

7 June, 2013

Submission to Parliament re: Early Years Quality Fund Special Account Bill, 2013

Gowrie SA is a not-for-profit organisation which offers long day care and preschool programs. We have long supported the Union campaign that educators are underpaid for the work they do. Child care affordability for families makes it difficult to negotiate significantly higher wages for educators.

We wholeheartedly endorse the establishment of a pay equity commission with a long term view of improving educator wages.

We feel there are some complexities within the current Bill which require addressing:

- The EYQF is inequitable given the limited numbers of long day care centres that will be able to access the Funding. Further inequities arise when considering our organisation has 2 Child Centres and there is the possibility that one may receive the Funding and the other may not. This would be the case for other organisations that have more than one site.
- We have several educators who hold, or will shortly attain, a 4 year teaching degree. In fairness, all should be paid an additional rate on their salary as per the Schedule but it is unclear if this is the case. As an organisation which also offers a Government funded preschool (fully integrated within the service), do the schedule rate increases also apply to those educators under a Preschool Award?
- There has been an understanding from the Union that the entire amount goes to a wage increase in full (for example, a Certificate III qualified educator would get a wage increase of \$3 per hour), but clarification is required if this amount includes on-costs or not.
- The Bill is the first mention we have heard that the Funding could be used for professional development when all information so far has suggested it is only for wage increases. On what basis may centres determine how much may be dedicated to professional development? How will this impact on educators if centres do not choose to increase wages but opt for ongoing professional development?
- Industrial lawyer advice is that there is no precedent for lowering wages when the Funding runs out (which could be anytime within the 2 year period). Given educators who had received the Funding would then be disadvantaged by a wage decrease there are significant risks for organisation viability if Fair Work Australia deem that the higher wage levels for educators must be continued.
- Our organisation employs well above minimum regulation proportions of Diploma qualified educators (currently in excess of 90% of our educators hold a Diploma in Children's Services). Therefore any grant Funding would need to be significantly higher than for a centre that has less than 50% Diploma qualified staff. Our organisation is already meeting all ratio and qualification requirements under the NQF. Would our organisation be disadvantaged because of this?

- Given centre relief budgets can only be an estimate based on expected educator sickness and leave, how would this be accounted for within the limited EYQF? The Funding received by a centre could be consumed much earlier than anticipated.

We believe if the Government is committed to ongoing investment in early childhood education and care then the Fund would need to be available to all educators working in this sector. However we do not support spreading the existing funds to all educators to receive salary increases of \$1 per hour as that will not achieve the desired outcomes of professionalism and growth of service quality. In short, funds need to be allocated which allow all centres to apply for funds on the basis of demonstrating commitment and adherence to the new National Quality Standard.

Kaye Colmer, CEO

Lynne Rutherford and Eleanor Scrafton, Children's Program Leaders

Kate Harding and Melissa Beelitz, Union representatives