

IEUA-QNT SUBMISSION

[8 September 2022]

Submission: Select Committee on Work and Care

The Independent Education Union – Queensland and Northern Territory Branch (IEU-QNT) welcomes the opportunity to provide commentary regarding the work of the Select Committee on Work and Care.

About IEU-QNT

IEU-QNT represents ~16,000 teachers, support staff and ancillary staff in non-government education institutions in Queensland and the Northern Territory and consistently engages in debate concerning educational, industrial and equity issues through its Education, Industrial and Equity Committees and through its national counterpart, the Independent Education Union of Australia, which receives input from teachers in all States and Territories.

As a union of education professionals in the non-government sector, and a union with over 70% female membership, we have a strong interest in the Select Committee's work to investigate interactions between work and care.

From an educational perspective, our interest focusses on the fundamental importance of ensuring that all children have access to quality early childhood education and care as an essential foundation for further, positive engagement with education and work.

From a social perspective however, we are also interested in what more might be done to ensure that workers in our industry, and the workforce more generally, are able to balance work with caring responsibilities, particularly where restrictive definitions of caring responsibilities constrain their access to flexible work arrangements.

We would also suggest that strategies for supporting working parents and carers should not focus solely on access to formal care during hours of work but should also seek to create economic and social conditions that encourage greater equity for all workers with caring responsibilities. Fundamental to this is assignment of high value to caring roles, both within the family dynamic, and within the education and care sectors.

In that context, and in the absence of a more detailed Discussion and/or Issues Paper, we have chosen to respond to the Committee's Terms of Reference collectively, with the goal of putting forward broad recommendations for: a) changes to early education and care policies and systems that are consistent with the goals of enhancing children's access to quality education and care, and; b) achieving equity for all workers with caring responsibilities.

Response to the Committee's Terms of Reference

1. While there is a simplistic attraction to link the availability of high-quality care to parents' and carers' capacity to engage in paid work, there is a broader economic and social argument for investment in early childhood education and care.
2. Early childhood experiences create the foundations for future learning, health and wellbeing [1-8] and it is, therefore, essential to consider early childhood education and

We are #IEUnionStrong

Submission: Select Committee on Work and Care

- care provision as more than simply releasing parents and carers from caring duties so that they can engage in paid work.
3. A long-term failure to assign appropriate value to work with young children has led to a situation where qualified, registered teachers who chose to work in early childhood settings are underpaid relative to their counterparts in schools. These teachers clearly apply their pedagogical knowledge in ways that parallel the work of school-based teachers and should, therefore, have access to equal remuneration.
 4. The employment of tertiary-qualified, registered teachers, in addition to VET-qualified educators is essential to ensure that early childhood settings provide meaningful learning and development opportunities [1, 2, 4, 9-11].
 5. Issues of underpayment for these workers, relative to school-based teachers, are exacerbated by a reliance on government funding, which has, for many years, been renewed on an intermittent basis.
 6. Stable, long-term and adequate funding is required to allow not-for-profit, community-based kindergartens and preschools to provide secure employment for early childhood teachers and educators which is appropriately remunerated.
 7. Families' education and care needs and preferences are also highly diverse, meaning parents need a range of easily accessed education and care options [12]. It is not possible for a single education and care model to meet the needs of all children and their families.
 8. The provision of high quality, flexible education and care also requires urgent measures to address the economic value assigned to education and care work through enhanced wages and conditions for care workers generally. This is essential to attract and retain qualified and experienced workers [1, 2, 13-16].
 9. Offering better funded, more flexible early childhood education and care options for families will not, however, provide a blanket solution to the problem of unequal distribution of caring responsibilities within families.
 10. Long-term studies of employment patterns of Australian working parents clearly indicate that female parents' engagement with paid work is more constrained than that of their male counterparts [17, 18].
 11. It is also worth noting that the minimum provision of 10 days of paid carer's leave, and 2 days of unpaid carer's leave, per annum (as per the *Fair Work Act*) does not recognise the interconnectedness of work and family life and the frequency with which individual workers transition between work and care roles on a day-to-day basis.
 12. An unexpected benefit of the coronavirus pandemic has been an increased acceptance of working from home options, which can enable greater balance of caring responsibilities, but there is still evidence that the percentage of mothers making use of flexible work and working from home options greatly exceeds that of fathers [19].
 13. There is also evidence that working at home does not always facilitate better work-family balance [19].
 14. Our union has, through its engagement with various reviews of relevant legislation at both federal and state/territory level, argued for changes to parental leave entitlements to remove all gendered language, allow greater flexibility for employees, and extend the right to request part-time work to parents/carers of older children.

Submission: Select Committee on Work and Care

15. Such changes are consistent with both international best practice and the broader goal of supporting greater participation of women in paid work [20-23].
16. In recognising the broader remit of the Select Committee however, we would suggest that there is also scope for embedding broader definitions of terms such as 'caring responsibilities' not just to encompass workers who provide care for family members with disability, but also the unique and contextualised forms of care that characterise First Nations families and communities.
17. In both instances, the care provided may extend well beyond childhood and support for workers should accommodate this within employment conditions.
18. Greater recognition of the many and diverse forms of care which are provided within society is also consistent with a broader agenda of recognising both paid and unpaid care work as essential to individual and societal health and wellbeing.

Concluding Comments

Our union strongly supports changes to legislation and policy that allow workers with caring responsibilities to engage with paid work and enable children and young people to access education and care in ways that support their social, emotional, cognitive and academic development.

Given the diverse and complex nature of caring responsibilities, it is essential that legislative and policy frameworks enable individual families to access a variety of formal care options, in ways that support them to engage with paid work. There can be no single, prescriptive solution that will meet the needs of all individuals and families.

It is however, possible to design and enact legislative and policy frameworks that support the provision of dynamic and flexible options within the formal education and care sector. For example, out-of-pocket costs should not be allowed to escalate to levels that prevent vulnerable workers from engaging with paid employment.

We look forward to the opportunity to participate in further consultations as the committee progresses with its work and develops more detailed proposals for changes to existing policy and legislation.



Terry Burke

Branch Secretary

Independent Education Union of Australia -Queensland and Northern Territory Branch

Thursday 8 September 2022

Submission: Select Committee on Work and Care

References

1. Early_Childhood_Australia, *Reports show that Australia needs to strengthen and extend early education*. 2018, Early Childhood Australia: Sydney.
2. The_Front_Project, *A Smart Investment for a Smarter Australia: Economic analysis of universal early childhood education in the year before school in Australia*. 2019, PricewaterhouseCoopers: Sydney.
3. Pascoe, S. and D. Brennan, *Lifting our Game Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools through Early Childhood Interventions*. 2017, Victorian Government: Melbourne.
4. OECD, *What are the benefits from early childhood education?* Education Indicators in Focus, 2016. 2016(42).
5. Campbell, F., et al., *Early Childhood Investments Substantially Boost Adult Health*. Science, 2014. 343: p. 1478-1485.
6. Heckman, J.J. and L.K. Raut, *Intergenerational Long Term Effects of Preschool - Structural Estimates from a Discrete Dynamic Programming Model NBER Working Paper 19077*. 2013, National Bureau of Economic Research: Cambridge.
7. Heckman, J.J., *Schools, Skills and Synapses*. Economic Inquiry, 2008. 46(3): p. 289.
8. OECD, *Education and Training Policy: Investing in High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)*. 2012.
9. OECD, *Providing Quality Early Childhood Education and Care: Results from the Starting Strong Survey 2018*. 2019, OECD Publishing: paris.
10. Torii, K., S. Fox, and D. Cloney, *Quality is key in Early Childhood Education in Australia Early childhood education*, in *Mitchell Institute Paper No. 01/2017* Mitchell Institute: Melbourne.
11. Sylva, K., et al., *Technical Paper 12 The Final Report: Effective Pre-School Education*. 2004: London.
12. Baxter, J. and K. Hand, *Flexible child care: Key findings from the AIFS Evaluation of the Child Care Flexibility Trials*, A.I.O.F. Studies, Editor. 2016, Australian Government: Melbourne.
13. Hurley, P., K. Noble, and J. Jackson, *Australian Investment in Education: Early Childhood Education and Care*. 2020, Mithcell Institute, Victoria University: Melbourne.
14. O'Connell, M., et al., *Quality Early Education for All: Fostering creative, entrepreneurial, resilient and capable learners*, in *Mitchell Report No 01/2016*. 2016, The Mitchell Institute, Victoria University: Melbourne.
15. Department_of_Education_and_Training, *Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Action Plan 2016-2019*. 2016, Queensland Government: Brisbane.
16. Press, F., S. Wong, and M. Gibson, *Understanding who cares: creating the evidence to address the long-standing policy problem of staff shortages in early childhood education and care*. Journal of Family Studies, 2015. 21(1): p. 87-100.
17. Wilkins, R., et al., *The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey: Selected Findings from Waves 1 to 19 The 16th Annual Statistical Report of the HILDA Survey*. 2021, Melbourne Institute: Applied Economic & Social Research, The University of Melbourne: Melbourne.

We are #IEUnionStrong

Submission: Select Committee on Work and Care

18. Baxter, J., *FATHERS AND WORK: A statistical overview*. 2022, Australian Institute for Family Studies: Melbourne.
19. Baxter, J. and D. Warren, *Families in Australia Survey Towards Covid Normal Report no.2 Employment and work-family balance in 2020*. 2021, Australian Institute of Family Studies: Melbourne.
20. Baird, M., et al., *Women and the Future of Work Report 1 of The Australian Women's Working Futures Project*. 2018, University of Sydney: Sydney.
21. Diversity_Council_Australia, *Future-Flex Mainstreaming Flexibility by Design: Redesigning work to make flexibility standard business practice in Australian retail workplaces*. 2016, Diversity Council Australia: Sydney.
22. Fair_Work_Ombudsman, *Best Practice Guide - Work and family. The right to request flexible working arrangements*, F.W. Ombudsman, Editor. 2013, Australian Government: Canberra.
23. Cooper, R. and M. Baird, *Bringing the "right to request" flexible working arrangements to life: from policies to practices*. Employee Relations, 2014. 37(5).