

Standing Committee on Education and Employment

RE: Early Years Quality Fund Special Account Bill 2013

I strenuously object to this Bill. My opinions are based on a career in early childhood education spanning more than 14 years.

This Bill is poorly considered and fails to look at the wider perspective of its effect on the early childhood sector. When it was announced, a quick calculation based on information from the last early childhood census revealed to me the degree of the massive underfunding and the discriminatory nature of the proposal. Why has it been allowed to proceed to this stage?

In discussions with colleagues regarding the proposal, senior staff appreciate the negative consequences of this misguided Bill and do not support it, junior staff all believe that they will receive a pay increase in July.

This Bill will have only negative effects on the early childhood sector if allowed to proceed in its current form for the following reasons:

1. It discriminates against the vast majority of early childhood professionals. Inequality in pay levels between similarly qualified and experienced staff will create dissatisfaction amongst the **majority** of child care educators and may tend to lead to an exodus from the sector: “the last straw”.
2. Employers who fail to receive the funding for their employees will be forced to increase the wages of their staff to try to prevent them from seeking work elsewhere or leaving the sector altogether. For operators to remain viable there will be two solutions:
 - a. **Increase fees:** Fees charged to families will have to be increased to contribute towards the additional employment costs. This will place a greater burden on families and also increase the Government’s exposure to the Child Care Rebate
 - b. **Reduce Staffing Costs:**
 - i. **Reduce Overall Staff Numbers:** High quality centres that employ additional educators and teachers will be forced to reduce the number of staff they employ to ratio levels only, thus reducing the quality of the service provided to the children in their care. This will also place even greater burden on already over-stretched staff who are striving to meet all the compliance and documentation requirements of the National Quality Framework.
 - ii. **Reduce the number of Diploma Qualified Educators and University Qualified Teachers:** Quality child care centres employ additional

highly qualified and experienced staff over and above ratio requirements. In an effort to reduce staffing costs employers will be forced to replace highly qualified educators with trainees or less “expensive” staff. This will have a negative impact on the quality of the educational program offered to children.

In summary, this Bill if it is allowed to proceed, it will **fail to accomplish any of its aims.**

However it will achieve:

- Dissatisfaction amongst the majority of early childhood professionals
- Increased employment of lower qualified staff in preference to higher qualified, experienced staff, leading to a reduction in the quality of the educational program delivered to children
- An increase in childcare fees for the majority of families using early childhood services
- An increase the Government’s expenditure on Child Care Rebate.

The early years are vital to a child’s wellbeing. I respectfully request that this Bill be rejected in the interest of the children and the majority of child care professionals.

Yours sincerely,

Julie Hobson

Kind Regards

Julie Hobson

Manager

