



Hetty Johnston AM GAICD, MAICD

IM& HM Johnston
ABN: 51 658 254 104

30th September, 2025

Atten: Gerry McNally

Committee Secretary

Education and Employment References Committee

Dear Senate Committee,

Please find below my responses. I apologise for the brevity but I simply do not have time to put in writing everything I would otherwise include. If the inquiry requires any further elaboration, explanation or information I will be happy to provide it.

In response to:

- a) the health and safety of children in childcare services across the country;

If Australia is to remain an economically & socially viable democracy then we must prioritise the safety and wellbeing of our future – our children. There is no more pressing need than the purposeful nurturing and prioritisation of our nations children and young people. They are our future. These sentiments have been expressed on countless occasions by countless people and yet, they are just words – the carnage continues. It is action that is needed now, not words or countless inquiries.

Where ever there are children there will be sexual predators disguised as caring people just waiting for the opportunity to act on their sexual urges. And too, there will be even more 'others' who will profiteer from children such as those who trade images and services of children online, and those who financially exploit the vulnerabilities of children in every way possible. We know this. We know it is getting worse yet we fail to prioritise their safety.

Forgive me for my scepticism of this yet another inquiry. After 30 years in this space I am at the point of accepting the apathy of the community, and accepting that those in positions to protect children, to change the system, those with the ultimate duty of care, will never activate the urgency and sincerity necessary to reclaim the rights to a safe childhood in Australia.

It is the ultimate betrayal of not only the one in four of our nations children who will directly effected and their families, but of our nations future.

You can see Australia's future now, you can count it, you can survey it – you can find it playing and learning in childcare and classrooms across the nation. There lies our nirvana future.

You can also find them in psych wards, juvenile justice centres, homeless shelters, living rough, queuing in unemployment lines, caught up in child safety and mental health services, hospitals, drug and alcohol rehabs or, for far too many, in our cemeteries. And here lies the future for those we fail.

For Australia to prevail, we must ensure a healthy population, a healthy economy and a healthy environment. If any of those fail, we all fail.

This starts in the homes and childcare centres and schools. This has to be our priority.

- b) the effectiveness of Australia's childcare regulatory system, including the performance and resourcing of state and territory regulators and the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, in maintaining and improving quality;

Staff charged with caring and nurturing our children need to be supported and paid for the critical role they play in our society. Teachers and carers are leaving the profession in droves. Why? Find out why and fix it. Listen to those who do the work, they know what is happening at the coal face but they are unlikely to respond to an Inquiry submission request like this. They have already given up.

- c) early learning providers' compliance with quality standards and legislative requirements, including compliance with workplace laws and regulations;

Please see following a letter I sent to Minister Clare 3.7.2025. I was not given the opportunity to meet with the Minister nor any of his senior staff.

Good morning Minister Clare,

I am writing to you in relation to the most recent expose of sexual abuses in childcare and to ask for a meeting to discuss urgently necessary comprehensive, trauma informed training for child care. This microcredential will be officially launched in Brisbane Wed 9th July and is available now., With your support, it could be available to all who work in childcare, from the boardroom to the sandpit.

As you may know, I have been involved with the media response to safeguarding issues relating to the two most recent matters receiving media coverage and I am aware of another which is not yet in the media having occurred in the northern suburbs of Sydney. I understand that it is not appropriate to discuss this one publicly at this stage. I suspect this is the one where you have a connection.

Minister, I have been in this space for 30 years, both as Founder of Bravehearts Foundation and most recently Safeguarding People Australia. I joined the National Office of Child Safety as Inaugural Co-Chair of the National Office for Child Safety (NOCS) National Strategy Advisory Group (NSAG), and remain on that group which reports to the Attorney General.

Out of sheer frustration at the lack of effective training around sexual abuse I have recently partnered with Bond University and Ansvar Insurance to bring a powerful, effective, comprehensive, trauma informed, affordable, first of its kind safeguarding microcredential. The childcare industry needs this training and you can deliver it immediately by making funding available for the childcare industry to do so.

In partnership with Bond University and Ansvar Insurance, I created and have now completed this training – Safeguarding Vulnerable People. It is available now. It is exceptional. I am 100% confident that if every person involved in childcare, from the Boardroom to the carers were required to do this training the risk of sexual assault occurring, not being noticed, not being reported and not being stopped would be reduced exponentially.

This isn't just another box-ticking exercise. It's a 15 hour, evidence-based online course designed to equip every worker – from board room to the sand-pit, with knowledge and tools to prevent abuse, recognise warning signs and respond appropriately.

Coupled with other measures such as:- a National ban on the use of mobile phones in childcare, (something I called for at the outset of the Qld child care expose). as well as strengthened national regulatory oversight, national enforcement, fast tracked introduction of a National WWCC (an agenda item at NSAG), and strengthened Whistleblower protections; - I believe the risk and occurrence can be reduced substantially.

For background, I was headhunted by Ansvar to re-write their entire risk framework so as to ameliorate the risk of sexual assault following the revelations of the three Royal Commissions – Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, Aged Care and Disability. Ansvar have adopted my risk reduction framework across all sectors they insure, including childcare and education. Ansvar are now using this framework and, after the almost complete market failure in the space, they remain the only Australian Insurer to offer PSA (physical sexual abuse) insurance – a mandatory requirement for most organisations who receive government funding. However, as part of my risk reduction framework, they only offer PSA to organisations who are taking safeguarding seriously. They are in fact now doing much of the oversight that government should be doing.

In doing this consultancy with Ansvar I became exposed to the inner failings of organisations of all types in responding to the risk of sexual abuse. Consultants providing expensive but ineffective low quality tick-box policy and procedure. Woeful light touch training. I am not surprised that these offenders can offend for so long without detection. This has to end.

It became very clear that we needed a nationally consistent safeguarding training offering to all organisations working with children, young people and vulnerable adults.

Now we have it.

I am asking for someone in your office to do the course in order to satisfy yourselves that it meets and exceeds the child care Standards and then for you to expediate funding availability to childcare providers so they can do the course.

I am keen to discuss in further detail in a telephone or online meeting.

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Training is key. I cannot say that too often. Staff can not recognise, respond or report unless they are competent and confident. They can not understand the what, why and how of the safeguarding Standards unless they have been taught them, they cannot comprehend their importance unless they truly understand the nuances of abuse and they will not play their part in a change a culture unless they understand what that looks like and then participate enthusiastically. In my opinion, the current government training is light-touch, ineffective and misses the key learnings needed to change operational behaviour and culture.

I am aware that recently, new training is being developed by people working in the child protection, childcare sectors who have done the Bond University training. They are now using learning from the Bond training to develop their own training offerings. My only hope now is that they do this well and that children benefit.

d) the impact of childcare providers' employment practices on quality and safety;

The national child safe principles need to be imbedded. The answers on how to fix this system, including employment practices, can be found in robust implementation of same. Government just have to support and enforce rapid adoption, auditing and provide the robust and trustworthy employment and character background information when it is needed.

We have already seen the impact of not having done so.

e) the role of worker compensation and pay on childcare quality and safety;

As above. These workers need to be valued.

f) the role of private for-profit incentives and their impact on childcare quality and safety;

Government is solely to blame for most of the incidents we have seen in the media. Failure to adopt national information sharing, failure to insist on national consistency across States and Territories, failures in almost every aspect. These are key failures and these have been raised in almost every Inquiry report ever written. Yet, here we are decades later and it has not been achieved.

Any incentives for staff, either for-profit or for-purpose should be focused on safety **only**. This goes to organisational culture. Incentivising the occupancy or the lack of complaints or incidents is counter productive to child safety. The aim must be 'safety first' - always. That should include incentives.

g) transparency within the early childhood education and care system, including access to information and data;

As above. You can't blame the ECEC sector for these fails.... The system they should be able to rely on failed not only them, but also the children that were harmed as a result and their families. The system is in crisis largely because of government failures – not ECEC.

And I might add that the Aged Care and Disability Sector is equally as dangerous for those unfortunate enough to rely on it. What ever this Inquiry learns in relation to governance in safeguarding and protecting children must be mirrored in these sectors – and urgently!

h) the suitability and flexibility of the funding of early education and care across Australia;

No comment.

i) the choice of care options available to parents and families; and

I am aware of a push for 'childcare-at-home' funding. For the amount allocated to childcare centres per child to be accessible for families to manage their own childcare needs. I understand this idea, and the fear that drives it, however, I believe that would be even more dangerous and against the best interests of children than the current system.

It would isolate children from any outside observation and potentially trap children in their homes in favour of money. Many children who attend childcare need the observation childcare provides. Children need space to mix with other children, to experience different environments, to play and learn in ways they can not and/or do not at home. Childcare is more than child minding, much more. I also believe this proposal would be open to financial rorting on an industrial scale. Again, no registration, oversight, management, safeguarding – no checks and balances.

j) any related matters.

One in four Australian children are sexually assaulted before 16. This is resulting in the crushed hopes, dreams and future potential of tens of thousands of children every year. Unforgivably, it is costing little lives. And it is costing billions of taxpayer dollars every year. This is a national crisis. These children need adults to protect them. Those adults with the most power to do that need to understand the gravity of the need and respond accordingly.

We shall see.

Hetty Johnston AM