

21 September 2016

Committee Secretary
Senate Education and Employment Committees
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary

Re: Senate Inquiry into the Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (Jobs for Families Child Care Package) Bill 2016

The Mitchell Institute welcomes the Senate Inquiry into the Jobs for Families Child Care Package Bill.¹ The Inquiry presents an opportunity to secure Australia's future by ensuring that all children have access to high quality early education regardless of their background or family situation.

Early education is one of the most significant investments in education and productivity that governments can make. The early years are a critical window for building the essential foundations that enable all children to be confident and capable learners, and develop social and emotional skills.

However, as evidenced in our attached report *'Quality Early Education for all'*, there remains an unacceptable divide in both opportunities and outcomes between the poorest and wealthiest Australian communities, between cities and very remote towns, and between children from different cultural backgrounds (O'Connell, Fox, Hinz & Cole, 2016).

A third of Australian children do not attend preschool for the number of hours needed to make a difference (at least fifteen hours a week) and children in poorer communities have fewer high quality early education and care services available to them (O'Connell et al., 2016; Cloney, Cleveland, Hattie, & Taylor, 2015). More than one in five children start school with developmental vulnerabilities that can make it hard for them to take up the opportunities that schooling offers (Australian Government, 2016).

There is evidence that attending two years of preschool improves children's readiness for school, with particular impacts on their early literacy and on their social and emotional skills (for example, see Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2004). Research demonstrates that all children benefit from participation in quality early education programs and that these benefits are amplified for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, for whom extra hours and longer duration can make a significant, positive and lasting impact on their schooling and beyond.

Early education should be delivered with a level of quality and intensity that is proportionate to need and delivered in a way that, as far as possible, reduces barriers to access for children and families who stand to benefit most.

¹The Mitchell Institute at Victoria University works to improve the connection between evidence and policy reform and actively promotes the principle that high-quality education and training is fundamental to individual wellbeing and a prosperous society.



Public investment should be calibrated to enable children to receive at least the minimum dose of early education needed to have a substantial developmental impact.

In examining the Jobs for Families Package, we urge the Committee and the Senate to ensure at least fifteen hours or two days of high quality early education is made available for all three and four year olds. The design of the subsidy and broader funding mechanisms should enable all children to participate, regardless of their parent/carers' involvement in approved activity. This is vital to secure the health, wellbeing and education of our children and future prosperity of our nation.

We also recommend that the operation of the Additional Child Care Subsidy, which provides access to early education and care for children deemed at risk, prioritise stable and sustained access to early education for eligible children. It is important that the administration of the Additional Child Care Subsidy not create additional barriers to access for the children and families in need of this additional support.

We would be happy to provide further information and encourage the Committee to view our full report and recommendations, which is attached and is also available at: <http://www.mitchellinstitute.org.au/reports/quality-early-education-for-all/>

Yours sincerely

Dr Sara Glover
Director

References

- Australian Government (2016), Australian Early Development Census national report 2015, Department of Education and Training, Canberra.
- Cloney D, Cleveland G, Hattie J & Tayler C (2015) 'Variations in the Availability and Quality of Early Childhood Education and Care by Socioeconomic status of neighbourhoods', Early Education and Development, pp.1-19, 30 September.
- O'Connell M, Fox S, Hinz B & Cole H (2016). 'Quality Early Education for All: Fostering, entrepreneurial, resilient and capable leaders', Mitchell Institute policy paper No. 01/2016. Mitchell Institute, Melbourne. Available from: www.mitchellinstitute.org.au
- Sylva, K, Melhuish, E, Sammons, P, Siraj-Blatchford, I. & Taggart, B (2004). 'The Effective Provision of Preschool Education (EPPE) Project: Findings from pre-school to end of key stage 1', Department for Education and Skills, Nottingham, United Kingdom.