

17238 - New submission from Early Years Strategy - Public Submissions

My main concerns about early childhood education and care relate to the poor pay and conditions of teachers and educators in centre-based long day care services. Pay can be as low as \$22.00 per hour and the workload relating to accountability is onerous. Early Childhood Teachers are the lowest-paid of all teachers earning an average hourly rate of more than \$15.00 less per hour than they could as primary school teachers and without the benefit of school holidays. It is no wonder teachers and educators are leaving this sector in droves. This leaves us with many services operating below regulatory requirements and at minimal quality - often with licensing waivers just to keep operating. Long Day Care services are closing rooms, capping numbers, and reducing hours in order to keep operating. Meanwhile, many of the larger corporate providers for example G8, are reaping profits while receiving high levels of government subsidy. Privatised early childhood education needs to be phased out. The cost to taxpayers, the community and our children is just too great. Services in rural and remote communities are particularly under pressure - most of these are not-for-profit community-based services that are receiving insufficient subsidies given their location. private providers know that these services are unprofitable and will not take them on. Long Day Care provides early years learning and supports parents to work. A skill shortage and staffing crisis in such child care provision exacerbates skills shortages elsewhere and the high fee cost also makes it cost-ineffective for many parents to work. The snowball effect is clear. It is also clear that because this sector largely employs women it is living up to the dreadful nomenclature 'the pink ghetto' coined by Sally Loane many years ago.

Solutions:

Increase the hourly rate and directly subsidise the wages of staff in long day care services.

No more licences to private, for-profit providers and operators.

Look at strategies for phasing out private, for-profit child care.

Bring back and subsidise work-based long day care - give incentives to large employers to provide long day care for their workers' families.

Make private for-profit long day care services more accountable for the subsidies they collect - these subsidies must go to operating costs and staff wages not to increase profit margins.

Make policy based on a clear understanding of the different forms of children's services and early learning services. Long day care is VERY different to preschool.