

Professional wages for educators would have a significant effect on the quality of ECEC experiences and outcomes for children in the sector. They would go a long way towards retaining the skilled and experienced educators and Early Childhood Teachers (ECTs) that keep leaving for higher paid jobs in supermarkets, factories and schools. This can be seen most significantly when looking at the turnover ECTs at the centre. Within an 18 month period, 7 ECTs were employed, and subsequently left the centre, mainly as a result of the low wages. The effect of high turnover of staff on the children, families, and staff was concerning. The children felt sad, rejected and abandoned, often asking "don't they like us? Why did they leave? Are they coming back? Did I do something wrong?"

High staff turnover is a well know problem in the industry that has far reaching consequences. Continuity of care is so important to provide quality education and care for kids. When staff members continually leave, children can't prepare for the separation and are not able to adjust. Children, and especially those with

disabilities and extra needs, need to form bonds to develop trust, something not possible when staff turnover is high. High staff turnover also negatively impacts relationships with parents and team dynamics. In the situation when the ECTs were continually leaving, there was often hostility and a reluctance to bond and develop relationships with “new-starters” because they were gone so quickly and often. This can also be said for the effect on parents. If parents haven’t developed a bond with an educator, they don’t trust that person to educate and care for their child. They refrain from confiding about home circumstances and don’t express their concerns in relation to their child. This means that the educators and parents are unable to exchange information and work well together in the best interests of the child. This especially applies to families from different cultural backgrounds, non-English speaking, those experiencing domestic violence, separation, custody issues, child safety issues, alcohol and drug abuse, mental illness.

The NQF has played a significant role towards achieving quality in the industry, providing a common standard for ECEC nationwide, with an accreditation process that allows enough flexibility to cater for different learning styles and philosophies among centres. It’s an excellent guideline for practise that contributes to further professionalising the industry and providing a system of accountability through accreditation. Primary, secondary and higher-education facilities all have curricula, it makes sense that the all-important first five years have standards and a curriculum too. While the framework requires more paperwork than previously, it can be managed by putting effective systems in place. We have found the NQF to be a user-friendly, adaptable and effective framework. Further changes are unnecessary and would only create anxiety and fear through the change process.

Moving forward, maintaining play-based learning in ECEC is important for the educational outcomes of children in the future. The academic expectations placed on children are continuously being increased at a young age, and with this is a perception that this is achieved through rote-learning. Play based learning helps children develop a wide range of social and cognitive skills; needs which will help them in the future. ECEC could be improved dramatically through better early intervention, such as: quicker assessment, diagnosis and therapy for children with disabilities; increased and longer-term support for children and families effected by domestic violence, separation of parents, custody, mental illness, drugs and alcohol abuse, homelessness; and more support for CALD families. This requires a major increase in human resources in the local community rather than the current support workers who are understaffed and overworked. Early intervention needs to take place before Child Safety is involved with the family to enable these vulnerable children to grow, learn, and reach their full potential. For the optimal learning outcomes for young children in their first five years, the builders, owners and managers of ECEC centres need to have a background in ECEC.

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**Marti Lancaster, Educator, Helensburgh Community Preschool**

Our sector is suffering. Low wages mean we cannot keep educators, a trainee earns \$11 an hour and a Certificate III qualified will only earn a few dollars more. Often, we earn less than a cashier at a supermarket yet our daily duties requiring training and expertise. We undertake roles in a variety of areas, such as first aid, catering to additional needs children, reading and following reports from specialists, writing and delivering educational programs, counselling and supporting families through difficult situations.

The increase in expectations within the early education sector is not reflected in our pay. Parents are unaware of our pay rates, they believe that that pay huge amounts in fees (therefore it is all wages) and are shocked when they hear how much we earn.

The NQF is wonderful and aimed at providing quality services and ratios. Commercial centres are crying time poor, complaining about paperwork. But it's really just about profits for them. Anything that requires them to meet a high standard will cut into their profits. Profits cannot come before quality care. Many not-for-profit services introduced the new ratios over 12 months ago and have no issue putting quality for children first. Part funding by the government for educators wages is required for early childhood educators to receive an adequate wage, for us to be able to keep motivated staff, for families not to suffer higher care prices.

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**Samantha Bowman, Educator, Kindergarten Union Tree House Sydney**

I have been part of this profession for the last 12 years and it has not been easy.

I am paid for eight hours a day but do close to 10 to 11 hours outside of work to prepare educational activities, finish my documentation and attend training at my own expense so that I can keep up to date with new learning.

I'm thankful that the early learning framework has come into place, yes there has been an increase in the kind of work we have to do that needs to be better reflected in our pay. The NQF has been great, however, in terms of mandating ratios and the credit we are getting as a professional. It has shown the centres that are lacking.

We as professionals are happy to continue training, but just ask for a professional wage to keep the quality teachers in this profession. I have lost countless colleagues who the children adore leave because they couldn't afford to live on the wages. I have had to move back into the family home and unfortunately see owning my own home as a distant dream. Please make this a profession that people want to stay in because they are able to support their family. Keep it a profession that I am passionate about.



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**Katrina Rhodes, Educator, Goodstart Early Learning Corowa**

Early education is a highly stressful sector with low remuneration in wages for staff. For quality to be achieved in the sector I feel that there are still many changes to be made not only with wages but ratios of carer to children, more programming time for staff. Staff members burn out and become uninterested in their work when they need to continually take it home. We are educating the next generation of Australians lets make it count, for the sake of the children and the country.

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**Sally Whitaker, Director, Willetton Child Care Centre**

I run a highly used ECEC service in the southern suburbs of Perth. I have been there for three years. I have worked in this sector for about 20 years. I have run rooms, run centres, delivered training and worked in Out of School Hours Care too. I also have worked interstate. We have low staff turnover and the educators have excellent working conditions. Yet, it is still a struggle to make ends meet. The wages in our sector have not caught up with the high cost of living in Perth and I am thinking of taking a second job to assist me in paying my bills. We work hard to deliver high quality curriculums to our families and have more qualified staff than we need. This is because we have a commitment to our children and families. We put up our fees for parents to cover the increased cost of having an early childhood teacher and lunch cover. We haven't found a teacher yet but our lunch cover positions have been filled and it is helping the staff immensely.

My job as centre director is diverse to say the least. Last week I was digging in the garden to try and find the water tap to turn off the water as we had a broken tap. Then I was responsible for coming in on the weekend for the quarterly pest control check. I am on call on for the alarm system. None of these things are in my job description yet I do them for no extra pay. Until the issue of professional wages is addressed, this sector will struggle to attract and retain quality educators.

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**Salina Mclvor, Goodstart Early Learning Kellyville**

My current employer has employed me for ten years, having been in the sector for 16. Many times in this period I have come close to leaving the sector because of poor wages. The reason I have stayed is because the care and education of young children is paramount to me. I have witnessed many educators leave because they just can't make ends meet on this wage. I believe the National Quality Framework has made a great impact on the operations of services and care for our children and families. I believe to improve ECEC we need to receive professional wages to keep the dedicated educators we have. Provide diploma qualified educators with support to study a bachelor's degree while working so that services can have enough early childhood teachers employed. We are scaffolding the lives of young children and we should be recognised for the important work we are doing.

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**Ruth Woollett, Director, Bumper Bears Early Learning Centre**

I am currently a director of a very successful centre in Kippa-Ring. I have both a Bachelor of Teaching degree and an Associate Diploma in childcare. I started in this industry in 1994, and at the time, was earning around \$11 per hour to be responsible for a group of ten toddlers. I was not a parent myself at this stage, so was thrown in the deep end, from nappy changing, to being able to predict if children were being neglected or abused, to counting heads all day to make sure I had all ten children at all times. I administered first aid, I negotiated with parents who were experiencing guilt because they had to go back to work and I was cleaning non-stop.

From then to now, I have pretty much done every job in a childcare centre that you could imagine, from maintenance person, to cleaner, administration assistant, software developer, staff counsellor, trainer, mentor, friend, negotiator, and so much more. We often have unsettled children who cry for hours on end, we have angry parents who take it out on us because we are the first person they see. I have worked 6am - 6.30pm (usually arriving half an hour prior to my shift for no pay), I have attended staff meetings in my own time for no pay. I now train and mentor staff as a major part of my role, and these staff need support, not only professionally, but also personally. We have been lucky enough to maintain a consistent staff team who, although are committed to the job, have indicated that if things with wages don't improve, they will have no choice but to leave childcare altogether. This would be sad shame for our centre, but also for the industry as a whole, as we will lose staff members who have not only life skills, but also professional standards. Please consider our case and improve the wages for the whole childcare sector: we are shaping the future of this nation one child at a time.

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**Alice Voigt, Owner, Moore Park Gardens Preschool and Long Day Care Centre**

As an owner of a centre, I have seen and experienced high staff turnover due to low wages first hand. It has such a detrimental impact on my business. It is impossible to implement quality programs without the security and continuity of staff members. Over the past few years, we have spent thousands of dollars on training staff only to lose them to other sectors after a few months. The low wages not only affect the children's experience of their early education but also the business of a centre. There is no quality without quality staff. There is no staff without quality wages!

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**Nora Miller, Administrative staff member, Playhouse Parent and Childcare Centre**

I have worked in the childcare industry for past 20 years, having been an educator for a number years working and with a variety of age groups from babies to preschool. I am currently in administration. I know our educators work very hard for a very low wage. It is sad to see many struggle and live week to week. If it weren't for my spouse's wages I would never be able to survive alone on mine. How others do it, I have no idea.

Our educators and teachers here at Playhouse Childcare Centre do a great job in supporting families of students and university staff. They are more than mere teachers, they're nurses, counsellors, cleaners and advisers. The support they give our families is immeasurable. We are not for profit centre struggling to make ends meet, so cannot pay our teachers more and there's a limit to how much more parents can pay towards their children's fees.

Our country's future and wellbeing depends on the young people being properly educated and we need properly paid educators to do this.

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**Karen Moran, Director, Goodstart Early Learning Caloundra**

This is a submission on behalf of all educators from Goodstart Caloundra.

Our service has collectively almost 100 years experience in the early childhood sector and our team ranges from Bachelor qualified teachers to Certificate III qualified educators. Working in the early education and care sector is rewarding but tiring. The workload is overwhelming at times and we have staff on just over \$19/hour who can barely pay rent most weeks. I currently have a staff member who is a single parent, she is approximately \$40 a week better off working full time than she would be if she were on Centrelink benefits and staying at home. It has to be worth coming to work and for that kind of money I'm not sure it is. It takes dedication and passion to stay in the industry but sadly a lot of the educators who are passionate and dedicated have been forced into other industries because of the low wages.

It is essential to us that we have quality staff which means caring, compassionate, welcoming and warm staff members who take the time to form bonds with families and children and who become a part of the child's extended family. To achieve quality we need to reward hard work and offer incentives for the right type of people to work in the industry. Staff members suffer from exhaustion and leave due to the highly demanding and exhausting nature of the industry. The workload has to match the pay and this is currently not the case. Children deserve to have well educated and highly qualified educators/teachers in the service, but this is hard to find. The National Quality Framework has done a lot to boost the level of respect staff feel and how they see themselves and their role in the child's life. It has lifted the professionalism in the industry and put the focus on quality.

We fully support the National Quality reforms and the changes it has brought to the industry.

Professional wages would change the industry because we would have the right/qualified people applying for positions. The workload, hours and expectations far outweigh that of a teacher in a formal school setting but the wages come nowhere near that of a teacher. If you want quality in the sector you have to pay for it, just like any other industry. We are currently recruiting for a group leader and have been using casual relief staff for over a month due to not finding the right person for the job. It is important that staff now have qualifications, experience, certified supervisors certificates, references etc.

For us, the introduction of the NQF hasn't increased our paperwork. We have just become more creative in the ways we document. The advancements in technology have made it easier for us to document things as it's happening. It's important to show parents the achievements of their child for that day, not in a week's time or when you get around to it. It took us a while to find our feet with the paperwork but we are happy with where we are at, it's about working smarter not harder.

The early education and care sector could be improved by professionalising the industry a little more. We are not babysitters, we are educators and maybe the politicians that make decisions for our sector should come and spend a day with us and really see what we do. We are paid inadequate wages for a job that most parents say they wouldn't do if we paid them double.

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**Brian Pearce, Program Manager , Garran School Age Care Centre**

I have worked in the school age care sector of childcare for almost 25 years, working as both a centre manager and a program director, responsible for several school age centres. Over the two decades working with the people that we all regard as our most precious and valuable, commodities, I feel as a sector we have lost our way. When it comes to wages, my son as a first year teacher in a school earns more per hour than I do. We do very similar work but he is university trained compared to me only having a diploma from CIT.

We are continually told how valuable we are to the community, how we need to employ and train staff to a higher level, however retaining and attracting good staff is impossible while pay rates do not reflect the hours or the responsibility of the job.

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**Kristy Morgan, Director, Goodstart Early Learning Shailer Park**

This is a submission on behalf of my centre. I am a Centre Director for Goodstart Early Learning. I have a Bachelor of Child and Family Studies and have been working in Early Learning / Child Care for the past 16 years. I have worked in Outside School Hours Care, in an Early Childhood Training College and Long Day Care and am considered an expert in this profession. I graduated from university in 2000 and have been working full time in Long Day Care since that date. At my centre alone, I have educators who have worked alongside Australia's littlest people for the good part of 25 years. I am privileged to work amongst and alongside people who are deeply passionate about early learning, and more over have a realistic understanding of what it looks like in real life, and what successes and struggles we face daily. I strongly believe that it is people like me and the people that work in this profession daily that should have voices on your Advisory Council.

Educator's qualifications should remain in line with the National Quality Standards. A lesser view on qualification requirements is indicative only of an opinion, that early childhood in Australia is unimportant. Qualifications and experience in early childhood education is vital. To work with children is to be responsible for their ultimate care, wellbeing and education; three things that should not be sacrificed to allow a government to continue to underpay wages guilt free.

Educators with university degrees are earning so little they are not even reaching thresholds to pay back HECS/HELP fees. There is absolutely no benefit or lure for highly qualified educators to remain in the profession of Early Childhood Education.

In the past, educators have remained in the job for their passion for early childhood and their understanding of the importance of the first five years. In the past, this has been enough to look beyond the poor wages and work conditions. Unfortunately however, with the rising costs of living we are sadly losing the fight. Every day we see highly skilled, highly qualified educators leaving the profession with heavy hearts, to pursue other careers so that their own families can stay afloat.

The loss of a high quality early childhood educator affects the lives of small children, their parents and the entire community. Losing high quality standards in early childhood is criminal. The effect of high ratio's, uneducated staff and low governance is risking the actual lives of Australia's children. It is additionally risking the futures of many children considering that 80% of a child's brain development actually occurs before they start school. Australia actually invests the least in early childhood out of every developed country in the world.

What is worth valuing if not the lives of children? The Australian Government needs to invest in Early Childhood as a priority. However at this stage we understand it is the intention to increase "flexibility" to its current funding envelope. Increase flexibility? At what cost to quality? We need to increase the envelope, along with the flexibility! Please do not lower standards in early childhood. Higher qualifications equal higher quality. Pay early childhood professionals, professional wages.

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**Christopher Bromley, Assistant Director, TLC Childcare Sherwood**

I have worked the industry for over ten years at many different centres. In that time, I have seen a lot of great and wonderful educators come and go as well as some educators that should have not have ever been in the industry. A lot of the great educators have left due to the fact that they could not live of the wages they were earning cause it was too low. Instead they left to become either bank tellers or work in a chemist. Some of the educators that should have never been in the industry are those whom complete their study with six weeks and walk into a centre and think they know it all. We need to find a way of attracting and retaining the right people; the right people shouldn't leave and give up their wealth of experience simply because they cannot afford to stay.

I have a young child and sometimes find it hard to pay for things because of the low pay that we receive, there are some days where you stop and think if it's all worth working into childcare when, down the road that guy, that works at KFC gets more then you. We don't have the right remuneration system in place. This makes qualifications virtually meaningless in terms of pay, given that once you get your Certificate III your pay only goes up 20 to 50 cents an hour! It's hardly worth it.

The NQS has been a great start for centres. I have gone through a lot of training with the NQS. Through a great trainer, I have been lucky enough through my current centre to fund this. The NQS is great in a way that it lets the children be children and resource their own learning. I think there should be greater focus, however, on how the NQS could link to school learning as there is not a great deal of illustration than that and I think we should have more of a holistic approach. The NQS does expect a lot from educators and I feel that we should be more recognised and the wages should reflect this. We do just as much or more as school teachers, while working longer hours and for a longer time in the year.

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**Rhonda Kent, Director, Goodstart Early Learning Buddina**

I have been working in the early childhood sector for the past 14 years. I find this sector to be highly rewarding; in fact my job is one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. It is amazing when you are working in a centre where the staff understand the children and families and are involved because they care.

In the past I have quit from positions due to unethical operators who would have too many children for the required ratios. I reported this to the department. I have even heard of centres where the staff members have been ordered to take additional children out the back gates just prior to a visit from department officers. The NQF is good because it mandates ratios and now we can benchmark where we are at with that. It is a step in the right direction.

Quality is about treating children as capable learners and respecting their abilities, skills and wishes within a curriculum framework based on outcomes. This kind



of quality was not achievable ten years ago as the majority of the workforce was unskilled in the area of child development and many had no skills other than being a woman (who, society might have you believe, are innately capable of nurturing). Quality depends also on having consistent educators who remain in the sector. I know that this is a problem as many just cannot afford to. People are forced to leave because they can't meet their financial commitments. When we change educators, children and families feel displaced. This has a huge impact on parent confidence in the centre and the emotional attachments children have made with their educators. When placing my own children into care I was dismayed at how many centres I turned down purely because the educators were sitting together having a chat while the children played behind them unsupervised and unchallenged. What would anyone expect when the staff are considered babysitters and paid a pittance. Professional wages would see us better able to attract and retain highly educated early childhood professionals who have the theoretical background to assist children in their development and education and the drive to succeed. Staff turnover would decrease, leading to better outcomes for the children as they remain in stable conditions whilst in ECEC. Costs involved in recruitment would also decrease and could be funnelled into training opportunities.

The NQF has proven to be beneficial to Australian children. When I hear little snippets of criticism in the media stating that the paperwork required is too much, I despair. It's such a beat up. The child programming requirements are similar in expectations from ten years ago and anyone who is attempting to create a quality learning environment would understand that the visual documentation is necessary.

Finally I would just like to state that I do not believe that employing nannies is beneficial to anyone except the wealthy. How will the government monitor quality if this is introduced?

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**Michelle Feeney, Early Childhood Teacher , Goodstart Early Learning Huntingdale**

I come from a primary school background so beginning to work in a Long Day Care setting was always going to be a culture shock. I thoroughly enjoy my job and derive great and immense satisfaction from educating the young minds of Australia's future. It deeply saddens me that due to the lowly wages and the obvious lack of respect the government has shown childcare workers, that each day, week and month, we lose valued educators. They started as enthusiastic and committed educators and move onto other fields of study, where their talents and commitment are appreciated. This in turn leads to a severe lack of continuity of care to the children. It's highly disruptive. Our main priority as educators is for the children in our care. Surely we deserve recognition, including financial recognition, for the vitally important role that we play.

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**Name and centre withheld**

I am a four year trained early childhood teacher. I have been working in the ECEC sector for thirteen years casually as an assistant educator and have studied throughout to become a professional. It's a privilege to be working with families and making a big impact on society where you teach and care for young children, who are growing and learning during a sensitive period. I know a strong early learning program is likely to make up for a mediocre primary education and allow for less expenditure on social, health, welfare and jail in the future. High quality early education is where we can close the gap in Indigenous education and life equality. It's where we can stave off some of the impacts of a poor home life. With a happy, healthy start and specialist teaching techniques we can make a huge difference. My specialist knowledge allows workforce participation for parents, especially for women. What we do is good for the economy. My job gives me great satisfaction that I am appreciated by the families I work with during my long days that are physically and emotionally taxing.

I am in my work for the intrinsic rewards and my skills built up over years of experience and ongoing professional development. If I was not in my current centre I have been in for years I most likely would be teaching in primary school, TAFE or studying at University. But the job is not perfect.

The high turnover and lack of understanding and respect for our sector means I would have left years ago had I not found a great centre. The reality of unstable teams of educators means extra stress with unsettled children who cannot relax, trust their teachers and learn and grow well. Unhappy educators, families and children do not make for productive early education and care or a wider community workforce. The low pay contributes to high turnover, a lack of high standard and dedicated educators.

If we are to have a world class, high quality early education system then we need to fix the workforce issue. Quality is happy, relaxed children, educators and families. It's where educators stay and their investment in children's growth and learning is worth it and gives them enough money to live on. It's when families appreciate all the work you do for their child and educators are people who actually want to work with young children and dedicate the time and study to do so well. I recommend visiting model centres achieving the exceeding rating in the NQF to see just how capable educators are at their misunderstood and often undervalued work.

Professional wages will bring value to the profession and instil confidence respect. Our country's public, independent and private schools all are subsidised heavily on the premise that education begins at anywhere between three to five years. It starts earlier, in the nought to five years and we need to better fund this sector.

Our centre's waiting list is up to three years and word of mouth holds us in high regard. We turn families away every day and wish we had the funding to invest in a second centre. The paper work to achieve the rating is extensive and is often done well outside our almost full day contact hours. We hear in the media lot of people complain about the paperwork, but it's vital. We feel so strongly about

our work that we do this as we believe we are not going to provide a mediocre program, we always have to improve practice and we know that policies, documentation and forms keep us and all our stakeholders safe and of a high standard. Children deserve this. The paperwork also shows just how much goes into this amazing sector and why it's educators should be better remunerated and the sector better funded.

My suggestions to improve the sector would be to ensure it is funded well so fees are affordable for all and that services can expand so it is like public school. In England families can have access to centres from three years and are looking to start this from two years of age. This means children at risk of neglect or abuse can be in the community and have access to support services we can refer them to. This is especially important as early intervention for all children as well as for families struggling or for families with children with additional learning needs can happen in the local Long Day Care/ECEC centre. Right now ECEC is hard to access and costs for many as much as a private school, even with rebates. Many families will be staying at home and waiting to resume work when they can access care and subsidised schooling.

I look forward to your favourable response and action in improving our OECD rating for ECEC and female workforce participation and most importantly showing the world through investment in children and educators we can be a model country teaching where it actually makes a difference.

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**Hayley Canobie, Room Leader, Goodstart Delroy Gardens**

I love working within the early childhood sector. Working with children has always been a passion of mine but I feel I struggle from week to week in my personal life when it comes to affording my rent and living expenses. Over the last six years in the sector I have spent each year close to \$1000 to \$2000 dollars a year on resources for my class of children. I shouldn't have to pay for room resources but I do. I want the children to have the best. Quality means to me placing the needs of the children first. However, the lack of resources and money available to buy what we need from day to day for the children is lowering our quality of care. In addition to be under resourced, we also experience poor remuneration.

High turnover in staff has always had a big impact on the service, staff struggle from week to week when it comes to affording day care for their own children, paying rent and just managing the general cost of living. We should be encouraging passionate educators to work and stay in the sector but with out low wages it is next to impossible to do that. This is negatively affecting the continuity of care for children.

Improving the quality of staff means giving them credit for the work they do

and recognising the hours we put in to improving our daily practices. The early childhood sector needs a big overhaul. The most important aspect of this overhaul needs to be noticing, treating and paying educators as professionals.

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**Julie Dowling, Director, Discovery Early Learning Centre**

I chose to begin my career in early childhood education and care eighteen years ago. I began this journey when my children were young, my youngest daughter was suffering from epilepsy and my eldest son was hearing impaired.

I decided that I could make a difference for them by working at home as a family day care educator. I wanted to prevent some of the issues that they could face early on. I wanted to be pro-active on their behalf instead of reactive later in their education.

I started with my Certificate III and soon discovered a passion for early childhood education and care and I learnt I could make a difference not just to their learning but to many children's learning outcomes. I went on to finish my diploma and degree.

The reality of achieving my degree took many years; I was fifty when I donned my cap and gown. The cost of obtaining a degree on an educators wage was difficult. I found a profession I felt passionate about and cared about but was not recognised for the important role it played in children's lives and learning. I had learnt the importance of the early years to children's lives. A good beginning to life is well recognised as the foundation for future development health and wellbeing, not only in the early years but throughout life.

Despite this recognition and the advocacy efforts that have flowed from it, policy and practice in the early education and care are not matched with government recognition. Government should provide investment levels that match the importance of ECEC. Investment in the sector should be increased to reflect the recognised value of ECEC services. Both levels of government, state and federal, should meet its responsibility to deliver education to children from birth to "formal schooling" as this obligation is currently not being met.

The rhetoric underpinning our opinion about the importance of the first five years of life is not matched by government policy. If government truly believes that the first five years of a child's life is critical to their development - why then does government funding at a minimum, not match the level of funding given to children from 5 years to 12 years in the education system? This anomaly makes a lie of all government's position. Subsidising parents with ECEC costs is not the solution: the real solution is funding ECEC to the equivalent level of the 5-12 years education level.

The primary objective of funding should be to provide universal access to high quality ECEC services, ensuring that cost is not a barrier to participation for any children, families and the remuneration to the professionals who work in this sector is equivalent to those who teach at the 5 - 12 years education level. The current level of funding does not support this.

Disadvantaged and vulnerable children often fall through the cracks. If parents can't afford care or find a centre where they feel valued and comfortable they do not attend. The cost of care can be a huge burden to families on low incomes and these are the children that require care and education to bridge the gap of social disadvantage. It is usually directors or educators of a centre who are best placed to support disadvantaged families. They spend a lot of time working with families and children often in their own time because of the passion they have for educating and extending the knowledge of families of disadvantaged children. This is not a cost that should be borne by these caring educators.

Families from lower socio economic areas go to an area that they trust: a place where they feel safe and comfortable. Families from disadvantaged areas will attend services that understand their needs. It is often difficult for families to physically get to a service as a first step.

Within my organisation we have a service situated in a lower socio economic area. To support families' ability to attend ECEC, a bus has been purchased (at the owners cost) to pick up children and drop them off. Normal bus services are not regular in this area and families rely on the ECEC service for many reasons. Many families truly need this service to help learn life skills including how to feed their children nutritionally appropriate foods. In some instances, families are reliant on the service to bathe their children because they have no power at home. In Tasmania Child and Family Centres were built for these purposes but it is important to note that not all families trust these services or will attend in an area that they feel does not suit them.

Disadvantaged people trust the people who have helped them and where they feel safe. They have limited mobility and limited resources. Skills need to be taught with people they trust and those they trust to educate and care for their children. The cost of education and care for these families is a struggle and I worry that as time goes on they will not be able to afford services. This would be a tragedy, as these children need our services.

If families had to bear the cost of higher educator wages this group of children will not attend care. Children from disadvantaged families need education to help rise above the situations of their life. Early childhood services can provide education to families as well as children and support the whole family as a unit. We have seen our ECEC setting that operates in an area of disadvantage be a concrete support to not only children but also their families. Families trust us to affect a change for them; we are the people they trust to make a difference. This aspect is as individual as children.

Vulnerable children often attend our services supported by DOCS and they are with us for a very short time (and can leave us without notice, depending on their care arrangements). Circumstances change quickly particularly as they are often put in care with a foster carer.

We need to see a funding system that allows for greater subsidisation of families. The cost of ECEC for these kinds of children should be minimal so that children can stay in a service where they have felt safe and comfortable. We could work together to achieve great outcomes for children where their life has been upturned with circumstances no child should have to deal with. I have a personal experience with this issue. We were working with a four year old boy with severe behavioural problems, DOCS asked us to enrol the child and work with his mother to provide a stable environment. We worked with the family to develop a trusting relationship. In working with the child, we could see slow changes to his personality, he started to smile on arrival and give educators a cuddle. We waved goodbye to language a four year old child should never know. It was not perfect, but we were making a difference for him and the whole family.

We were able to change preconceived notions about this child in our education and care community. Then something completely out of our control happened, his mother went to child. The foster carer assigned to the child could not afford ECEC fees, the child left us and we no longer have contact. We were left with a sizeable amount of fees outstanding that won't be paid. Most disappointingly we lost contact with this young child at a time we were seeing a change.

It was devastating to our centre community and I should imagine to this young boy. He would now have to start his learning journey again, build new relationships and move to a new home.

This child is now potentially lost in the system and could end up costing the community and government much more in the longer term.

The impact of changes to staff ratios and qualification requirements on the cost of employing ECEC workers is high. The cost of employing a teacher in ECEC has been problematic. An early childhood service cannot meet the conditions (relating to pay, leave and hours) that a qualified teacher would receive in a school setting. Often teachers will take an early childhood position in a centre until a teaching position in a school is available. This does not provide consistency of education care for children.

We need to raise the profile of our sector and the only way I believe to do this is to improve the wages. This will help to stem the flow of educators out of the sector. One of the most frequent complaints from parents about child care centres concerns high turnover of staff and the effect that it has on their children.

Minimal staff turnover is an important indicator of quality care. Research suggests that children should be taught by the same staff members for at least one year at a time. Consistency among staff helps to establish healthy and secure



attachments. This is particularly important for infants, but is recommended for all young children.

Recent research suggests that increased behaviour problems among children in child care may be due to lack of stability in teaching staff. This may be related to the fact that frequent turnover does not allow children to develop stable and affectionate relationships with teachers. Infants and toddlers are particularly affected by staff turnover and display more appropriate social behaviour when they are in stable relationships with staff.

There are so many facets to this problem and a lot of it has to do with how we, as a community, value early childhood educators. We need to look at what sort of social and financial investment we're all prepared to contribute in order to improve and stabilize the sector and make being an early childhood educator a profession that's highly regarded, rewarding and has real potential for progression.

My sector is the kind which attracts many female workers who are looking for something that gives them flexibility for their own family life. As a result there appears to be a much higher incidence of staff on maternity leave than in other sectors.

If we want to ensure staff retention and also help support working families, the government and the community need to view the education and care sector as an investment similar to the school system. Both society and families with children within the ECEC system need to understand that someone has to pay for the higher qualifications of staff, career prospects and therefore better retention levels and to make it a better choice for men and women as a viable and long term career. While it's easy for us all to complain about fees, standards and issues such as staff turnover in early childhood education and care, for the most part, early childhood education and care centres are trying to manage the situation as best they can. However, the onus falls on all of us as a wider community to help develop this sector and focus on its needs as much as we do schools.

With increases in the cost of living, more and more families will have both parents working at least part time and in need of early years education and care. Early childhood education providers such as early childhood education and care centres will increasingly lay the foundations for our children's education and social development. If we want to invest in our future generations, we're going to have to start investing in children's services. I could tell many stories as a director about staff leaving the sector but I will focus on Lisa. Lisa is a staff member who works in our toddler's room. She came to us a bright, happy and committed educator with a passion for the sector and a vision to create change in children's lives. Her interactions with children are authentic and children love her. Roll forward a year: Lisa has met a significant other in her life and has a dream of buying her own home. She has grown up in a one-parent family and it has always been her to dream to buy a home. At the same time Lisa has had significant issues with her teeth, needing her wisdom teeth removed and braces to straighten her teeth, not for cosmetic reasons, she was suffering from headaches because of her teeth.

The dream of a buying a home is gone as she has a payment plan for her dental bill, the cost of which is impacting on many other things in her life. She is learning to drive, but lessons are limited because of the large bill from her teeth. Lisa's partner wants her to go on holidays with her, however, all of these natural things a woman in her twenties would aspire to must be put on hold. We have seen a bright, bubbly girl who loved her profession come to me to say that she will leave our service when she finds a new job. She is not that bubbly person anymore. She is working other jobs in her spare time to raise money for her debt with the dentist. The children and families will miss her but she cannot support herself on an educator's wage and pay her health bills.

As much as the way ECEC is funded affects educators, it also affects parents. I have often wondered whether increases in support reduced the out of pocket cost of childcare for parents, or have fees just risen in response?

The delivery of the Child Care Rebate provides the options of going directly to the family or to the centre. When it is paid to the family it does not necessarily mean it comes back to the centre. Many families have extraordinarily high accounts and as a director, I play a large role in chasing these high accounts and ensuring a payment plan is put in place so that families can pay their bill. Many families obtain the Child Care Rebate without having paid their account. The money is not always going where it is intended to go. I have witnessed quite a few families just leave care when the account is high and then being referred to debt collection.

In summary, the increase in benefit through the Child Care Rebate has provided no real tangible benefit to a child's early years education. Should a greater (or smaller) proportion of the assistance be directed to: particular regions; particular types of ECEC; ECEC used for particular purposes – parents working, studying or undertaking other activities; or to support additional needs children or lower socio-economic groups?

Interestingly the Australia Early Development Index showed that when you target particular regions and put funding into lower socioeconomic areas, the need arose in the other areas. There are additional needs in all demographic areas now as families have the capacity to choose the area or service they would like to attend. My centre is situated in an area that has a broad mix of children as we border a low socio-economic area and a middle class area. The solution is to have a uniform system of service delivery so it does not matter where you live or your socio economic status, you receive the same level of early years education and care.

My journey of learning and advocacy for children continues and it is my aim is to end my early childhood career seeing educators paid appropriately for the work that they do, see them respected for the quality education and care they provide and see Governments acknowledge this right.

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**Kaylene Hayter, Director, Goodstart Browns Plains Redgum Drive**

I have been working in early childhood for 30 years and in that time I have had many and varied positions in my ascension to the role of Director. Each step along the way I have educated myself so that I can continue to improve the children's education. My qualifications at the moment are Advanced Diploma of Children's Services, I take this qualification very seriously and I look for people who have dedication to study to work alongside me. This industry has changed and the need for better qualified educators mean that we can no longer be seen as babysitters; we are educators of children in their most informative and vulnerable period of their lives.

When you work with non-qualified staff you are spending time teaching them and not spending time educating the children. We are trying to create a safe and prosperous environment for the children and their families. If you bother to study and find the time to educate yourself you are more likely to have a passion for the children in your care, too often in the past we had people who were here just for the money. Those of us who are educated are not in it for the money; we would be lawyers or politicians if money were the big issue. We are in this profession to help shape and educate small children to prepare them for the big wide wonderful world.

Our ratios have been talked a lot about in the past; our centre has been using the new numbers for over two years now. The staff and children are benefiting from these and it would be very difficult for the children to go back and share less quality time with each member of staff.

If you gave early years education and care a more professional wage then the sector would take us more seriously, after all we are the ones that educate children and send them off to school with a basic knowledge of what is happening in the world.

We are very lucky in our centre that we do not have a big turnover of staff, but in the centres where this is happening the toll on the children; the families and the staff that remains are enormous. Educating staff and paying them accordingly are the best ways to stop this.

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**Christine Bollangary, Assistant Director , Braypark Childcare Centre**

This submission is on behalf of Bray Park Child Care educators. The ECEC sector provides an essential service for today's working families and families in need. Each educator not only provides a quality education for each child, but provides a safe, nurturing and loving environment to help each child to develop positively. What is provided to each family is much more than care. In today's busy society, many educators are surrogate parents for these children. Without this industry, the country will stop working and later on down the track, there will be fewer

productive members of the community as there was no base education for many of them at a time when they needed it the most, birth to five years.

Quality within the sector consists of having qualified educators with both classroom and practical training. A well-resourced centre provides the ability for each educator to teach to the highest potential ensuring that all children are able to learn at their own pace. It is vital that the sector consists of caring and nurturing educators and there is little to no staff turnover. Each centre needs to meet the NQS and NQF standards to ensure that there is consistency throughout the whole country so no child is left behind.

Professional wages are a necessity to the industry. This allows for consistency of educators and continuity of care; which then in turn ensures that the sector has dedicated educators that are in the industry to provide the highest of care and education to children, as expectations of educators is higher, not for just a pay cheque. Professional wages gives educators professional recognition, which we have been deserving of for so many years and allows for incentives to further study and attracts quality educators to the sector.

It has been proven that children learn best when they feel safe and secure. If a centre experiences high turnover, this disrupts the bonds created with both child and family which then in turn disrupts the child's learning. High staff turnover creates distressed children, puts other educators under pressure to cope with not only dealing with the emotional aspect, but also trying to keep the learning going. Turnover doesn't just affect one child or family, it effects the whole centre and creates a lack of parent confidence with Not only the centre but the system. High staff turnover can affect the ratios adding even more pressure with the element of safety standards not being met.

The NQF gives the right for children to be children and learn without feeling pressured. Compared to the old system, there is less paperwork when the NQF is being implemented effectively which allows for more time with the children. The NQF has allowed for the whole country to be level with curriculum which allows for a child to learn consistently regardless of what happens in their lives outside the centre. This system has finally professionalised the sector, giving educators much needed professional recognition taking us from Childcare workers to educators.

Many things work so well within the sector currently with the NQF and professional recognition. What needs to be looked at is professional wages to ensure quality educators come to and stay in the sector and the training colleges providing training for educators needs to be consistent and not creating an easy path to qualifications. There is no short cut to teaching qualifications; therefore there should be extensive training for ECEC educators.

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**Roushan Rahman, Educator, Holland Park Crèche and Family Childcare**

I work for Holland Park Crèche and Family Centre. I have been working in this field since 2009. I absolutely love working with children. It is an extremely rewarding job in which I am able to experience beautiful young children shaping up into even more inspiring unique individuals. At work, sometimes, I see children coming in with potentially inhibiting emotional and negative attitudes, which ultimately is not the child's fault, rather the product of their family environment or situation. In these situations the parents generally are under a lot of stress due to factors such as: family break-up, divorce, single parenthood, drug/alcohol addiction, neglect and/or abuse.

Thus, when we work in this field we are faced with everyday stressful situations and are expected to handle these situations with utmost care and caution. This is not as easy as it seems. This job is quite tough however the positives most definitely outweigh the stress accompanied by this job.

In order to provide young children and their families the best possible care, we always work hard and spend many nights offs and spare time researching the behaviour of many of the unique individuals we take care of in order to try and solve them. Such children include: autistic, disruptive/aggressive, and mentally and developmentally challenged (hearing and visually impaired) children as well as children who are psychologically classified as 'the norm'.

Our work is not just mental, but also physical as we setup both outdoor and indoor activities to give children a wider variety of choices in order for play-based learning. That's why we setup and redesign/rearrange equipment every day in order to prevent boredom. We also take care of babies and toddlers, picking up, nappy changing and many other physical tasks. I am sure to say that when you take care of 44 children/babies/toddlers a day via changing nappies, nurturing and educating, how can your body possibly remain healthy all the time? but I can definitely say and I'm sure many of my fellow child education workers would agree with me that after one day of work my body gets extremely tired and exhausted.

I worked as a relief staff for many years. I know how much physical burden is brought upon us when working with both babies and toddlers. Many staff members talk about their alcohol intake and at the end of the day you can't blame them, this is a tough job. When all the stress and burden outweighs the rewarding benefits many members change their profession. I have watched many of my friends leaving this profession due to the intense burden on their body. One of my closer friends left this profession and joined education support at school as there is less pressure on the body. I am also contemplating about changing my profession into something far less stressful than a childcare educator. However if there is a pay rise compensating for all my endurance and hard work I would be happy to keep working as I absolutely love this job but the stress and pressure is becoming far too demanding on my body.

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**Rebecca Bandt, Educator, Parkside Community Childcare Centre**

Early childhood education is a very hard though rewarding sector. We work long hours providing an education for young children. I feel that we are providing high quality education to children and an essential service for parents. Our job is so stressful that we often don't get time to do everything we need to do during the day. We are not making enough money as educators and I believe we deserve a pay rise so that our wage reflects the amount and the complexity of the work we do. I would like to buy a house but I cannot afford a deposit. Choosing this career, though I love it, sees me struggle.

In our centre, we have a high turnover in staff because of the low pay. All educators need to have Certificate III or a Diploma in Children's Services but the wage isn't enough to keep people with those qualifications for long. I am currently looking for a new job as I need stable, full time hours.

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**Helen Crain, Group Leader, Sunnybank Anglican Early Learning Centre**

I have worked in the industry for 24 years and I have seen many changes come and go due to the length of time spent within the centre. One big factor is that our low incomes affect whether or not we are able to make ends meet. The day to day pressure that is placed on staff provides fuel for burnout and staff being sick more than they need to be.

The turnover of staff makes the families very angry. They often will remark "who is looking after my child today" or "where are the other staff who my child is familiar with". When parents leave their children with people they don't know, both the children and the parents become very emotional. Children become frightened of socialisation and parents who will not trust anyone.

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**Kayleen Condrick, Assistant Director/Group Leader Educator, Brassall Childcare Centre**

This is a submission on behalf of Brassall Childcare Centre. All educators here hold strong views on the quality of education and care currently offered to Australian children, the quality of care that should be offered, and the workplace conditions of staff in the industry.

Staff were asked to provide their individual views on the following subjects and agreed upon the following:



Quality Early Childhood Education and Care should look like:

- Welcoming childcare centres/in home care facilities with long-term stability of staff,
- Staff who are familiar with existing families and who quickly become familiar with new families,
- Compassionate, qualified staff who have experience with children and, specifically, in the field of early childhood education and care,
- Good on-the-job training and orientation for new staff,
- The ability to hire experienced, qualified staff and enthusiastic newer staff with an affinity for children, education and care,
- The ability to retain the above staff.

Our experiences of the sector have led us to believe:

- That the level of respect shown to early childhood educators is dropping – where previously parents would drop their children off in the morning, saying “I couldn’t do what you do”, “I really appreciate your work” etc., now we quite often feel disrespected, hearing things like “Oh you’re lucky to just play with kids all day”, “When does child-minding finish for the year?”

That the job is stressful due to:

- Parents demanding so much more than education and experiences for the children – “He has a doctor’s appointment this afternoon. Make sure his face, hands and feet are washed and his shoes are on”.
- Changing legislation requirements which seem to be an opportunity for many ‘training’ providers to frighten staff with horror stories of what documentation will be required and to sell educators exorbitantly-priced templates to complete such documentation.

That the job is challenging:

- Children always provide an interesting perspective on every little thing and challenge our established patterns of behaviour and thinking.
- However, changes to requirements regarding staff/child ratios, staff qualifications, what experiences need to be offered and how, and most importantly, the documentation of those experiences prove to be difficult when there is no financial compensation for the increase in workload. Further, expectations of staff and centres are increasing in that we are required to have an educational leader without a commensurate pay increase.
- That change is needed and welcomed, but must be for the purpose of providing real improvements to quality of care and education and improved professional recognition and wages for staff.

The following are representative stories from staff members.

Kayleen's story:

I have worked in the early childhood education and care sector for over ten years. Previously, I worked as a School Dental Therapist for Queensland Health (with a 'diploma equivalent' qualification). After becoming a mother, and then, unexpectedly a single mother, I decided to study childcare in the hope of becoming a Family Day Care provider to work from home and raise my child. It ended up being much more feasible to work in a childcare centre (as I was invited to do so while on practical placement) and I've been here ever since. With a Diploma equivalent qualification as a School Dental Therapist, I was employed at the TO3 level in 2000 earning about \$21/hr.

With a Diploma in Children's Services in 2014 and as Assistant Director, I receive more than a Group Leader but still only receive \$23.48/hour! I have an equivalent qualification, more responsibility and receive less than \$3.50/hour more than I did 14 years ago!

I have worked with children for my entire career and love doing so, but, when told recently that Queensland Rail were seeking train drivers, I went straight home to apply! I seriously consider changing professions, even if I will enjoy my job less, just because of the low pay. I don't want to live in government housing! I want my child not to be recommended by his school for a smith family scholarship! (I work full-time for heaven's sake!). I want professional recognition for my qualifications, experience and professionalism! I absolutely want not to be considered a 'babysitter'! I want not to work a second and sometimes third job (as I have for most of my ECEC career) or to at least sell Avon (as I still do), in order to make ends meet.

Elaine's Story:

I am Indigenous and have a hearing impairment that doesn't affect me.

I owned my own house (purchased before I entered the early childhood education and care sector) and have no children of my own. Because of my Indigenous background I'm from large families some of whom still live in each state of Australia.

I have been working at the Brassall Child Care Centre for two years, during which time I was a trainee at the centre and achieved my Certificate III in Children's Services.

I enjoy coming to work every day, to me it's so rewarding learning new things from team members and also from children. By watching children grow develop and it gives me understanding about my work. Sometimes can be a tiring and stressful job.

Before working Brassall Child Care Centre, I was working with Endeavour Foundation for 20 years as a support worker/carer.

Before Endeavour Foundation, I worked as a kitchen hand for two years and also worked on a flower farm with my father on weekends.

I suppose I have found my career and enjoy doing my job, but I am glad that I already had my house before I entered the sector as it would be very difficult to make repayments on the income of a certificate qualified assistant.

Staff members at our centre believe that professional wages for the sector would assist in ensuring quality and parent confidence by enabling centres to retain staff and avoid a 'revolving-door' effect where children and parents have difficulty forming lasting, trusting relationships with staff. It will also help to attract several qualified applicants for advertised positions instead of having to 'settle' for the one or one of a few who apply. We hear of many qualified and experienced educators who see our advertisements but don't apply as they are aware of the pay rate (it may be why they left the industry in the first place) and can make more money at just about any other job (including unqualified work such as working on the checkout at a supermarket.)

The impact of high staff turnover on children and families is usually stressful. Parents begin to develop a trusting relationship with one or two carers and then have to start all over again. If a child has allergies/intolerances or special needs, the impact is even worse. Parents begin to trust that a staff member won't give their child cheese/misunderstand his tantrums/expect him to speak when he's mute/use regular sunscreen instead of his special sensitive skin one and then they have to explain his needs to a new carer and worry all over again if this is the person who will forget his condition. There is a massive level of trust required to hand your child (especially younger/non-verbal children) over to a stranger and it helps if that person is not a stranger for long. Handing them over to a series of strangers is terrifying!

The stress caused to children by high staff turnover is inestimable. They too have to develop a trusting relationship with their carers and it's even more difficult to explain to a small person why yet another caring adult has left their sphere.

The National Quality Framework as written should have a strong role to play in achieving quality. It clearly sets out standards in an easy-to-follow manner and can act as a list of what needs to be achieved. How to achieve this may be a little less clear, but not outside the realms of understanding of an intelligent person.

Our centre has hired an extra 'floater' assistant to cover ratios at busy times and provide cover for our assistant educators to have 'programming' time (equivalent to non-contact time for teachers in the Education Department).

This means that every educator in the centre (who is assigned to a room) receives two hours weekly of programming time which has resulted in more personalised, interactive experiences being planned and extended upon. This can only have a positive impact upon the children who attend the centre.

We have also hired a teacher, but we have had great difficulty in finding one. Several advertisements went unanswered (and we have heard that the pay in the ECEC sector is a major factor in teachers not applying). We ended up finding an applicant through word-of-mouth, who is in the process of rehabilitating back into the workforce following a severe and debilitating illness. She freely admits that, if she is able to recover fully enough to work in schools, she will be forced to do so if the pay conditions in the ECEC sector don't improve. She also admits that all of the educators at the centre are doing the same programming, curriculum and experience planning and documentation – it's just easier for the teacher who has been trained specifically to do so in the current form, whereas many of us were trained to focus on individual programming for each child's specific needs in each developmental area and have had to find our way to meet the requirements of the Early Years Learning Framework and, now the National Quality Framework. We feel that ECEC can be improved by implementing the NQF in full as currently written, providing more professional wages for staff and that both of these measures will eventually increase the professional profile of the ECEC sector.

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**Donna Bazeley, Educator, Zebra Kids Hahndorf**

I have worked in the childcare sector for over five years, in this time I have completed my Certificate III and just completed my Diploma. My pay for all of this study is just over \$22 an hour. During my time at this centre I have attended several training evenings as well as completed first aid, mandatory reporting, police clearances all of which I had to pay for myself, even though this is a requirement of my employment. I have seen too many staff members to count leave the service because of the terrible wages and conditions. I can't imagine leaving as I am one of the lucky ones with a partner who earns enough to support us but it seems unfair that those with a passion for the job have to leave it. The childcare sector has seen many changes in the past few years, all benefiting children, however some things have not improved the quality of care, the amount of documentation was meant to be reduced, this is not the case. While I am all for us being more accountable for the education of our young, better preparing them for school, we are not given the time or resources required to enable us to do this effectively. Things must change in the sector. I am sure that if there were the staff turnover and subsequent disruption within the school system parents would be furious. We need to be paid as educators not baby sitters, so people are more inclined to stay in the sector.

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**Anupma Sood, Director, Meadowbank TAFE Children's Centre**

With this review I really hope that our world has a better understanding of the early childhood care and education. Our society needs more child care centres, qualified and caring staff and a system where we can retain this quality staff.

Our centre caters for the children of the students in TAFE who fully rely on our facility to study and get ready for work. Unfortunately only one quarter of the students who apply are able to get a place in the centre for their children and are forced to quit their studies.

This absolutely is senseless as on one hand our government is giving new migrants the opportunity to study and get work ready but on the other hand they are forced to leave their studies due to the lack of childcare. How can government not take this issue seriously and do something about it.

We need to see early education and care as an important profession and pay the professionals adequately so that they can contribute to the society and get to stay in the jobs they love.

Our aim should be also to keep all the centre top quality centres as our most important possessions, our future Australians ( our children) have all the right to get education in safe, secure and stimulating environments. The NQS plays a big role in this and keeps all of us in check with our work. I certainly do not think that it has increased the paperwork or made it tough for the educators. Rather, it has rather simplified the process.

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**Robin Shannon, Educator, Narrabundah Early Childhood School**

At Narrabundah Early Childhood School, like most childcare centres I have had experience with, the staff are predominantly a mix of first generation immigrants and young people just out of school who have had a difficult relationship with the formal education system. The design of the now mandatory Certificate III is ill-suited to these demographics and is a major cause of demoralisation of excellent staff who lack the literacy skills it requires. This is especially true when the certificate is administered by private training providers who tend to provide little or no face-to-face interaction.

At Narrabundah Early Childhood School I have seen many gifted educators humiliated and demoralised by their training experience. For example, a skilled educator in our infants room who has been working in childcare for almost a decade and was recently forced into completing her Certificate III was thrown into an extended period of self-doubt about her own competency and seriously considered leaving the sector because she was struggling so much with the requirements of the certificate. The insignificant pay rise upon completion of the certificate merely rubs salt into the wound. Meanwhile, I have seen poor and

mediocre staff who have been most in need of training finish the certificate (at a not insignificant cost to the taxpayer), yet not improve in the least.

Instead of basing the training system on a dumbed down version of the school or university model, centred as they are around linguistic skills and theoretical knowledge, a far more effective model would be the adoption of an apprenticeship style system where highly skilled practitioners provided one-on-one support for new educators. This has always been a core component of teacher training, and there is no obvious reason why the same or a similar model could not be applied in childcare.

My suggestion for the shape of such a scheme would be as follows. Each new educator would be paired with an experienced educator at their home childcare centre. The experienced educator (with oversight by the centre director) would guide the initiate through each of a flexible checklist of skills (a combination of core skills and centre-specific skills) and provide regular critical feedback sessions. Importantly, the experienced educator would be incentivised with a pay rise as well as time off from other duties to facilitate this.

After the initiate has acquired and demonstrated the required competencies, they would then be required to undergo several 'practicals' where they are assigned to an experienced educator at a different centre for around a fortnight. This would allow educators to be exposed to a variety of educational settings and methods as well as foster transferability of their skills.

This system would not only provide much more useful training to new educators, it would also provide a much needed reward to highly skilled educators and thus help stem the current loss of talent from the sector.

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**Abdallah Kholoud, Supervisor, Bankstown Montessori Childcare**

I have worked in Childcare for 11 years. I now work in this centre and it's been hard to be a supervisor because it's not easy keeping staff for a long period of time due to the low wages. When living expenses go up, staff are forced to leave.

It would be good if we can have a recognisable wage due to the important role we play in building a foundation for the young children before they enter school.



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**Ally Ryman, Early Childhood Teacher/ Room Leader, Early Achievers Enmore**

This year will mark the tenth year that I have been in the early childhood sector, starting off as a trainee earning only \$8 per hour. Although now as an early child teacher I have a higher pay rate it is disheartening to think that 10 years' experience and a university degree barely puts me on par with a full time worker at ALDI and I have a HELP debt to replay on top of that.

Many early childhood educators have to face this heartbreaking decision: leave the career that you love or stay and be unable to afford to buy a house or start a family. The statistic that 180 workers leave the sector every week in Australia does not remotely surprise me.

This has put the sector into crisis, as without enough educators there are not enough child care facilities for our families. Not only is there a lack of services there are also a lack of quality services as budgets are tight and educators are often stressfully over worked and, as you know, underpaid. The first five years of a child's life are critical in moulding the people that they will become in society. In fact studies have proven that for every dollar spent in a person's early life will save the government \$7 in their adult life. One of the reasons that I have put up with the financial struggles of working in the sector is because I believe that children deserve high quality education, giving them the best possible start in life.

Please consider creating quality care facilities through subsidising professional wages for early childhood educators. It is a necessary investment for a brighter future for our society.

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**Heather Kilgour, Director, Campbelltown Community Preschool Inc**

I have worked in the Early Childhood sector for over 20 years; 15 of them at the present centre in both teaching roles and the last three years in the teaching/directing role. I strongly believe in children accessing high quality early childhood services and being a community based centre I strongly believe that we are there for the community providing the service that they need. Quality to me is a friendly and homely environment where people want to be and want to return- this includes staff, families and the children. Quality is seen when children and staff are deeply engaged in a variety of experiences indoors and outdoors, where safety for children is taken seriously and still being able to allow children to take reasonable risks too. As educators our role is to be there for the children and their families; to support them as they make this transition from home to Preschool, form positive relationships with all family members and create a place where everyone feels that they are an integral part of the preschool family and community and they have a sense of 'belonging'. Quality can't be created if the educators and owners of centres are not passionate about the role they play in children's lives.

Finding quality and passionate early childhood teachers and even trainees has been an issue at our centre over the past few years. Many applicants haven't shown up for the interview, some don't even ring. Last year we spent three months finding an early childhood teacher and we have spent over \$1000 in advertising to get quality staff. Some think working in a Preschool is easy because we get the school breaks, when in actual fact we walk in the door and don't stop until well after our finish time.

Countless voluntary hours are spent interviewing, catching up on work and reading material to stay up to date with the many changes that we are dealing with presently.

Parents feel stressed when there is a turnover of staff, some children have difficulty dealing with these changes. I have had many comments from parents saying they are not happy with the centre their child is attending as there has been a high turnover of staff and now there are no original staff left, "why is this happening?" they ask, "what do I do?" I have seen firsthand children four and five years of age who have had difficulty coping with the changes in staff at our centre over the last 12 months.

I don't know why wages are so different in the early childhood sector compared to a teacher in a school. There is still a large workload, there is still the training to acquire qualifications, but there are even differences in wages between preschool and Long Day Care. I believe that wages should be at a professional level to try to retain staff and the director's allowance should reflect the role performed. I can earn the same wage as my husband who works in an office and I have the responsibility of eight to ten staff, 40 children a day, advise a management committee of their duties and responsibilities and to ensure we meet all regulations.

In my opinion the National Quality Framework only justifies what good quality services are already doing. I don't know that it can follow up on services that are not meeting the standards. Many parents really don't understand the whole National Quality Framework and many don't want to know. In my experience they just want a Preschool for their child to prepare them for school between the ages of three and five years. I still believe that as individuals, the assessors will still have personal opinions and preferences and focus on particular elements of the standards that they want to. So there can't be a level playing field within the assessment process. Each state is funded differently and if different states get different funding levels then they may have better quality resources, provisions, training etc.

The early childhood sector in NSW needs equality with funding, equality with rebates for families, and equality with wages for staff.

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**Kellie Nielsen, Director, Goodstart Early Learning Cessnock**

I have worked in the early childhood sector for over ten years. During this time I have worked in a number of roles and with all age groups birth to five years. I hold a Bachelor of Teaching and as working towards a Bachelor of Education.

I have stayed in for the love of the work that I do, not for the poor wages. The first five years in a child's life are imperative as they strongly influence the rest of their lives. Research has shown that over 90% of the brain develops in the first five years of life, so for me, early education is paramount. Yet the early childhood sector is often seen as babysitters not only by the community but by the government as well. My friend who is a waitress (which I understand is an important service) is paid more per hour plus tips than most of my educators - we are responsible for the care and education of Australia's future - is this fair? I think not. As an industry we have high turnover which makes it difficult for families and children to build strong secure relationships with the educators at our service.

As a Centre Director I find it difficult to find high quality educators as most of my educators could be paid more money stacking shelves at a supermarket. Early childhood educators need to be recognised for what they do. The early childhood sector needs to change and the time for change is now.

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**Sara Smith, Group Leader, Crèche and Kindergarten Community Childcare Centre Newmarket**

This submission is on behalf of my centre. Our service has been operating since 1977, providing quality education and care for the greater Newmarket area. We have 11 dedicated early childhood professionals at this service, all with qualifications of Certificate III through to a Bachelor of Education. Most of our dedicated staff have been employed at our service for a substantial period of time, allowing us to build strong relationships with the children and their families.

Although staff are highly qualified and talented they are still required to attend additional professional developmental training which ensures they are up to date with current practices. Early childhood education and care is a place where children should come first.

Our service believes that the Early Years Learning Framework Curriculum is paramount to a child's development, and recent studies have shown that the early years is key to a child's ability to learn, and to become a participating, socially acceptable global citizen. If a child in the crucial stages of their life is not supported through a high quality education and care, they have less chance of becoming a successful adult.

In recent times, we have noticed that many dedicated and talented staff members within the organisation are forced to leave the job they love to work elsewhere for less responsibilities and more money. This is of great concern to us at this service,

as it impacts the children and families directly. My centre recognises that wages for all early childhood educators are very low; however we do not believe that government initiatives, such as free training will alleviate the financial pressures felt by our staff. It is crucial that educators in Australia receive a professional wage for the professional work they do with our children - the future of Australia.

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**Stacey Yeadon, Assistant, Goodstart Early Learning Goulburn**

I have worked in child care for eight years. I really enjoy working with children I find it extremely rewarding. However to improve the sector I think we need to be recognised as professionals with wages to match as well as more assistance with training. I think by having professional wages and upgraded training we would be ensuring the best quality staff for the children. I have found that the staff turnover is incredible over the last 6 years I have seen 3 complete changes of staff at the centre I am in. I feel this is partly to do with the rate of pay not being enough to hold quality staff. I feel also that the amount of paper work produced is amazing I know that I find the amount of paper work that needs to be done on a daily basis to be quite stressful I think this also contributes to the great turnover of so many staff as a result this can lead to non consistent care.

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**Sayaka Ueda, Educator, Randwick Open Care for Kids**

Although there is no turnover at the place of my employment, fortunately, we - all educators here - feel that we are not getting what we deserve. What we do at the service is not a babysitting but educating which should be seen as more than just \$20 per hour. It is such a shame that many educators have no choice but leaving the sector because they do not get paid for what they do. If we can get what we deserve, the quality of the service and education will be much better because we will be motivated because we will feel recognised for what we are working on.

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**Barbara Cedro, Educator, Randwick Open Care for Kids**

I just achieved my Certificate III a couple of months ago. During my studies I realised the importance of an educator for a child development, we are responsible for what they learn in their early years and for showing them what are the rules on our society. Having minimum wages, make us feel that our job is not relevant. The high turnover on a childcare makes it harder for parents and children to feel comfortable and confident, once they have only a short period of time to get to know an employee. Families struggle raising their children when they should be encouraged to work and leave their children in competent hands.

The NQF demands observation, program planning, activities on each area of development for a child, guaranteeing that the best will be done for each child.

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**Amy Bell, Educator, Randwick Open Care for Kids**

I have worked in the early childhood profession for eight years and have loved educating and seeing children grow and develop within that time.

I believe that every child in Australia deserves quality care and education and that is not being met in many services across Australia in regards to staffing arrangements and the amount of educators that are leaving the sector each week (around 180 educators a week).

In our centre alone we have just had a male educator leave our service due to the low wages and he moved onto working in a school as he is paid a much higher wage and is recognised for the work that he is doing. This was a loss to our families and children and I know from experience that families in other centres find it a struggle each morning handing over their children to a new educator each week.

As early childhood educators we are not recognised for the amazing work that we do every day and it is also not reflected in our wages. If educators were recognised and paid accordingly there would not be a problem with high staff turnover as educators would feel valued and recognised as professional, both emotionally and financially.

One way we show our commitment to education is through the NQF which is an amazing tool in achieving quality, but the amount of paperwork that is involved and expected is overwhelming and is forcing educators to do endless overtime and unpaid hours.

Please understand that we love educating the future minds of Australia but the question is can thousands of educators afford to live, survive, pay a mortgage and raise children on wages as low as \$18.57 an hour? I don't think so and that is why we have a crisis in the early childhood education and care sector which will continue to affect families, children and educators until there is a change.

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**Fiona Micallef, Supervisor, Goodstart Warner**

ECEC is an essential service that is vital to not only educating children but providing a service to families to ensure that they can work. Without it, the country would stop. The role that we play educating children at this early age is vital to the community helping create productive citizens for later on down the track. Educators have a massive role in preparing children for the education system.

Education of the educators is important to the sector, staff members need to be qualified for the positions they hold. Educators need to be trained before they come into the sector both in the classroom and practically as well. Retaining staff for long periods ensures continuity of care and staffing ratios ensure that high quality care is possible without sacrificing safety and the ability for some one-on-one care. Management of ECEC centres should ensure that directors need to have higher qualifications than just a diploma and have extensive experience in the ECEC sector.

Professional wages allows retention of quality and qualified educators for longer periods ensuring the kind of consistency which maintains parent confidence with the care of their children. Professional wages ensures that, for a sector that is so vital for the education and care of the next generation, educators that work within the sector are professionally recognised for the work they do.

Educators are required to build secure attachments with every child in their care. High staff turnover hinders the learning process as children need to confidently explore and engage with social and physical environments through relationships. High turnover effects how children cope emotionally as they need to create a new bond with each new educator.

The NQF is essential to the ECEC sector as it guides educators to extend and enrich children's learning from birth to 5 years and the transition to school. The NQF supports professional practice, especially in aspects in building and nurturing relationships, curriculum decision making and teaching and learning. The NQF allows the expression of personality and uniqueness as it caters to each individual child whilst acknowledging that educators are professionals taking them away from the 'babysitter' persona. The paperwork allows us to show our parents the professional role we have in educating their child and displays a portion of the knowledge that is being imparted and also learnt by each child each day.

Changes that would benefit the sector are ensuring that ratios stay low, especially in younger rooms as this ensures high quality care, emotional well-being for both child and educator and safe environments. Another change that needs to be made is ensuring that all educators are qualified before working in a centre. Looking at how educators are trained before entering the sector and not shortening or easing paths to gain qualifications.



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**Angela Conley, Director, Cygnet Community Children's Centre**

My name is Angela I have been studying and working in early childhood education and care for 30 yrs. I have worked in Outside School Hours' Care and Long Day Care as a carer, educator, team leader and director.

I chose childcare as a 16 year old, it was probably because I liked children and they seemed to like me. Unlike many who I studied with as a 16 - 17yr old I stayed in the sector because I enjoyed the work. At first it was hard to find a full time position, but the casual work I did provided lots of experience and lead to permanent work in a local government centre. I was very fortunate in that role to have some amazing mentors and leaders to work with over 11 yrs. They shared a wealth of experience and knowledge with me which supported my ongoing learning and training and led to a position as the director of a small rural centre.

Having worked in both local government services and the community based sector my observation is that both providers focused on service provision to the highest standard we could achieve.

In community-based centres such as ours a voluntary committee operates the centre. I am employed to be in charge of the day to day operations under the supervision and guidance of our Management Committee. The parents who hold the approval to operate and participate in the decision making for the centre are representative of the families in the community that we provide for. This has always guided the centre towards a quality focus on children and families. Our management committees over the past 15 years have always been supportive of and thankful for the quality of work done by the staff in this centre, and though unable to pay above award due to the need for fee restraint, have long recognised it is a vastly undervalued and underpaid profession.

Despite the constantly changing frameworks, standards and curriculums I continue to work in early childhood education and care because I get to make a difference in someone's life every day I come to work. Significantly it is only because I am a director not an educator that I am able to support my family on my wage.

The availability of our service in our small rural community enables local families to choose to work, study or participate in the community. Families who live and work in rural communities need to have the access to quality care for their families. The families who use our centre are (or have been) the local teachers, pharmacists, chefs, doctors, farmers, council workers, health care workers, sales staff, waitresses, lawyers, accountants, factory workers, seasonal pickers and packers, florists, postal contractors, students, volunteers and artists. Families access our centre for many reasons, for example, to enable them to volunteer at school, support children with health or additional needs, care for elderly family members or manage chronic health conditions or shop without the stress of travelling in the car with a child who gets car sick. Without local childcare of high quality all the contributions these families make to our community would be lost.

In addition to what happens while the child is here with us, the connections that

families form in our centre carry on outside the centre enhancing positive inclusion into school, sporting and art groups and the development of social networks based that enhance their work and family life. Being able to work and live in the same community has many environmental, economic and health benefits.

Generally families bring their children to us as a choice. I feel that they choose this centre because it is a small community based centre. The families volunteer to run the centre and it has comparatively small group sizes. Family feedback has been that they like the natural environment and home like feel to the spaces. Most importantly, families like to make a connection with the staff quickly so they can feel confident about leaving their children.

The educators are members of the local community, the sense of ownership and connectedness is strength when meeting the needs of families and making them feel welcomed and included. Their local knowledge about events and celebrations means educators can converse with children and families about what has been happening in their world – sharing common interest like the local footy or scouts. Giving children a sense of importance, knowing what their favourite beach is like or talking about where to get the best fossils, knowing where someone lives or what happened overnight when the wind blew. Being able to discuss the struggles of local weather, garden or land management and what this means for families. Letting everyone know about family events like the lantern parade or Christmas parade and how to be involved or when the toy library is open. Just modelling to the children how to treat a wide range of people with respect and friendship is a huge step in building community strength.

Our sense of belonging to and being proud of our community is a strong base from which to raise healthy families. The way we share the challenges and more importantly celebrate the work involved in raising healthy families is a powerful message to our clients and the extended community. All this connection and engagement has a ripple effect in the wellbeing of our thriving community.

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**Julie Clark-Smith, Parent, Cygnet Community Children's Centre**

I just wanted to say that having a local childcare with great educators means so much to me because I feel secure that my children, Charlee and Jack, are getting the best care.

She feels happy and comfortable there, I don't have to worry that she is stressed. I know she feels cared for and loves her carers too. Her education needs are being met and she also enjoys learning new things in an environment that she feels supported in.

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**Chris Baczkowski, Early Childhood Teacher, Cygnet Community Children's Centre**

We believe that all learning is like learning to walk or talk. We need someone to show us how by doing it where we can see or hear, we need to be motivated to have a try, and practice (for some a lot of practice). But mostly we need to be able to make mistakes and be helped back up supportively and with love. This includes learning to make friends, learning to share, learning how to express emotion and learning to learn.

Quality early childhood education and care provide great outcomes for children. Just imagine if every family could offer their child the opportunity to experience an early childhood education and care setting that is of high quality. How much more could they learn when their play was supported by qualified educators as well as their loving families? I have been teaching at Peregrine School, for the past six years and have seen the difference in children who have had the opportunity to attend a quality child care centre, such as Cygnet Community Children's Centre. The early learning and socialisation that occurs in this environment is severely underestimated by most of the community. Children who have the skills and confidence to ask questions in the group situation, share their thoughts and beliefs with adults and peers and confidently engage with the learning opportunities provided at school have a greatly advantaged start to their education. In addition to the quality of life for the child, the whole community is richer for its diversity and the learning that happens when we meet someone different.

Our local kindergarten teacher comments frequently that children who have attended early childhood education and care have a much more positive introduction into the kindergarten setting. They are more independent in routines, able to separate happily from parents and can manage in the social setting with much less anxiety. In essence this means ready to get on with the business of formal learning. Where kindergarten teachers had met children who will be attending next year they sometimes recommend enrolment at our centre to the families. They recommend this to provide some "practice" time for separation and social development.

In addition to the educational benefits, many centres make key differences in the support of vulnerable families and children at risk. If a child is 'at risk', but able to access a quality early childhood education and care program we can make immeasurable differences for that child. We can support development, provide a consistent relationship; provide links to additional support, in essence care for the child while providing early intervention. A child can be 'at risk' for many reasons. They may not be able to grow or develop at the 'normal' rate due to birth, genetic, or other issues. If those families come to us we can assist them to make the connections to early support services, and provide ongoing support for the child to get them the best possible early start. If children are at risk because their families are unable or sadly unwilling to provide the proper care or nurturing we can advocate and report to the proper agencies for those children. If a child just sees the world differently and does not cope or learn the same way their siblings or others do, we can help the family come to terms with the difference, access information and celebrate their child. We can also assist the child develop and practice coping strategies. In all interventions the earlier we start the better the outcome can be.

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**Mirjam Holthuis, Parent, Cygnet Community Children's Centre**

I believe childcare has been the greatest gift for my sons, especially the youngest one with a disability. He learns by copying and seeing other children going about their business has stimulated his learning. This was later continued in school. He learned to crawl and walk at childcare and tried much harder around other children to push his limits. I believe educators have a great responsibility with our children and the centres my children have been lucky enough to visit have been fantastic in supporting my children to learn and feel happy at childcare. Apart from having the availability of a childcare centre in our community, it is great to also be able to leave your child somewhere where he is happy and respected for who he is. I have no doubt that my child with a disability presents challenges for staff, I feel the less good times are part of life and easy to get over as the good times are so much better and happen more often.

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**Natalie Leader, Director, Cygnet Community Children's Centre**

Money spent on providing training for our workforce, while appreciated, is only ever going to get a poor return. In the past 12 months I have lost six educators, three had Certificate III qualifications, two had funded Diplomas, and one has attended 20-30 hours of funded training in the past two years. Of these six, only one has worked in the sector after receiving their qualification. Funding for training has insufficient impact on the long-term quality and experience available in the sector.

For example, an employee of mine, Chloe, had finished her Certificate III in October and had enrolled in her Diploma. She and her partner were clinging on to the hope that the Early Years Quality Fund provisionally offered would be delivered. She and her partner want a mortgage and a family and couldn't see a way to achieve their dreams on their combined income. Chloe is now performing unqualified data entry for a financial services company on twice the hourly rate she was receiving here. The children and families in our centre lost the friendship and care of a vibrant, intelligent and caring young woman because she could not afford to live on her wage.

In my role as a director my greatest challenge is recruiting. When I advertise if I am lucky enough to get enquiries, few are suitable for the position. This time around I have a plethora of applicants, however with the exception of one they have inadequate training or are well qualified people who put many conditions on their availability. My one applicant without these challenges is an existing staff person looking to change positions and, if I allow her to move into this position, I will then have to fill hers. At this point as in almost every other occasion in the last ten years I am clinging to hope that this will be the last time I have to select the applicant who presents the least challenging path, rather than the very best person for the job.

The continuity of staffing in ECEC setting is important to families and children as well as the health and wellbeing of the employees in the centres. Stable staff presence to build relationships with the children and allow interpersonal learning and learning about their extended community and the world is paramount. If a child is spending all their mental resources building new relationship and coping with grief for lost relationships, learning is inhibited. Stress for a person makes their body produce cortisol, and ongoing high cortisol levels in the child's physiology are known to have a lifelong detrimental impact for their physical and mental health.

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**Ros Francis, Educator, Cygnet Community Children's Centre**

While the work we do is incredibly rewarding it is also hard, it requires a broad skill set and a depth of knowledge. It is very stressful work, emotionally and physically. Educators not only work to care for and educate children but also their families, the community and their colleagues. The work carries a heavy burden of responsibility, in the absence of a parent you are everything to the small child in your care. They are completely dependent on you. You are in essence in loco parentis.

I feel quality childcare is vital to our future. Everyone knows the first five years are a foundation of a person's development and wellbeing and the community cannot afford to neglect any child.

This demands good economic resources which will enable flexibility, respect and provide ongoing affordable education to staff no matter what age or stage they have achieved.

Managing change is a constant in our modern world. We know this. However it would have to be said that the biggest challenge in embracing the National Quality Framework for educators is the doubt surrounding its lifetime and when the next change will come. In my 15 years as a director I would estimate that I lose a team member each time we are asked to implement "a new way of doing things" because each change impacts on everything we do. Everything we do from the language we use to the documents we are required to use and maintain. Each change takes away from time and energy available for working with children and families and improving our centre. Each change means educators spend more hours at meetings (frequently unpaid due to tight budgets) and in the evenings. More time away from their families and absolutely drained as the result. At this point many have decided "it simply isn't worth it anymore" or "I just can't do it again".

Among the National Quality Framework's key elements are the notion of ongoing reflection, review and improvement. This means the whole framework from service (centre) level right through to the Authorities and the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority will undertake the process of review and

improvement. The changes from this process reflect manageable and responsive change for improvement. Having embraced each version of the National Childcare Accreditation System, numerous state based curriculum initiatives and significant (and welcomed) changes in the training and assessment of students, centres like ours are change fatigued. The constant drain on financial and human resources and energy when embracing and implement change is having a critical impact on our ability to move forward and retain experienced educators.

In conclusion I believe that the things of most importance to our sector the need to improve the quality and quantity of people choosing to work and stay in ECEC by reviewing the funding model. Centres should be funded as an essential service for children. The funding should be sufficient to enable the awarding of pay rates that reflect the importance of ECEC educators in the quality of our Sector and the knowledge and skill required to fulfil that role. Secondly, stabilise the quality framework and standards. We have an amazing framework that has the potential to deliver professional and responsive early learning and care services throughout Australia. I believe we should give it the time and resources it needs to achieve what it aspired to achieve.

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**Sarah Wormald, Director, Two Wells Community Children's Centre**

I have worked in the early years sector for 13 years. It is very rewarding, busy and an sector that is built on relationships, resourcefulness and the ability to meet the individual needs of every child and family that walks through the door, while maintaining a safe, caring and educational service.

Quality is about relationships with all stakeholders, responding to children's needs, consistency in staffing, and staff members who are educated and continuously developing skills to move with the times through training and development. It is about having quality staff members who feel valued, and rewarded for their commitment and dedication. It's about educators having generous time within work hours to program and plan for the children in care. It's about the sector recognising the growing needs of children with special needs accessing childcare, yet educators having minimal training and limited government funding to provide early intervention initiatives on site.

The role professional wages would play is simple. They get paid what they deserve. I used to get paid more working for Coles supermarket than working in childcare! Parents would recognise that we are more than just babysitting we are educating and caring for children. We are providing early intervention. We can provide consistent high quality educators for the community, children and families because the people who genuinely have the passion can remain in the sector instead of seeking higher wages in often unrewarding jobs to make financial ends meet. Indeed, the 40-50% turnover of educators annually is not a figure to



be proud of. Parents are often not the primary educator of their children when working full time, it is our job to be doing this for the families. If educators are paid professional wages we will retain them over time, keep them updated with training and their experience and knowledge builds parents confidence in ability.

Staff turnover is never ending its like two steps forward one step back. It is so hard to build a positive high quality service culture with a revolving door.

There's lots of way we can improve our sector. For example, we could receive funding for educators to undertake minimum ten hours a year training and development. Tertiary studies for the sector should require some time to be an apprentice, for example two days a week at a centre while studying at TAFE. There are too many training providers signing off on poor quality students who are not workforce ready and lowering our standards. We need professional wages for educators so we can retain the people who are genuinely dedicated to the sector and who are in it for the right reasons. We need increased training within tertiary sector in understanding and dealing with children who have special needs. We could also have speech pathologists, occupational therapist, and behavioural therapists visiting sites fortnightly to educate educators, early intervention strategies, practise skills and share learning ideas.

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**Loretta Ross, Preschool Room Leader, Goodstart Early Learning St Leonards**

In my centre, I've found that staff members always want to know more and learn more. The issue in the sector is not a lack of interest in the work, it's a problem of not having professional recognition or pay. In my experience it is a very difficult job to balance professional development, paperwork, evaluating each day's experiences, plans, learning and challenges. I have seen staff come and go because they do not earn enough to stay. I have seen staff move back in with their parents because they can't afford rent, food, car repayments. I've even seen staff cancel holidays and even a wedding. My colleagues and I have had breakdowns from stress. In this career there are so many doubts and challenges. At the end of the day we know our impact but it is not validated by the community. We are not labelled as professionals or experts despite the many skills we must learn and improve for everything we do in one day. I am concerned for our future. Early education in Australia is no longer 'babysitting'. Times have changed. Expectations have been built upon research. Now, we need a way and help to meet those expectations with more government grants, support and professional wages to encourage our educated, hardworking and experienced staff to stay on board to educate our future doctors, scientists, artists, photographers, politicians, authors, nurses, mums, dads, counsellors, judges and lawyers. By helping the staff and the services, we can encourage parents to search for quality in qualified staff and appealing services and help them see quality in practice. In line with the national

quality standards this can help put Australia back in the spotlight of amazing early childhood education. I enjoy documenting children's learning and I try to be creative with how it is done. Sometimes the paperwork can be overwhelming but alongside EYLF experts and courses I feel that our documentation can really help visualise and expose what we do as educators and what the children benefit from and learn. I believe staff members need more reasons to stay and services need more support through better funding of the sector and its workers.

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**Christina Ryan, Group Leader, Churches of Christ Care**

I am studying for my four year degree and now qualify for a kindergarten teacher position. I was lucky enough to be offered one last week at a for-profit Long Day Care centre offering the kindergarten program with government funding. I turned this position down though as the pay rate was about \$23 an hour which is less than what I get paid now working as a group leader in a not for profit centre. My situation illustrates the endemic issue in my sector : inappropriate remuneration for the skill set required. My question is why would early childhood educators invest their time and money in a four year degree when the pay rate at the end of it is so atrocious? My study has been the most valuable thing I have ever done; it has improved my self-esteem, my appreciation of diversity and increased my love of working with children, especially from disadvantaged backgrounds. There is a mismatch between the qualifications needed and the pay rate that goes with it.

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**Rebekah Michelmore, Owner/ Educator, Homegrown Family Day Care**

Educators give their heart and soul to educate children. We use the latest philosophies and teaching techniques. We have studied and required to continually attend professional development, first aid, meeting and other training in our own time. I run a Family Day Care and charge \$8 per hour per child, and I still need to take expenses out of these wages. I don't get paid to undertake programming. I am currently studying to change my career to get a professional wage. The sector suffers with staffing inconsistencies which in turn affects the quality of care that can be provided. Professional wages would allow more people to stay in the sector and support their families as well as the children the care fore.

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**Rebecca Wilson, Director, Goodstart Early Learning Centre Boonah**

This is a submission on behalf of my service. My name is Rebecca and I would like to share with you some insight into my time in the early childhood education and care sector.

In 1996 I came to the sector as a school leaver with little understanding or knowledge of what was ahead of me. It was my chosen career path, because I wanted to make a difference in the lives of young children in our area. My history as a child coming from a low social economical area, having an additional need and being one of six children growing up, I wanted to make a positive difference to the children in my care.

I started as an unqualified educator in a privately run centre, where my job description was far different from my daily job requirements. I was employed as an assistant in a room, but with quality not a focus of the centre, I found myself spending little to no time with the children and more time completing book work, documentation and even yard and maintenance work. I decided the only way to get more time in the room was to become qualified. I completed my Certificate III and then my Diploma in a short time frame of two years, whilst continuing to work within a variety of services.

Over the 18 years I have now worked within the sector I have seen a variety of different quality standards within a variety of different companies, both private and public or not for profit. The sector has changed I believe for the better, but there is still room for change, as long as quality is still the focus of that change. I believe the key point that needs to be addressed is in the 'name' Early Education and Care is our sector and when you look at this, the focus has shifted from Care to education, we are an early education service and we also care for those children in our care, a balance needs to be met. We are not treated equally to others in our sector and our wage rates reflect this. It is important that there is a cultural change in the way that we are seen as educators. I understand that a lot of people are focussing on the "wage" and this is true but when we are recognised for our contribution to the early education sector we will be able to retain our quality educators within the sector to only improve our quality within the rooms. The NQF has assisted with allowing more quality time for the children and less time around the paper trail that was associated with "childcare".

We take pride on our relationships with our families, or community and our children in our care, and they support us and have confidence in what we do each and every day. However the impact of staff changes not only affects the daily running on the service but also effects and impacts the children and families. Separation anxiety is the a major behavioural issue with families, knowing that we are building quality lasting relationships is fundamental, not knowing when their child's educator will leave is detrimental. The high staff turnover in the sector is clearly linked to qualifications and the wage issues. We have control over both, but still seem to have issues with both.

I am now a Bachelor qualified educator, which holds a contact director role within

a small rural town. I am still continuing to further my educator. I have grown as a person and as an educator. I am more educated, more understanding and more refined in how I run my service. I value and respect my educators as individuals who are all on their own journey. They are the backbone of this sector and need to be shown that their contributions to the future of our country are acknowledged through wage recognition. We are willing to pay the price for a high quality couch, but not for a high quality educator or education and care service.

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**Kelly Brookes, Educator, not-for-profit centre**

Throughout my time in childcare I have been greatly shocked and disappointed with the lack of rewards educators receive to assist them with the great work they do and to assist them in staying in the sector with wages that support the work they do. At my last centre, I watched as the kindergarten room went through five teachers in one year due to low wages, limited support from management and the stresses caused by working in an sector with such wages and the stress that comes with paperwork and documentation. During an interview with four of these staff members, the director and I were told that if the wages were higher, the stress would be better managed at home, as they wouldn't be competing with home lives/teaching lives and the money that supports them.

During this time it was also clear when trying to find new qualified bachelor teachers to fill the position in the kindergarten room, that 95% of the applicants were fresh out of university with no experience. This is quite alarming in my opinion! With the number of staff changes that happen in childcare this also bring stress upon other staff, families and children. This comes as it takes a minimum of 2-4 weeks to find and start a new teacher at the centre, and therefore the children and families meet a diploma qualified staff member between the teacher transitions; which do not appear to be smooth. This causes great upset to the children's well-being and sense of belonging as they try to form relationships with the new educators: which are forever changing due to stresses and limited wages. This also causes centres to loose families and children, as they become aware of the changeover in staff and want the best for their child in the transition to school period.

The National Quality Framework started off with a bang and lots of centres feeling scared and not ready, however I believe it is a framework that needs to stay in place for centres to show their quality ratings and to assist families in feeling safe and supported within the centre their child attends. This is also increasing the safety, wellbeing and care that is being provided to the children; who begin learning from birth and therefore need to be supported from this age.

The paperwork and documentation that comes with childcare is very important in documenting children's learning and development. This assists educators to

plan and support children's learning for their future and their lives at school and further. However since working at a number of centres it is clear that centres are confused about the number of observations required per child to confidently show the child's learning and development.

The quality improvement plans are also a great thing to come to childcare centres as they form a better setting for the children to grow and develop confidently and safely!

Things that need to improve in childcare for staff to stay:

1. Better wages for all staff
2. Better ratios for children
3. More programming time allocated within the regulations and requirements (one hour is not enough and causes staff to take work home and spend hours at home catching up on important documentation).

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**Natalie Eldridge, Director, A Brighter Beginning**

I am a Director of a small early learning centre on the Gold Coast and have worked in the child care sector for the past 23 years across New South Wales, ACT, Northern Territory and Queensland. I entered the sector as an unqualified assistant, I now hold a Bachelor of Child and Family Studies, Advanced Diploma of Community Services, a Diploma and a Certificate III in Child Care. I am currently studying for a Graduate Diploma of Education through Griffith University.

As a Director I employ several staff members, two of which are certificate trained staff who receive \$19.07/hour as Assistants at our Centre. Both ladies work second jobs (one in a bar, the other as shop assistant in a chemist) to help meet their financial commitments. There are often discussions in our staff room about the low rate of pay (compared to their other jobs) and the regulatory demands and responsibility placed on them in the roles as child care assistants. There is a great concern that the sector will be unable to sustain these staff members, as financial and work commitment pressures exceed their personal enjoyment/reward of working within the childcare industry. I feel this issue similarly, as does another staff member who is also studying her Bachelor of Early Childhood. Both of us are acutely aware of the wide variances in conditions for a four year Bachelor qualified educator working in a Long Day Care centre as opposed to an educator working in a school. The rate of pay, contact hours with the children and holidays per year are all factors which dissuade educators from choosing the early childhood sector to seek, instead, employment within the formal schooling system. The retention of qualified staff (be they Certificate, Diploma or Bachelor qualified) has a major effect on building and maintaining quality interaction

and programs within the early childhood field. It also contributes to the greater negative perception of the early childhood sector as we are seen as being unable to retain high quality staff and this diminishes the level of respect and the integrity of the industry. It also diminishes us as professionals. Ensuring that senior staff members find that their work is sustainable and available to mentor the less experienced and or less qualified staff is imperative in improving the long term quality of our industry.

The implementation of the National Quality Framework to a reasonable standard is dependent on qualified and experienced staff being available to lead less qualified or experienced staff through the process. The breadth of the framework allows for many perceptions and interpretations to be considered. The ability to interpret and implement the framework in your own way is desirable if the early childhood staff members are experienced and knowledgeable. However, in many circumstances inexperienced staff members are placed in lead educator roles and they are not capable of implementing the framework properly, resulting in poor quality programs.

Along with the implementation of the National Quality Framework and the Early Years Learning Framework, there has also been an increasing amount of pressure placed on educators to upgrade their skills and participate in professional development. In addition to childcare qualifications there are also mandatory requirements that the majority of staff within a service must hold. Achieving and maintaining first aid training, asthma and anaphylaxis, blue cards, fire training, nutrition and food handling training are all ongoing requirements that are met solely by the employee. Professional development that is scheduled during work time has a direct impact on centre resources i.e. replacing staff or cost of the in service training. All of the staff within our centre support up-skilling and professional development but we have to start asking, "at what cost?" Considering the low rate of pay despite the high level of qualification, it's increasingly hard to see it as worthwhile.



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**Anita Hamilton, Director, Clontarf World of Learning**

I have been working in the Early Childhood Sector for 12 years, I am originally from New Zealand where early childhood education is very important and teachers are well respected and treated as professionals.

Since moving to Australia and working in the sector here for the last six years, it is apparent that the early childhood education sector is still in its infancy. Many people still see the facilities provided as day care centres and describe the staff using terms like 'child care workers' rather than 'educator', which is what we really are. It is currently, and has been for a while, a battle for the dedication and commitment of early childhood educators to be recognised for the many hours and effort they put in to study and be qualified. It is, in fact, the same length of time and effort it takes for a person to become a qualified sheet metal worker who, with the same level of qualification, gets paid a much higher rate. It is an even bigger battle to be recognised as professionals with professional wages. Unfortunately, due to the inconsistency in the wages between industries the early childhood sector loses out. The turnover is constant; recruitment is a very long process with many now asking the money question up front and ending the interview before it has really started. Quality early childhood education begins with quality educators who require qualifications and experience. In order to attract the right kind of people, who will stay and provide a stable learning environment for children, we need professional wages.

As the attitudes towards early childhood change with the implementation of the Early Years Framework, parents will be more aware of the teaching aspects of our services and be looking for services with highly qualified and experienced staff. As both a parent and a Director I strive for this within my service. High staff turnover does not promote stability or consistency for children. It creates a sense of uncertainty and does not allow for the establishment of a routine. Children learn best in a safe and secure environment and they must have a good relationship and trust in the people around them. We simply cannot provide this when services are losing staff every few months because they cannot afford to stay.

The introduction of the National Quality Standard has further highlighted the need for quality early childhood education if we are to have good educational outcomes for Australia's children. This Standard has given services and companies a tool to ensure that the regulations are met and that we are providing quality services for our children.

I believe for the attitudes towards early childhood in Australia to change and for quality to be a priority, we must be recognised as professionals. We must be put in the same standing as teachers. Early childhood education is more than just caring for children. We are teaching them and setting them up to be our future world leaders, athletes and academics. We equip them with skills for life and promote the importance of life-long learning.

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**Leisa Pickard, Director, Goodstart Rutherford**

Our families deserve and expect the best, their children are the most precious things in their lives and to leave them with other people on a daily basis they need to be assured that these people are professionals, the right people for the job.

The biggest issue in our sector that we face is the high turnover of staff. It is so detrimental to our provision of quality care because the revolving door of people is not conducive to creating a stable environment for the children. Really, \$18 to \$20 an hour is not a viable income. The new requirements for educators to hold a minimum of a Certificate III qualification and for over 50% of staff members in a centre to have Diploma or higher is an amazing win for the sector. It will ensure that we have properly trained professionals teaching the next generation of children. Now it is time to remunerate them correctly. Highly educated, experienced professionals deserve professional wages. It is that simple.

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**Danielle Lange, Director , Goodstart Estella**

Studies show that the first five years of a child's life are the most important years of their lives. Working in the early childhood sector, we need to make sure we are providing all areas of development whilst following child/family routines and to keep the children safe. Due to the importance of all of this, we need professionals to undertake the job who are, in turn, paid a professional wage.

There are some very stressful days in early childhood. Educating and caring for young children, we have a high level of responsibility, arguably more than a primary or high school teacher and, yet, we are paid far less. This low wage is not only unfair as it is incommensurate to the level of training and to the professionalism with which we conduct ourselves; it also negatively impacts the sustainability of the sector.

Poor wages mean a lot of educators are leaving the sector. Early childhood teachers are hard to come by and recruitment is a lengthy process that takes away from our face time with children. Nearly every centre needs teachers but there is little in the way of money to attract them. This sector needs to improve and educators need to be recognised for the hard work and dedication we give to the children, families and wider community every day.

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**Elizabeth Robbie, Director, Goodstart Junee**

I have worked in the early childhood sector of over 20 years and believe that I do it for my love of children and watching my impact on their development. Despite the deep personal satisfaction I derive from my job, I also believe that my work has been to the detriment of my own family. I work long hours for less pay than my sister who works 9 to 5 in a call centre.

The turnover in staff that I see in the remote services that I work in can mean that some children don't even get one qualified worker for a complete year of care. Educators are always quickly moving on for the kind of work that gives them more money for less stress.

We have been advertising for an early childhood teacher for two years now at our service and have only had two qualified people apply. Both these teachers have been offered the position, only to turn it down when they realised the rate of pay. I can never match their pay expectations and the sector, being a small service I am not in a position to just keep upping my offers.

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**Cyrene Adams, Group Leader, Goodstart Calamvale**

My name is Toni Lang and I have been a Director at this centre for four years now. I am submitting on behalf of all the educators who work at my centre. When I first began working at this centre in 2010 the staff turnover was very high. During a period of 12 months, 12 permanent employees left the centre due to them being unskilled for the positions they were currently in. Countless casual employees left for the same reason. When someone leaves, it is because the low pay rate has taken its toll. Since the introduction of the NQF in 2012, I have had only two staff members leave, because they were moving to another state and I have had two others relocate through the company into higher job roles as they have developed their professional skills. I think, the NQF has allowed us to consolidate the level of skills required for these roles and accordingly ensure that the right people are doing the right roles.

Recruitment in my sector, regardless of the reasons why we have to do it means I lost a lot of valuable time in replacing them and in the meantime had to employ high rate casual workers. I would spend roughly a half an hour per job role on advertising for a position, up to two hours interviewing for each placement, four hours for each new employee to go through the orientation process and, over the course of a month, multiple 'in action' training sessions of the policy and procedures. This time is in addition to updating them on current requirements and expectations in their new job role. This is all valuable time that has taken me away from supporting the families, children and educators within the service. High turnover of staff has not only a negative impact on the children, who miss the educators they grow attached to, but also on my operation as a business.

Since the introductions of the NQF educators are keen to stay, there is more team work and passion. This is evident in the dramatically reduced staff turnover rate. The children are settling quicker and families are staying longer. I think a real community feel has formed at the centre. The educators are engaging with enthusiasm for professional training to learn more and to engage in professional growth within the sector.

I am currently working alongside the third Director this centre has had over my time here. When I first began working here at this centre the staff turnover rate was very high, with many new faces appearing each month. It made it very difficult to put into place appropriate communication techniques and difficult to develop skills both on my own professionally and with others. This continued until the beginning of 2012 when the NQF was introduced. Now educators are only leaving to move into higher job roles within the sector. I have seen a vast improvement in the skills and capabilities of educators within the sector as they are receiving more support and guidance from both the Early Years Learning Framework and the National Quality Framework. They have both lifted the quality and standards of early education and care. I have used it as a scale on which to measure my skill level and work to achieve higher standards. With the inclusion of the EYLF and the NQF I have developed my skills as a professional in a way that benefits the children in my care the most and assists other educators to do the same.

Our educators believe that having a high staff turn-over leads to families feeling unfamiliar with the educators within our centre and developing insecure and negative feelings towards early childhood education and care. In our experience in 2011 and the beginning of 2012 we had many families questioning us on the reasoning behind the turnover rate and leaving due to the unsettled feeling in the centre and not wishing to leave their child with different educators all the time. This affects the children very much as they are forced somewhere new, taken away from their close friendships that they have formed and they also can develop a sense of insecurity and mistrust about being left in an early childhood setting.

Quality in early education means having qualified skilled staff, staff collaboration, happy and engaged learning with children and educators. We believe quality is represented by competent and professional staff, punctual and regular attendance of the children at the service and good relationships with families. Quality educators should be able to assist in diagnosing any development issues in children, collaborate with other professionals within their community (like government agencies, schools, specialists etc.) and engage in on-going professional development. Quality is shown when the children are demonstrating a progression of development, the provision of educational resources and a stimulating environments is occurring and educators are given adequate non-contact time to plan and reflect on the curriculum.

Professional wages would play a massive role in ensuring quality and confidence because it would encourage educators to remain in the sector which leads to a

low turnover rate. A low turnover rate means that there is increased confidence from families as they are able to form lasting relationships with professionals and their children are then more secure. This also leads to more experienced educators and a higher quality of care and education service. Professional wages would reflect the long work hours and high demands of the current job role that the educators currently employ. Professional wages would help educators to remain in the sector as it would relieve them of the stress of the financial burden that the low paying rate in the sector currently creates. Educators would feel valued and viewed as professionals which would make them more motivated to stay in the early childhood sector. Professional learning and study would be more appealing as it would be more affordable to undertake to strengthen the educator's skills. Early childhood teachers would remain in the sector as their role would be viewed and respected in the same light as it would be in a school system.

We believe that the NQF reflects the UN convention of the rights of the child. It respects and values children and their own individuality with regard to life and learning. We teach them how we can learn and grow together with educators and our peers. I believe this creates a greater sense of individual self-worth and the worth of the communities around us. It encourages equity among children and gives all children the right to the best possible start in life.

Since the introduction of the NQF I personally have seen great change occur within our centre. Our centre has pushed the NQF as a standard with our education and practices within the centre and we have been able to up-skill our educators to what we believe to be a much higher quality. This is shown through their understanding and implementation of education at the centre, the retention of educators with high quality skill sets and the involvement of the educators within the centre, the community and the professional society.

We believe that early childhood education and care can be improved by encouraging the community to understand the importance of the first five years of a child's life and the important role that educators in the sector play in teaching our children. We believe in a professional wage being given to educators for the role and responsibility that they undertake each day at their job role. Furthering the qualifications of the educators is important to maintain high quality education and care for children and to ensure that the best opportunities are made available to the children attending each service. We believe in keeping the educator to child ratio's low as this ensures that all children are given the respect and individual care that they need and deserve. We wish for our professional development in the sector to continue to encourage further growth and increase networking between professionals throughout the early childhood sector. We believe that having a clear standard of education and care for all of Early Childhood is paramount and that this is being achieved with the NQF and the EYLF and strongly believe that they enhance the quality of education and care for all children which supports our company's motto "Children are central to everything we do".

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**Jessica Martin, Educator 2IC, Meadowbank TAFE Children's Centre**

I work in an excellent centre with hardworking staff. As a team we have embraced the NQF and are very pleased with the new standards and professionalism it has brought to the sector. However in July 2012, two of our staff members have left the centre and have still not been replaced. One of those was the early childhood teacher and director which lead to another staff member been moved off the floor to the office. As a consequence, we have had a string of casuals which had to be trained in centre polices, routines and required documentation. These changes have negatively affected staff morale and caused stress and pressure on all those at the centre staff, children and families included. Unfortunately this is not an uncommon story in ECEC. This sector calls for more stability in the staffing arrangements which can only be achieved by supporting professional wages. Stability in staffing will lead to a more enriched early learning experience which will enable children to reach their full potential.

The NQF created a professional workforce now we need professional wages to match.

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**Chris Sneddon, Educator, Kanga's House Child Care Centre**

I have been working in the ECEC sector for over seven years and in that time have come to work alongside some amazingly talented people. Unfortunately, being able to work with them never lasts long. The low wages across the sector have forced many of my colleagues to alter their career path, so that they can seek a job that provides a decent weekly wage (not a significant wage, mind you, just enough to be able to live week to week and afford the Sydney's cost of living). High staff turnover obviously has negative effects on early childcare services, and more directly, negative effects on the overall learning and development of the children enrolled in the service. The positive feelings of safety and security that young children develop through being familiar with their educators are continually broken as educators leave the sector. These first five years of a child's life are fundamental to establishing the groundwork for a happy, healthy and productive future. A quality early childcare service is a service with low staff turnover; a service full of highly motivated staff who do not have to worry if they will be able to financially survive their near future.

The service that I currently work at (Kangas House C.C.C, UNSW Early Years) is in the minority in that it already pays its early childhood educators a professional wage and the benefits are undeniable (I would invite anyone who is sceptical to visit our service and view the evidence first hand: I am sure that you will be pleasantly surprised). In saying this, we are constantly busy with settling children into the centre, monitoring the children's development and education, staying up to date with contemporary theoretical perspectives on early childhood education and extending our own professional development. It scares me to think that my fellow colleagues across the nation, who do not have the security of professional



wages, must find a way to fit all of this into their day while simultaneously wasting time and effort on never ending recruitment and training, resettling children with new educators and worrying about their own personal financial insecurity.

In the past four years I have had firsthand experience of the implementation of the National Quality Framework (NQF). In my opinion, the introduction of the NQF has achieved exactly what it promised to do: raise quality and drive continuous improvement. Over the past two years the NQF has provided specific direction for me and my fellow colleagues at Kanga's House, improving the way we relate to the children we educate and care for. My conversations with colleagues from early childhood education services in other Australian states and territories would suggest that the NQF has had a positive impact right across the country. I believe that this is largely due to the National Quality Standard (NQS): the set of rules and regulations that ensure the safety, wellbeing and future achievement of our children on a daily basis. Recent suggestions for the NQS to be 'watered down', or the call for the removal of 'red tape' causes me to fear for the safety and wellbeing of the children in my care. My hope is that my colleagues and I will be able to continue to improve our own personal practice, and raise the quality of our service, through working towards achieving the positive outcomes set forth by the NQF.

These next few years are without doubt going to be a crucial time for the history of Australian early childhood education and care, and seemingly will turn out in one of two different ways: Australia will step up (backed by research), and develop a nationwide model for ECEC that places us as world leaders on this front or Australia will step down, back off, and revert to old 'tried and trusted' models that have placed us in our current childcare crisis. Be brave Australia, do it for the children.

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**Nichole Clendenning, Director, Goodstart Early Learning Woongarra**

I am a university educated early childhood educator. I am a centre director. I have completed my degree and recently enrolled in a fourth year. I have taught around the world. I have a wealth of knowledge through up-skilling in my chosen profession. I educate our future. I counsel our families. I assist families in financial and emotional times of needs. I cannot afford to stay in my chosen profession much longer. I am strongly considering leaving the industry.

How am I to attract and retain high quality staff when I can't assure them this is the sector they should be in when I doubt it myself? How can I assure parents and families their children are in the best education and care setting they are entitled to with such poor wages?

Would you stay?

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**Barbara Weeks, Director, Cairns TAFE Community Child Care Centre**

I have been working in the child care sector for over 20 years now. I was an educator in the room for 15 years and have been a director of a non-profit community centre for the last five years. I am lucky to be working in a non-profit centre that has great working conditions for educators and ample resources due to all the profits being put back into the centre but this doesn't happen everywhere. I believe the child care sector is in crisis due to poor wages, high expectations, lack of recognition or respect and the majority of the centres having high staff turnover. Quality child care requires qualified, dedicated educators to develop programs and experiences that are based on their knowledge of individual children in their care and childhood development. In my experience over the years many centres lack quality due to the educators that are employed. Many educators work for their love of the children but due to the long hours, educator to staff ratios, paper work and financial stress they either lose their passion or simply leave the industry. This affects the centre operators, parents, children and other educators as continuity is essential in providing quality child care.

To achieve quality child care the government needs to:

- Fund a pay rise for educators. Parents can't afford increased fees and centre operators can't afford to pay for wage increases. If the Fair Work Commission decides on a \$5 an hour increase after the review, this will have to be passed on to parents for centres to stay open. The government has to take responsibility for our educators and give them the financial respect and recognition they deserve, without this, educators are going to continue to leave the sector
- Follow through with the transitional ratios set under the NQF to decrease pressure on educators and allow more time for small group and individual educational development with the children.
- Keep the qualification requirements under the NQF. This inquiry aims to identify future options for addressing children's learning and development needs but wants to keep child care affordable for parents. Children will not learn and develop in early childhood centres with unqualified staff. Research shows learning and development from 0 - 5 years of age is crucial for future learning so why are we thinking of using unqualified people to teach our children
- Leave the NQF and current national regulations in place. The child care sector has had enough changes over the last five years and now the government wants to review it all again. The introduction of the NQF had a positive impact on the early childhood sector and still is today. If we are going to receive a new framework every time the government changes hands there won't be any educators left as it is stressful and time consuming to learn and train other educators.
- If you keep the qualification requirements for 4 year trained teachers to be working in child care centres, the government should fund educators from child care centres to be trained. I have heard of many centres hiring teachers that won't do the 'childcare' part of their job and this causes disputes and friction throughout the centre.

- Continue to support families financially with CCB and CCR, as I believe this makes child care more affordable for parents. CCR should not become income tested but should definitely be paid directly to services. Unfortunately we have families that don't pay their fees but the government still gives them quarterly lump sum payments which they don't give to the services. These families then just move centres, building up bills at multiple services but still taking the government's money.

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**Lauren Hampton, Assistant Manager, Educational Leader and Preschool Teacher, Civic Early Childhood Centre**

I am a fully qualified teacher and have just started studying my Master in Education. I can only afford to stay in the sector because it is just me however if I meet someone or start to think about buying a house I will have to move across to the primary sector as my wage will not supplement a mortgage. I also cannot afford to live on my own. The sector is a high stress under paid sector that unfortunately sees passionate educators leave due to financial pressure. If the government wants a quality sector, they will have to pay for quality educators!

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**Leah Malzard, Group Leader, Crèche and Kindergarten Association Kelvin Grove Community Child Care**

I am making this submission on behalf of my whole centre. We believe that a key indicator of a quality early childhood program is its highly qualified, experienced and skilled educators.

An early childhood educator is one who enacts social justice principles every day and who is also an agent of change and active in challenging inequality and inequity. An educator also listens to children strives to accept, understand and value diversity, in a living and learning environment.

Educators must also foster relationships, connections and communities. Relationships are embedded with meaning in the lives of families when genuine partnerships are cultured between educators, children and families. A quality early childhood education and care setting generates a living, learning and teaching community that connects children with their worlds.

Early childhood education and care settings are places where children come first. My centre embraces the Early Years Learning Framework vision that all children experience learning that is engaging and builds success for life. We also recognise that wages for all child care staff are low. While government initiatives such as free

training may help to relieve the financial pressure, they do not ensure quality training and the overall effectiveness of the early childhood education and care worker in the work place, and online training is not always the right choice.

There is little or no motivation to gain higher or additional qualifications as the financial benefit is small and the extra responsibility placed on the worker upon completion of the qualification is great. Professional status is an issue for our sector, with highly qualified, experienced educators feeling as though they are merely babysitters.

I have spent 23 years with my current centre, Crèche and Kindergarten Association.

Being an Early Childhood Educator is an extremely rewarding profession, with big responsibilities. I work to create genuine partnerships with parents, as we are partners in their child's learning.

Achieving quality in our sector is vital, having a professional wage for the professional job that I do, will allow me to stay in this industry. It will ensure that I can continue to pay my mortgage and other house hold expenses such as food, electricity and water. With a professional wage I will also be able to take my teenage daughter on a holiday, nothing fancy just to the Gold Coast for an overnight stay. Something that right now, I am unable to do as the essential expenses come first.

Early childhood education and care settings are inclusive and sustainable living and learning communities, where knowledgeable teachers are respected as educators of young children.

Quality in this vital sector is built on the unique role of its educators, our competencies, qualifications, dispositions and experience. This demanding and central role in the lives of young children needs to be appropriately resourced, supported and valued by everyone.

By funding better wages for myself and my colleagues will keep us in the industry; quality experienced and qualified educators. Not increasing our wages will mean a revolving door of inexperienced, unqualified workers put in the positions of educating our children. Leaving parents to wonder who will be with their children tomorrow, and the days after. Quality counts.

The early childhood education and care sector is in crisis now! Asking the government to subsidise a pay increase for this sector is vital to the industry, its work force, the community, and the future of Australia.

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**Nellie Hodda, Room Leader, Kindergarten Union Antso**

I studied my Diploma of Children's Services for two years full time after leaving high school, and I have worked in early childhood for the past three years. I have worked in a number of centres and have been amazed (and at times horrified) at the differences that are evident in this field.

Quality is higher ratios and qualified educators. If you compare Australia to the rest of the world in early childhood we are embarrassingly miles behind the majority of the developed world.

High staff turnover is common and it can be hard to find new staff members. In one centre that I worked at they had had seven different directors in only three years! On top of that they had several vacant positions that took over six months to fill. This left the rest of the staff exhausted, stressed and not able to give as high quality education and care to children as they should have.

In my past three months I would have averaged six hours a week (unpaid) overtime, as well as working right through my lunch break. I do this because it takes this time to get organised and prepared and so that when I am working I am able to be an effective educator for the children and families I work with.

I feel that for the training I completed (two years full time) I should be earning more than I am. The first three years of life are most important for brain development. Why isn't anyone recognising this and putting in place the funds for higher qualifications and ratios? Educators will stay in their positions for longer if they are paid equitably and have better conditions.

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**Kim Davidson, Educator, Smarter Kids Nerang**

I am an educator and I get paid \$20.30 an hour. For the past year I have worked as an educator studying for my Diploma. Most days my assistant and I have 12 to 17 children a day to educate. In the room we are changing at least five children in nappies four times a day and each time we have one less educator on the floor, creating an opportunity for 11 to 16 children to have accidents, altercations with each other, throw blocks or urinate on the floor. Children need to be played with but we also need the time to write up learning stories and information for extensions and other lessons, as well as teach and direct children to other activities. My assistant needs to help with small tasks for other rooms for toilet breaks or lunches so her absence from the floor is also problematic. We are understaffed but cannot afford to take on new members. I am tired of having to take so much work home. I have to do most of the programming of activities plus cleaning outside of work hours. My company has not paid my super for three years. We are really short on resources and the centre needs a lot of maintenance. We have to try and fundraise money for resources, mostly on my own time. I spend \$20 to \$50 per fortnight for extra resources and cooking ingredients. In my 30 years of work it is worst sector I have had to work in. I feel really unsupported, bullied and unprofessional. Everybody is exhausted and there is nothing left over at the end of the day.

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**Kim Holloway, Educator, Kindergarten Union Wattle Lane Ultimo**

I have worked in Long Day Care centres for 17 years, qualified with a Diploma and working primarily with children under two years of age. I am very dedicated to this profession because I feel that early childhood education is a basic right for children. The work I do is very rewarding but also mentally and physically demanding and I go home exhausted every day. The pay I receive is low in comparison to the work load I carry during the day, not to mention the after hours' non paid work I do to provide quality care and education for the children at my centre.

Because our wage is low it is hard to find staff members who are able to live on this amount of money and remain in the centres for long periods. Over the years fantastic people have come and gone due to the fact that they cannot pay their bills on such a low income. Due to my low income I have not been able to obtain a home loan and have always needed to rent. Unfortunately my unit has recently been sold and I cannot afford any other rentals in my area close to where I work. I am currently staying with friends until I can find affordable rental accommodation but unfortunately this will probably be a long distance from where I now live and further travel to and from work. This is a situation a lot of educators find themselves in.

I have been happy to see the changes that the NQF has made to the staff ratios. Lower ratios are also needed to provide quality education and care for children this is essential. We need to increase wages and improve conditions to attract quality educators and to keep these quality educators in our profession. Without better wages and conditions we will all suffer, children, families and educators alike. I have struggled for many years with the low wages but it is so much harder now as the price of rent and bills are increasingly rising. In the not too distant future I will also need to consider my options whether I should find a job with a better wage so as to not have to continue to struggle to pay my rent and bills. I wonder what my retirement will be like as I have not been able to afford to save money as all my wages goes towards these items. I am dedicated to my profession but I also need to consider my future and retirement.

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Authorised by Louise Tarrant,  
National Secretary, United Voice,  
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