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Independent Education Union of Australia

The Independent Education Union represents the interests and professional rights of teachers and support staff in non-government schools, early education and care services and other non-government educational institutions Australia wide. It currently has a membership of approximately 75,000 members.

We have six branches, generally reflecting the state and territory boundaries - these are QLD/NT, NSW/ACT, VIC/TAS, TAS (Independent), SA and WA.

We represent early childhood teachers working in preschools, kindergartens, long day care services and occasional care centres.

The Independent Education Union of Australia believes that early childhood education and care services play a crucial role in supplementing parental care, promoting children's social, cognitive and personal development.

Effective schooling cannot be developed in isolation. Early childhood education is important for subsequent success and schooling should build on the influential years of early education.

The IEU welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Productivity Commission's Review into Early Learning and Childcare. In making the submission, the IEU has focussed its response on the essential areas for Early Childhood Education sector. We note that in doing so, other issues contained within the Productivity Commission's discussion paper may not be fully addressed. The IEU looks forward to addressing these issues as well as those contained within this submission at subsequent consultation round tables.

Early education lays the foundation for all education

Access to high quality early education is important for all children and needs to be considered in this light.

Australia's understanding of the importance of early education and care to children lags behind that of other countries. We tend to view our early education and care system as primarily a child 'care' system which allows the primary carers of children time away from this role to participate in the workforce.

This understanding is reflected in the terms of reference of the Productivity Commission Inquiry where the Commission has been asked to report firstly on the contribution that access can make to workforce participation and secondly to optimising children's learning and development.

The IEUA argues that these priorities should be inverted. Early education and care has been repeatedly proven to benefit children-throughout the entire lifespan: the fact that participation in such also allows parents and primary care givers to participate in the workforce should be seen as an additional benefit, not the main purpose of education and care service delivery and system design.

The benefit to children has also been shown to provide a substantial benefit to society as a whole.

We know without doubt that participation in early education:

- **Can help remove the educational gap between children born into economically advantaged families and those born into disadvantaged families.**

The Productivity Commission itself, in the *Schooling Workforce* section of its *2012 Education and Training Workforce Study* found that: "Students' individual, economic and social circumstances can impede them from achieving their educational potential."¹ Early education has repeatedly been shown to narrow this gap.

Studies of programs such as the Effective Provision of Preschool Education (EPPE) which was a longitudinal study of a sample of young children's development (intellectual and social/behavioural) in the United Kingdom between the ages of 3 and 7 years have shown that "Disadvantaged children in particular can benefit significantly from good quality pre-school experiences, especially if they attend centres that cater for a mixture of children from different social backgrounds."²

- **Allows the early identification of those children who are vulnerable in one or more areas of development as measured by the AEDI and who are thus most in need of early intervention.**

¹ http://www.pc.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0020/116651/schools-workforce.pdf

² [http://www.ioe.ac.uk/RB_Findings_from_early_primary\(1\).pdf](http://www.ioe.ac.uk/RB_Findings_from_early_primary(1).pdf)

Australia's early education and care services are often where developmental delays are first identified. The benefits of early intervention are well known but, unless children who require additional support are identified early, the window for this intervention is closed.

- **Is of particular value to those children who face complex disadvantages including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children at risk of harm, refugees, and children living in isolated circumstances.**

The Productivity Commission has also found that “Educational disadvantage is more likely to be experienced by students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, students in rural and remote locations, Indigenous students, and students with disabilities, learning difficulties or other special needs. Many, especially Indigenous students, face multiple sources of disadvantage.” In recognition of this, COAG set as one of its three key targets in its *Closing the Gap National Partnership on Indigenous Early Childhood Development* as ensuring that all Indigenous four years olds in remote communities had access to early childhood education by 2014.

- **Helps all children, regardless of background, improve academic performance in later schooling.**

The Melbourne Institute, University of Melbourne, conducted research that examined the causal impact of attendance at pre-school in the year prior to starting formal schooling on Year 3 National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) scores.³ It showed that children who have had access to a preschool education gain as much as a 15–20 point advantage in NAPLAN tests.

- **Can help arrest lifelong disadvantage and lay the foundations for attitudes and skills that support life-long learning.**

American economist and Nobel prize winner James Heckman has shown that early childhood education “packages cognitive skills with character skills such as attentiveness, impulse control, persistence and teamwork”. He asserts that cognition and character drive education career and life success.⁴ He also states that “all families are under increasing strain; disadvantaged families are strained to the limit. They have fewer resources to invest in effective early development.”

³ <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/research/preschoolparticipationandqualisummarypaper2013.pdf>

⁴ <http://heckmanequation.org/content/resource/invest-early-childhood-development-reduce-deficits-strengthen-economy>

Australia maintains a false dichotomy between early education and childcare.

Until 2012, when the start of the National Quality Framework for Education and Care saw the same regulations and quality framework brought in for education and care services, regardless of whether their service type was that of a long day care service (childcare) or preschool or kindergarten (early education), Australia always maintained a false dichotomy between education and care. Children learn wherever they are, especially if their early education and care setting is designed around play based learning, and caring has always been concomitant with education.

Unfortunately this historical separation between education and care has left Australian children, families and governments with a situation where:

- States and territories are primarily responsible for funding preschool/kindergarten provision and the Commonwealth responsible for 'childcare' provision despite the fact that both service types are now assessed and regulated under the National Quality Framework and have to provide exactly the same quality of early education, using the same curriculum – the Early Years Learning Framework. Under the past and current National Partnerships both service types are now required to employ qualified early childhood teachers, provide an educational program tailored for each individual child, assess the progress of each child against the outcomes of the curriculum framework and appoint an Educational Leader to guide the service's pedagogy.
- A lack of clear narrative about the crucial role of early education in their child's life, has led to a belief in some families that 'childcare' i.e. somewhere that will care for their child until at worst they enter 'big school' or at best they enter preschool/kindergarten is all that is required. Many parents associate 'education' with formal school or preschool/kindergarten rather than understand that quality early childhood education gives children an added advantage in future years of schooling.
- Until the previous government implemented the concept of Universal Access and the National Quality Framework, Commonwealth Government policy has not been developed around providing early education to children, instead around providing their parents with care options.
- The policy levers that are required to ensure that early education is of the highest quality and will therefore benefit children the most have not been universally supported.
- Policy decisions have been made (for example provision of parental subsidies for the cost of care, approving profit making entities to operate early education and care centres) that would not necessarily be made if early education was viewed through the same policy lens as that of school aged education.

The benefits of having a high quality early education system will accrue not just to each child but to Australia as a whole.

- Each child that accesses a high quality early education will benefit from that access. The COAG Reform Council reported last year that “With increasing participation in preschool, student performance at school may improve in future years. In international tests at Year 4, students who had attended early childhood education performed better in tests of reading, maths and science than students who had not attended”.⁵
- These early benefits are known to last – 15 year old children who sat OECD PISA tests who had engaged in at least one year of an early childhood education program performed better on those tests than other children.⁶
- Because of the benefits to individual children, Australia as a country, will benefit from children’s participation in early education. The work of Heckman shows that “early childhood development directly influences economic, health and social outcomes for children and families.”⁷

⁵ <http://www.coagreformcouncil.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/Education%20in%20Australia%202012,%20Five%20years%20of%20p erformance.pdf>

⁶ http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/education-at-a-glance-2013_eag-2013-en

⁷ <http://heckmanequation.org/content/resource/invest-early-childhood-development-reduce-deficits-strengthen-economy>

Because of the benefits it provides, Australian children should receive equal and universal access to early education.

Studies from the United States and Europe show in general that, although early education has higher benefits for children who are disadvantaged, all children still benefit from it.

It is for this reason that the Commonwealth and every state and territory government in Australia signed up to *The National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education* in December 2008. This partnership was aimed at ensuring that by 2013 every child in Australia would have access to a preschool / kindergarten program in the twelve months prior to full-time schooling for 15 hours a week, 40 weeks a year.

It is worth relooking at the words of that National Partnership. It stated that:

“Early childhood is a critical time in human development. There is now comprehensive research that shows that experiences children have in the early years of life set neurological and biological pathways that can have life-long impacts on health, learning and behaviour. There is also compelling international evidence about the returns on investment in early childhood services for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, including the work of Nobel Laureate James Heckman.

On average, children in Australia have good outcomes overall. The outcomes for some children however are poor and the gap is widening. Early childhood services, policies and practices in Australia have not benefited from a national focus and are therefore quite fragmented. This can be problematic for some families and particularly for those families with multiple and complex vulnerabilities who may find it difficult to access and navigate fragmented services. It also makes it difficult to advance prevention-orientated and early intervention approaches for all children and to coordinate services for those with complex problems.

High quality early childhood services offer the productivity benefits of giving children the best possible start in life, and for parents, the opportunity to be active participants in the workforce or community life.”

Whether or not the National Partnership Agreement has succeeded in meeting its aims, is open to debate, but the IEUA would argue that Australia needs to ensure that our country obtains “*the productivity benefits of giving children the best possible start in life*”.

Early education is not something that can be separated out from childcare. Children learn in all settings they are in and because of this we need to examine, in the context of the educational benefits to children, what those settings are and how our country best ensures that each child receives equal access to those settings.

It is worth also noting that the *National Partnership on Early Childhood Education* stipulated that the program must be delivered by “a four year qualified early childhood teacher”⁸

The National Partnership on Early Childhood Education (Universal Access) has now been extended, but the IEUA would strongly argue that we should not be viewing early childhood education as a separate policy area to the matters being covered by the current inquiry, i.e. childcare. Early education and childcare should be happening in an integrated fashion and in integrated environments.

As such, the policy approaches to both should not be separated into education and care silos.

Unless Australia starts to take the steps now to ensure a designed quality early education (and care) system, our children will be left behind.

⁸ This was later changed to allow three year qualified teachers to deliver preschool programs in consideration of the shortage of 4 year trained teachers.

Early education must, however, be of good quality for it to have benefits.

A range of research has shown that for early education to achieve the benefits it can be associated with it must be high quality early education.

The *COAG Investing in the Early Years – A National Early Childhood Development Strategy* put it this way:

“Another key research finding is that quality matters when it comes to the child’s learning environment, including the quality of the home learning environment and the early years of primary school. Aspects of quality include the capacity and engagement of parents in their child’s development; stimulating play-based learning activities; higher qualifications of early childhood professionals; lower child-to-staff ratios and a strong relationship between the child and a stable caregiver.”⁹

For this reason the IEUA supports the investment of public subsidies into those education and care settings that deliver quality education and care only. We do not and could not support the extension of public subsidies to unregulated home based care provided by nannies.

⁹ http://www.coag.gov.au/sites/default/files/national_ECD_strategy.pdf

Qualified teachers make early education, quality early education.

Analysis of the determinants of early education and care quality has consistently found that employment of more qualified staff, in particular degree qualified early childhood teachers is key to increasing the quality of early education and care.

Early childhood teachers are the primary factor in making early education and care high quality.

- Research has consistently shown that early childhood teachers engage in practices that lesser qualified staff don't and that these practices lead to higher quality early education and care¹⁰.
- Research shows that qualified early childhood education teachers have more positive interactions and have a positive impact on children's pre-reading and social skills than other staff.¹¹
- Where teachers are in management positions they exercise strong leadership. Services with teachers in attendance offer higher quality care not just because of the hours teachers deliver face to face with children, but also because of their role in leadership of other staff members.
- It is important to remember that COAG recognised the importance of teachers in early childhood settings when it agreed to mandate their employment in every early childhood centre based service when agreeing on the components of the National Quality Framework. The *COAG Decision Regulation Impact Statement for Early Childhood Education and Care Quality Reforms*¹² stated that:

“The literature generally finds a positive association between teacher qualifications and cognitive and educational outcomes of children. The Effective Provision of Preschool Education (EPPE) Program, a celebrated longitudinal study of preschool provision in the UK, also finds in favour of teacher qualifications above other indicators of structural quality. For example, Sylva et al 60(2003) stated: ‘Settings which have staff with higher qualifications, especially with a good proportion of trained teachers on the staff, show higher quality and their children make more progress.’ In a recent review of the literature on structural quality, Huntsman (2008)61 ‘the link between levels of caregiver education and/or specialised qualifications, process quality and child outcomes is perhaps the strongest in research on quality’. Huntsman supports this view by citing research by Burchinal, Howes and Kontos (2002) who, after reviewing data from over 300 child care homes, found that teacher qualifications consistently predicted quality.”

¹⁰ 1 M. Whitebook, ‘Early education quality: Higher teacher qualifications for better learning environments - A review of the literature’, Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, Berkely, CA, 2003.

¹¹ Siraj-Blatchford, K. Sylva, B. Taggart, P. Sammons, E.C. Melhuish, & K. Elliot, K., ‘Technical Paper 10: Intensive case studies of practice across the foundation stage’, The Institute of Education, London, 2003

¹² http://www.coag.gov.au/sites/default/files/policy_overview_RIS_early_childhood_development.pdf

Workforce issues within the early childhood teaching workforce mean that children get unequal access to teachers.

The current regulations for early education and care mean that, as a child, your access to an early education and care service where your education is planned by an early childhood teacher depends on which state or territory you live in and the size of early education and care service you attend.

Given that access to early education is so important, given that all the quality of early education is paramount and given that the presence of early childhood teachers is the most important element in determining that quality, the IEU believes that all children in Australia should have the right to an early education program planned by an early childhood teacher.

So why don't they?

The reasons each Australian child does not have equal to an early education program planned by an early childhood teacher include:

- **There is no clear understanding of the importance of early education;**
- **Our system of early education provision is haphazard and relatively unplanned;**
- **There are differing regulatory requirements for the employment of early education teachers in our early education settings depending on state and service size;**
- **The importance of early childhood teachers is not enshrined in policy.** Our early education and care National Quality Framework, including the regulations which determine the employment of early childhood teachers by our early education and care services and the National Quality Standard which sets the standard for quality, do not adequately allow for the importance of early childhood teachers in determining quality. In 2013, ACECQA made a determination that an early education and care service can be rated as high quality while having a waiver in place for the requirement to employ an early childhood teacher or teachers. Given that teachers are the main determinant of quality, how can a service be excellent without one?
- **Profit is antithetic to the employment of early childhood teachers over other educators.** Our mixed education and care service supply setting whereby early education and care can be provided by corporate and for-profit providers, is antithetic to the employment of early childhood teachers over less qualified educators. As low as early childhood teachers wages are they are still generally higher than other educators. When profit is the motive for service provision, teacher employment is seen as a barrier to obtaining that profit. For this reason a large and vocal lobby of private providers seek to delay the requirements for the employment of early childhood teachers while the not

for profit sector continually advocates the need for all children to have access to qualified teachers.

- **We have a shortage of early childhood teachers.** While the status, standing and wages of early childhood teachers are so low there will be a shortage of early childhood teachers in Australia. The Productivity Commission itself recognised this in its 2011 study of the early childhood development workforce where it made a finding that:

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

- **A range of issues make it harder to attract and retain early education teachers.**

These include:

- The status and standing of the profession;
- The wages that early childhood teachers can command;
- The regulatory burden that often falls on early childhood teachers;
- The consequent changing nature of our early education degrees from dedicated early education courses to 0-8 or 0-12 courses which give graduates the option of working in primary school settings where they can command greater wages, more status and standing in the community and have less regulatory burden.

It is important to note that in many states and territories whilst there is a shortage of early childhood teachers there is a simultaneous over supply of other teachers.

The IEUA supports the National Quality Framework and would not support any delays to the implementation timetable.

The main benefit that the National Quality Framework will bring to children's early education is the general increases to the qualification requirements of educators and the improved educator child ratios, but above all the requirements for the employment of qualified early childhood teachers.

The Productivity Commission has been requested to make recommendations on the benefits and other impacts of regulatory changes in early education and care over the last decade including the implementation of the National Quality Framework.

The IEUA believes that the National Quality Framework has and will deliver increased quality of education and care services across Australia. Because of this we support its full implementation according to the existing timetables.

That said, we note that in the absence of paid administrators of early education services, the regulatory burden of the National Quality Framework often falls on early childhood teachers within services, especially directors and co-ordinators.

The IEUA believes that the answer to the issue of regulatory burden is not to slow or delay the improvements of the NQF, but to build into our early education and care system support for teachers to fully implement the NQF changes.

This support should include access to adequate professional development and access to relief from face to face teaching time.

The IEUA believes that Commonwealth Government intervention is needed to fix the workforce issues relating to early education teachers.

- **Commitment to fund wage increases.** In some states in Australia early childhood teachers earn significantly less than other teachers, the IEU of NSW/ACT for example has found that early childhood teachers in NSW earn up to 20% less than primary school teachers employed within public or independent and Catholic schools. While wages remain low, recruitment and retention of the early childhood teachers that are so necessary to the quality of our education and care system is going to be difficult on an ongoing basis. Why should the Australian Government intervene in this industrial issue? At the moment we have a situation where other people's access to the workforce is effectively being subsidised by teachers through their low pay.

As the Productivity Commission is aware, money to increase early childhood teachers' wages to the level needed to ensure recruitment and retention can only be derived from increased fees or increased government income. Families cannot afford to pay more for early education and care than they already do, so the salary gap must be subsidised by the Government. Given governments' commitment to ensuring adequate enough remuneration for primary and secondary teachers to ensure adequacy of supply, it should not seem an unreasonable demand that that commitment be extended to early childhood teachers.

It is a sad situation where early childhood teachers cannot afford to have children themselves because they could not afford early education and care for their own children.

- **Action to increase the status and standing of early childhood teachers.** The Commonwealth Government must work with stakeholders within the early education and care sector including unions within the sector to promote the importance of early education for children and the importance of the role that early childhood teachers play in delivering it.
- **Protection of the importance of that role.** The Commonwealth must make regulatory reform to ensure that only services that employ the required number of teachers under the Early Education and Care Regulations can be assessed as Exceeding the National Quality Standard for Quality Area 1 of the Standard (Educational Program and Practice) or rated as Excellent.
- **Plan and implement sustained workforce intervention measures.** The Australian Government funding to reduce the Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) debt of early childhood education teachers working in areas of high need, (regional or remote areas, Indigenous communities, or areas of high socio-economic disadvantage) should be retained and extended to reduction of all HECS/Help fees for all early childhood teachers until supply equals demand.
- **Implement strategies to support career paths equivalent to those that exist in other educational settings.** Educators must be given options to upgrade their qualifications to

become early childhood teachers as in the short term this offers our early education and care system the best mechanism to fill the shortage of early education teachers.

- **Commitment to increased professional development options for all teachers.** In order to ensure early childhood teachers can take on management roles within early childhood services and meet the regulatory demands of the NQF they must all be given access to increased professional development options.
- **Action to fund wage increases for non-teacher educators.** All educators in early education and care services are underpaid. To ensure career paths and to ensure educators are attracted to the education and care sector all educators need to be paid wages commensurate with the importance of the career.
- **Full implementation of scheduled staff:child ratio changes due under the National Quality Framework.** Adequate staff:child ratios allow teachers to adequately implement appropriate educational programs for children.
- **Commitment to expend public money only on those services that deliver quality early education.** Early education and care services that are regulated and deliver quality early education should be in receipt of government funding.
- **Commitment and action to achieve universal and guaranteed access to early education.** Every child in Australia needs access to quality early education and care.

The Independent Education Union of Australia believes that the Australian Government must take strong and sustained policy measures to ensure that the status and standing, remuneration, conditions, career paths and access to professional development for early childhood teachers are improved to ensure that Australian children have access to the quality early education they both need and deserve. Without policy action on these issues, children will ultimately miss out.