

THERE ARE MORE THAN 358 000 CHILDREN ACROSS 256 200 FAMILIES USING APPROVED EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE IN NSW, APPROXIMATELY 60% OF WHOM ARE IN LONG DAY CARE. 54.7% OF ALL EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE SERVICES IN NSW ARE PRIVATELY OWNED AND OPERATED, WITH 73% OF CENTRE-BASED LONG DAY CARE SERVICES PRIVATELY MANAGED.

[Department of Education (2014)]

Suggested Reading

NQF Snapshot Q3 2014, ACECQA
(<http://bit.ly/1GhYzkl>)

Regulating for Quality in Childcare: The Evidence Base, Centre for Independent Studies (<http://bit.ly/1DcPVSm>)

A review of the impact of legislative changes over the last five years on childcare and early learning in Australia, Checkmate Analytics (<http://bit.ly/1Eo186a>)

Childcare and Early Learning Draft Report, Productivity Commission
(<http://bit.ly/1uVAclj>)

Child Care Services in Australia: Market Research Report, IBISWorld
(<http://bit.ly/1uVAy1u>)

Invest in early childhood development: Reduce deficits, strengthen the economy, Professor James Heckman
(<http://bit.ly/1qn3BJc>)

Putting a value on early childhood education and care in Australia, pwc
(<http://pwc.to/1t60wfu>)

References:

1. NSW Government (2014) *Education and Care Services National Regulations*
2. ACECQA (2015) *NQF Snapshot Q4 2014*
3. Council of Australian Governments (2008) *National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education*
4. NSW Government (2012) *Review of NSW Government Funding for Early Childhood Education*



Early Childhood Education and Care

Investing in our future

Election Policy Priorities
NSW Election
28 March 2015



To arrange a meeting, or for further information, please contact ACA NSW Chief Executive Officer Brianna Casey:
Ph: 1300 556 330 www.nsw.childcarealliance.org.au info@childcarensw.com.au

Australian Childcare Alliance New South Wales
ABN 60 277 501 947
A PO Box 660 Parramatta NSW 2124
E nsw@childcarealliance.org.au P 1300 556 330 F 1300 557 228

Australian Childcare Alliance (ACA) New South Wales is calling on all parties to commit to early childhood policies and long-term investment capable of delivering quality and affordable early childhood education and care for families across New South Wales.

Delayed implementation of changes to educator:child ratios

Current Situation

The *Education and Care Services National Regulations*¹ currently require nationally consistent educator:child ratios for 2-3 year olds from 1 January 2016. In NSW, this will result in a dramatic change from the current ratio requirement of 1:8 to a new ratio of 1:5. This is the most significant of changes to ratios of any age group in NSW. Services are responding by either employing more staff (thereby increasing operating costs, which we estimate will result in increases of 20-60% in daily fees) or reducing the number of places for children in this age group (thereby reducing access for families as well as increasing fees). This will seriously affect access to and affordability of early childhood education and care in NSW, as well as workforce participation.

Action Needed

Delayed implementation of the scheduled changes to educator:child ratio changes for 2-3 year olds.

The NSW Government must delay the proposed implementation of the 1:5 ratio for 2-3 year olds until such time as appropriate government resources are invested to assist early childhood education and care services to adjust to the new requirements and consequential impacts, rather than placing further pressure on families across NSW.

Failure to delay the implementation timeframes will have a negative effect on the NSW economy. Delaying the implementation timeframes would not have any negative impacts on the NSW Budget.

Coordinated, strategic planning for early childhood education and care

Current Situation

Early childhood education and care services must meet a range of Local, State and Federal government requirements from development and planning to licensing to Child Care Benefit, fees and registration. These requirements are often duplicated, with little sharing of data and information between levels of government. There are examples of circuitous processes and onerous parking restrictions delaying the granting of service approvals in areas of high-need, and examples of service approvals being granted in areas where there is already over-supply. Despite current and projected demographics data being readily available, there is little evidence of a coordinated, strategic approach to planning for early childhood education and care services, in NSW (or in fact nationally).

Action Needed

Develop a coordinated, strategic plan for early childhood education and care in NSW, particularly in areas of over-supply. Local Environmental Plans must be reviewed and updated to ensure consistency with state and national regulations pertaining to early childhood education and care. Local Councils, the NSW Department of Planning and the NSW Early Childhood Education and Care Directorate must work with the sector to urgently identify planning barriers to the delivery of quality, affordable and accessible early childhood education and care in NSW.

There are already more than 4600 long day care, preschool and outside school hours care services in NSW and the number is rising steadily².

Reduced fees for Certificate III and Diploma qualifications

Current Situation

The Smart & Skilled reforms of the NSW vocational education and training system commenced 1 January 2015, resulting in massive changes to the way in which students are financially supported. Students undertaking a traineeship for a Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care now face a qualification fee of at least \$1590 and a massive \$4380 for the Diploma qualification. Many students had the entire cost of their qualification covered previously. We have already heard from members who have had staff withdraw from Traineeships and Diploma studies as a result of the massive student fee increases. ACA NSW is extremely concerned that the reforms are reducing student choice, creating an additional barrier to students wishing to upskill and enter the workforce, and will exacerbate the existing challenges of attracting and retaining employees in the early childhood sector, given that services can only employ educators with – or working towards – a qualification.

Action Needed

Urgently revise the student fees associated with the Certificate III and Diploma in Early Childhood Education and Care, noting that qualification requirements for educators in the sector are mandated by the *Education and Care Services National Regulations*, meaning that employers must have at least the minimum number of appropriately qualified staff in order to operate. New incentives should be introduced for students and employers to assist them in gaining qualifications to work in early childhood education and care. Smart and Skilled allocations across the state should also be reviewed to ensure student choice is maximized.

Every early childhood education and care service must have 50% of the educators working directly with children holding or working towards a Diploma qualification (or above); with the remainder holding or working towards at least a Certificate III qualification in order to be compliant with the National Regulations.

Preschool funding for all children, including those in long day care

Current Situation

The Universal Access agreement³ signed in 2008 committed all Australian governments to achieving by 2013 universal access to early childhood education programs for all children in their year before school, delivered by university qualified Early Childhood Teachers, 15 hours/week, 40 weeks/year. To date, the NSW Government has excluded privately owned long day care services from accessing this essential funding, to the detriment of more than 150 000 children in NSW who are attending privately owned long day care services. Universal Access funding was extended to December 2015 but it is not yet clear whether the NSW Government will finally provide the funding to benefit all children in their year before school, not just those at community-based services.

Action Needed

Deliver Universal Access funding to all long day care and preschool services in NSW for children in their year before school. This would assist the NSW Government in meeting its Universal Access targets (thereby strengthening the case for further partnership agreements beyond 2015) and delivering on the recommendations of the 2012 *Review of NSW Government Funding for Early Childhood Education*⁴, which made it clear that families and children should benefit from investment in quality early childhood education programs regardless of whether they access a long day care centre or preschool.

More than 150 000 children across NSW stand to benefit from this positive change.