

Hello,

I am writing to express my concerns over the Early Years Quality Fund and the way it will be administered throughout our sector.

I am an Early Childhood Educator, an owner of a service and a parent, and the current implementation of the fund would severely affect me on all three levels.

As a passionate Educator with over 17 years of experience in Early Childhood, I see firsthand how quality early childhood services significantly impact on children having positive outcomes in their lives. I too believe that the wage given to those who perform this amazing and influential job is appalling!! I have numerous staff who despite completing a four year university degree and being a qualified professional, work a second job or do babysitting on the weekends just to make ends meet. This includes myself – what other business owner, qualified professional takes on second jobs to supplement a low wage.

As a business owner of a centre in Western NSW I cannot afford to increase the wages of my staff, despite the fact they deserve it, as any rise would directly impact on the families who use our service through fee increases. It is extremely difficult to find good staff in early childhood and significantly harder in rural and remote areas. If the Early Years Quality Fund is implemented in its current form, it will be almost impossible for services to retain high quality, experienced staff, as staff will leave to work in areas where services have been successful in obtaining the funding – and who could blame them!! To retain staff I would then have two choices – watch as my business and the standard of quality suffered or raise the fees so I could match the wages and retain my staff. This will significantly affect the affordability of families who are already struggling.

I have continually voiced loudly my support for the National Quality Standards which in essence is suppose to be ensuring that all Australian children, despite where they live, should be able to access high quality Early Childhood Education delivered by trained and experienced staff. This will not be the case if the Early Years Quality Fund is implemented in its current form.

The funding grant should be dispersed equally amongst all Educators as a show of good faith by the Government that they do value all Educators and that they do care about affordability for families.

This is the only way to improve the sector and support the fundamental outcomes of the National Quality Standards.

There has been so much research into the development of a child's brain in the first five years. There has also been so much research stating that every dollar spent on Early Childhood Education saves the Government up to seven dollars later in life (through benefit payments, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, social issues such as depression and anxiety, crime, etc, etc, etc). Why are we then willing to simply conquer and divide the only profession that can change children's outcomes by unfairly granting a funding agreement that will recognise the work of only a small percentage of Educators. We should be strengthening the sector, not dividing it, to ensure the implementation of the National Quality Standards and the right of ALL Australian children to high quality Early Childhood Education.

Our children, the leaders of tomorrow, need our voice – and we need yours to ensure quality continues across the country.

My suggestion: Use the funding to give ALL Early Childhood a dollar per hour increase rather than giving approximately 25% of Educators a \$3-\$5 increase.

Kind regards and thank you for your time,

Justine Cook

An Early Childhood Education Centre