



INDUSTRY, EDUCATION, TRAINING AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Members present:

Mr K.G. Shine MP (Chair)
Mr S.L. Dickson MP
Dr B. Flegg MP
Mr S.A. Kilburn MP
Mrs D.C. Scott MP
Mrs J.A. Stuckey MP

Staff present:

Ms B. Watson (Research Director)
Ms S. Gregory (Acting Principal Research Officer)

PUBLIC HEARING ON EDUCATION AND CARE SERVICES NATIONAL LAW (QUEENSLAND) BILL 2011

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

WEDNESDAY, 12 OCTOBER 2011

Brisbane

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Committee met at 11.17 am

CHAIR: Good morning. I declare this public hearing into the examination of the Education and Care Services National Law (Queensland) Bill 2011 open. Thank you all very much for your interest and for your attendance here today. I am Kerry Shine, the member for Toowoomba North and chair of the committee. The Industry, Education, Training and Industrial Relations Committee is a statutory committee of the Queensland parliament and, as such, represents the parliament. Committee proceedings are, in fact, proceedings of parliament, and I will explain the implications of that presently.

First, I would like to introduce the other members of the committee: Dr Bruce Flegg, the member for Moggill and deputy chair of the committee; Steve Dickson, the member for Buderim; Steve Kilburn, the member for Chatsworth; Desley Scott, the member for Woodridge; and Jann Stuckey, the member for Currumbin.

The committee has advised the public of this inquiry by advertising in the print media and on the Queensland parliament's website and by writing directly to a number of individuals, organisations and government departments.

On September 2011 the parliament referred the bill to the committee for examination and report to the House. If passed, the bill would adopt the education and care services national law as a law of Queensland. The national law establishes the national quality framework. The national quality framework includes the national law, national regulations and a national quality standard.

The committee is required to report to the House on this bill by 31 October 2011. In its inquiry into this bill, the task ahead of this committee is to consider the bill in terms of the policy intent to be achieved, as well as fundamental legislative principles and lawfulness, and to develop a report to parliament before the bill is debated in the House.

To date, the committee has considered the six submissions received from a range of stakeholders in respect of the bill and has heard briefings from the Department of Education and Training. The purpose of today is to further inform the committee's consideration of the bill.

Although the committee is not swearing in witnesses, these hearings are a formal process of the parliament. As such, any person intentionally misleading the committee is committing a serious offence. By the same token, parliamentary privilege applies to evidence presented here today. Although this is a public hearing, you are able to request that any material or information you provide be kept private, and you can object to particular questions. This information is contained in schedule 3 of the parliament's standing orders—instructions to committees regarding witnesses—with which each witness has been supplied.

I also remind witnesses that Hansard will be making a transcript of the proceedings. I therefore ask you to please identify yourself when you first speak and to speak clearly and at a reasonable pace.

Members of the public are reminded that they are here to observe the hearing and may not interrupt the hearing. In accordance with standing order 208, any person admitted to this hearing may be excluded at the discretion of the chair, to the extent that the chair may have any discretion, or by order of the committee.

Representatives of the media may attend and may record the hearing in line with the media broadcast rules set by the committee and available from the committee's staff. I ask all people present to turn off mobile phones or set them to silent.

TYLER-PASCOE, Ms Kerry, National Quality Framework Manager, Creche and Kindergarten Association

CHAIR: I now welcome our first witness, Kerry Tyler-Pascoe from the Creche and Kindergarten Association, or C&K as it is generally known. For the record, could you please state your name and the capacity in which you appear before the committee?

Ms Tyler-Pascoe: I am the National Quality Framework Manager for C&K, and I am appearing on behalf of Barrie Elvish, our CEO.

CHAIR: Would you like to make a brief opening statement before members of the committee ask you questions in relation to your submission?

Ms Tyler-Pascoe: Thank you. I think the point that we really want to make clear to the committee is that C&K are very, very supportive of the national reforms. We do believe that the national act and national regulations, as well as the national quality framework and the standards and elements that sit under that, are very important reforms in the industry. But we do believe that there are a couple of areas where we could make some improvements, particularly in terms of reflecting the Queensland early education and care sector.

One of our greatest concerns is about the role of volunteer parent management committees for community kindergartens. As some of you may know, we are a central governing body and we have Brisbane

significant concerns for the members of those committees and their ongoing roles and responsibilities and how they are going to significantly grow under the national quality framework but also in relation to the harmonisation of the workplace health and safety laws and a range of other changes that are happening that require them to have a much greater level of responsibility. So those are some of the things that we would like to discuss with you today and see whether we can make some headway about how things might change.

CHAIR: I will throw the meeting open to committee members to ask questions.

Dr FLEGG: We understand what the national quality framework is. The concerns may fall into a couple of areas. I think the No. 1 concern would be the effect on underlying costs and therefore on the fees that need to be charged to parents as a result of these changes. I understand that there might be a little difference between straight kindergartens and long-day-care centre arrangements. Could you, from a C&K point of view, indicate what you think the effect would be on costs and therefore on fees?

Ms Tyler-Pascoe: Sure. Just to be clear, we run kindergartens, as well as long day care, family day care, ATSI services et cetera. So we are really across all of the early education service types. For us, we are in probably a privileged position and a slightly better position than perhaps the rest of the sector. We have already had above and beyond qualified staff in our services. We already have our own Queensland studies approved curriculum, which is mapped against the Early Years Learning Framework. So our services are in a relatively good position in terms of needing to employ extra staff or needing to change indoor-outdoor environments or to buy extra resources.

For us, we are looking at a moderate fee increase of about \$5 to \$6 across our services for the new year. However, that is for our branch services. I think some of our affiliate services will be in a completely different situation. Certainly, our associate services and other services in the sector in general may have significant compliance issues in terms of the seven quality areas. I think there will be significant cost impacts on other service deliverers.

Dr FLEGG: When you talk about the impacts on affiliate services, are you thinking that they will be in relation to the physical structure of centres? What will be the biggest impact on them—staff qualifications?

Ms Tyler-Pascoe: I think staff qualifications and changes to ratios will have significant impact. As I said, for C&K branch services we have always had a high child-staff ratio, so we are not in that situation, although we are with the change to the 15-month age group. However, a lot of our other services and the services in the sector in general will have issues with attracting and retaining the appropriate number of qualified staff and the amount they have to pay those staff in order to attract them, particularly with the effect that universal access will have.

The long-day-care sector have always paid their staff under a different agreement than the kindergarten sector. So now they will need to look above and beyond their normal pay structures in order to attract university qualified teachers into kindergarten programs within the long-day-care sector, because they could earn a lot more working in a kindergarten under the kindergarten agreements. So that will, I think, significantly impact on their cost structures. However, I think there will also be necessary changes to physical environments, indoor and outdoor, and I think generally in the way they operate their business there will have to be some changes, too.

Dr FLEGG: You expressed concern about the parent governing bodies of community kindergartens—I think that would be the common expression.

Ms Tyler-Pascoe: Yes.

Dr FLEGG: It is fair to say that there is a fair bit of angst in some of those quarters, as I am sure you are aware. Where is it going and what effect will these sorts of changes have on a group that it is fair to say is already fairly stressed?

Ms Tyler-Pascoe: I think it could be the undoing of a number of volunteer parent management committees. I do believe it is going to have a significant impact on that section of the sector to the degree that some kindergartens may be in a position where they are untenable and unable to attract volunteer parents to be part of those committees. The significant legal and even financial responsibilities that go along with the new national quality framework and the new workplace health and safety laws are just some of the impacts and issues that these committees have to address.

I think what we have to get our heads around is that these are parents of children who may have, and generally have, little or no understanding of the early education and care sector and who have little or no training in that area and yet have to operate as though they are the business owners and approved service providers for that particular service. That puts them in a really difficult position because, of course, they do not know how to operate the kindy service. They may be lucky enough to get an accountant or somebody who has their own business and therefore has some business nous or knowledge to bring to the operations of the kindergarten service but, in actual fact, it is really the centre or service director that has to guide them and lead them and really tell them what to do. That puts all parties in an untenable situation because the director is, of course, the employee of the kindergarten committee but they are, in fact, hamstrung to make the right decisions because they do not know what to do unless the director tells them. So that puts them in a difficult position.

But I also think that it is the level of legal and financial responsibilities that comes along with the employment of staff, the workplace health and safety harmonised laws, and the new national quality framework. Just getting the committee to understand what that is and what impacts that will have on their

service and what requirements might need to be met is a significant issue. What we are hearing from committee members at the moment is, 'Thank God I finish at the end of this year.' Obviously, that is not a tenable situation for community kindergartens. They need people who will readily volunteer and take on those responsibilities. But, as we move further and further towards these greater levels of responsibility, I think that is going to be harder and harder for community kindergartens.

CHAIR: Will most of your kindergartens be ready to adopt the new framework by the start of next year? What is required of them by the start of next year?

Ms Tyler-Pascoe: All of our branch services and the majority of our affiliated services will be ready under the NQF from 1 January. We have just commenced a rollout through our roadshow program, training all of our educators in all of our services, and any members of parent committees who wish to come along, in what the national quality framework is all about. We have a whole series of tools and information in place for them. We are a large service provider, so we are in a good position to provide that. Some of the associate services who do not take that offer up or who are involved in the sector as individual providers may not be in that same position. But we feel that our services are relatively close to ready.

CHAIR: Have you been able to cope with the cost of professional development as a result of the new changes coming in?

Ms Tyler-Pascoe: We have had to put significant funding towards it from our own pocket and we are a not-for-profit organisation. We have created an entire team in order to manage the national quality framework. We are engaged in two large state-wide road shows that obviously have significant cost impacts. We have chosen specifically not to do those during the daytime because that would have further impacts, with staff relief and all of those things. Whilst we do not have to necessarily employ a range of new staff and buy resources et cetera in order to meet the standards, we still have taken on board a significant cost.

CHAIR: Have you received any state or federal funding to help with that training?

Ms Tyler-Pascoe: Four of our services in low socioeconomic areas have received the \$5,000 grant to assist with the national quality framework rollout. Some of that we have put towards professional development. Others we have allocated towards additional resources or outside environments.

Mrs SCOTT: Kerry, just harking back to the committees, I am the member for Woodridge so a lot of our schools have people very willing to serve on P&Cs, for example, but not the skills to do that. I know that we have rolled out quite a bit of training for them and so on. Is that something that may be needed, to actually work with willing people to give them a lot more skills to be able to carry out those roles, which of course are volunteer roles?

Ms Tyler-Pascoe: At C&K we think you have really only three options. One is that volunteer parent management committees are encouraged to become part of a central governing body, a not-for-profit organisation that can support them with the management of their services. All of that responsibility and the need to have that training is really taken away. They are given that ongoing day-to-day support. Two, a cluster model of management could be taken on board whereby groups of geographically co-located services would share the cost of a cluster manager who would do all of the employment, workplace health and safety, payroll, GST, BAS—all of those kinds of things that are above and beyond what should be expected of a group of volunteer parents. If neither of those options is taken on board, the volunteer parent management committee is required to go through a significant form of governance training. Our view would be that it should be as important as having a blue card and it should be a requirement of being a member of a volunteer parent management committee, because suitability to be with children is only one part of that role. Certainly if some part of the government could provide training for volunteer management committees, I think that would be a big step forward.

Mr KILBURN: The submission that we have here states that people in the supervisor's position—and I know there is some talk about that word—should have to hold a minimum standard. You are saying 'must hold the required qualification, not be enrolled or working towards'. When we discussed this with the department, the reason given was that, maybe not always in urban areas but sometimes in country areas, if it is a hard-and-fast rule but you cannot get that person on that day or at that time, basically you have to shut the place down. We recognise that you are not always going to be able to get the skilled people, but having someone working towards it is better than having the doors shut. What would you say to that comment?

Ms Tyler-Pascoe: I think we would agree. We have services in those areas where we struggle to find staff, particularly in relief situations where someone is sick or on holidays. However, I think our issue is that the wording of it sounds as though that is okay in every service on a day-to-day level. Our position would be we should be aiming for more than that, and C&K have always done that. That is our internal policy. We do not employ people who are working towards; we employ people who already have the qualifications. We only employ people working towards in an absolute dire emergency situation like you were referring to in regional and remote locations. I suppose we are saying that, if we are talking about raising quality, this is another area that we can look at. Perhaps there can be drafting in the legislation or regulations that refers to exigent circumstances where it may be required that there is the ability to have people who are not quite qualified at that point.

CHAIR: Is there anything else that you wanted to add, Kerry?

Ms Tyler-Pascoe: No. I think we have covered the key points of our submission. I am really grateful for the opportunity to come and speak with you all today.

CHAIR: Thank you. We are very grateful that you did. Thank you.

SPRIGGS, Mr John, Senior Industrial Officer, Independent Education Union of Australia, Queensland and Northern Territory Branch

CHAIR: Good morning. It may be that you would also like to make an opening statement? You heard my preliminary remarks?

Mr Spriggs: Yes, certainly.

CHAIR: I invite you do so if you wish.

Mr Spriggs: Our written submission indicates that we overwhelmingly support the general thrust of the improvement in quality care. Our submission identifies two matters, the first being more important than the second, where we believe some finetuning should very well occur. As I have said, we support the desire to maintain and improve quality education for children.

CHAIR: Did you want to expand on that finetuning?

Mr Spriggs: If I go to our submission and perhaps give an illustration. Regulations 90 and 91 place exactly the same requirement on the approved provider and the nominated supervisor for the provision of certain things. If you go to the act itself, for example, sections 165 and 166 place exactly the same requirement on the approved provider—that is, the owner of the entity—and the nominated supervisor to do certain things. There will be occasions—and the example we gave in our written submission related to the provision of nutritious food—when the entity—that is, the owner of the establishment—will have much greater control over the provision of some of the things that are to be provided and the nominated supervisor, being an employee and therefore being able to exercise only the discretion that is delegated to them by the owner, may very well not have the ability to control the things that the legislation says they should control and will be subject to penalty if they do not. For the sake of comparison, I indicate that it could be rectified. If we look at section 167 of the act, rather than saying that they ‘must ensure’, it indicates that they ‘must take every reasonable step’ or every reasonable precaution. In our opinion, that would be a better requirement to place on the nominated supervisor, given that they are an employee and subject to the direction of the employer, rather than that they ‘must ensure’.

Dr FLEGG: Thanks, John. Your union represents kindergarten teachers and the QTU does not; is that correct?

Mr Spriggs: You are correct. In kindergartens we represent the teachers and the assistants and the Queensland Teachers Union represents employees of the state government. In kindergartens, as the C&K has just indicated, employees are either employees of separately incorporated community associations or, for example, the C&K Association itself.

Dr FLEGG: C&K indicated, as have other people, that there is an obvious disparity between the pay rates in the long-day-care sector and some C&K centres, but more particularly I am concerned about the disparity between the pay rates for four-year trained teachers that might apply within the long-day-care sector compared to, for example, a primary school teacher. There has been some comment that universal access will struggle to work unless they are brought into line. I imagine you would be at the forefront of that?

Mr Spriggs: Absolutely.

Dr FLEGG: Do you have any comments you would like to make to clarify that situation for us?

Mr Spriggs: My first comment, with respect, is that that might go beyond the remit of the particular bill we are looking at, but we would have many comments. Historically, community kindergartens were funded under a scheme called DECKAS, the Department of Education Community Kindergarten Assistance Scheme, which provided for wage rates for teachers that matched wage rates for teachers in state primary schools. The wage rates for teachers in childcare centres were not so aligned. Unfortunately, this goes back quite a number of years, when there was at that time a distinction accepted between care and education. The teachers employed in long-day-care centres were not actually seen as providing an educational program. With the advent of universal access, that distinction has well and truly be taken away, regardless of our argument that it should not have existed some time ago. It has been taken away, but we are left with the historical consequences of those previous positions—that is, that teachers in long day care, even with universal access now, will struggle to be paid rates that are commensurate with those rates that are paid in schools.

Part of what will occur is that there will be competition for appropriately trained and experienced teachers. I think those people, whilst looking at the area that they want to work in—generally people choose to work in early childhood for specific reasons—will still be able to say, ‘I can still work in early childhood’—and most of our non-government schools now are starting to offer pre-prep and prep—‘in a school and receive the wages and conditions of a teacher. I can choose a community kindergarten, which is a little bit more at-risk in relation to its wages and conditions, or I can choose long day care, where I will be very hard pressed to get wages that are commensurate with those that should apply to a teacher.’

Dr FLEGG: And that would apply to holidays as well?

Mr Spriggs: Generally that is also the case. In long day care they might be asked to work 48 weeks of the year as opposed to kindergartens and schools where, generally, there are at least 10 weeks vacation time. There is a problem there. In our discussions with the department, the department has made a number of statements saying that the new kindergarten funding scheme is sufficient to ensure that the teachers receive teachers' rates. However, our own private research that we have commissioned would show that that certainly is not the case—not in kindergartens and definitely not in long-day-care centres.

CHAIR: You have gotten off pretty lightly, Mr Spriggs. Thank you, nevertheless, for your attendance today and for the submission from your group. We are very grateful for it. Thank you.

Mr Spriggs: Thank you for the opportunity.

BRIDGE, Ms Gwynn, President, Childcare Queensland

CHAIR: The next witness is Ms Gwynn Bridge from Childcare Queensland, which is a group representing private child-care service operators.

Ms Bridge: Thank you for giving us the opportunity to speak to you all. My name is Gwynn Bridge. I am the CEO of Childcare Queensland and I am also the President of the Australian Childcare Alliance, which is the federal body. Childcare Queensland has in excess of 800 members, primarily private, but we do have community sector members and a lot of the independent schools are now joining with us as well. So we are very active and we have been very involved in the whole process of these regulations.

I would also like to say that we support national standards across Australia. I think it is something that had to happen, but we have our concerns for the cost for families primarily. I would also like to say that we have worked very closely with the Office for Early Childhood Education and Care, and in conjunction with them we have some significant delays on a few issues for Queensland, which have been well appreciated.

Probably more than the other speakers we have more facets that are concerning us. A lot of our members are in very low socioeconomic areas. A lot of them have small centres; some of them have double centres. The problems across the whole sector cannot be summed up with one statement because they vary so much on the demographic areas. A huge issue that we have is the lack of qualified staffing and the issue of teachers is a huge concern. That concern is Australia-wide. It is not just a Queensland problem.

We are concerned about the readiness of the sector. We are concerned about the additional workload on our staff and the pressures. We cannot afford to lose any of our staff. Our staff are valuable to us. Our industry underpins the whole workforce so without staff and under the new regulations under the national law the penalties become a lot higher. Until they are implemented we can only read them as they are in the law. We do not know what the implementation process will be with them.

We are concerned about children from low socioeconomic families who currently cannot afford to attend an early learning program. We can see that with rising costs for families more families will be pushed into that disadvantaged group. Basically, that is my summing-up.

CHAIR: Thank you for that. What percentage of the market, so to speak, does your organisation cover or represent?

Ms Bridge: I think there are 1,400-plus long-day-care centres, and that will include some C&K centres and a lot of community centres who are not our members—so around the 800. But we also have private centres out there who are doing it alone. We are really concerned for those centres who are putting their head in the sand and maybe not working towards it all at the moment.

CHAIR: So 800 out of 1,400. That is 60-odd per cent. You mentioned the lack of qualified staff not only here but throughout Australia. What is the fix for that?

Ms Bridge: Queensland is better off than most other states because we have been working with qualified staff for a long time. It has been a requirement, but in a lot of areas even those qualified staff are not available. I think there should be additional funding for their training. We are going to need to bring them up to speed with these new regulations. They are flat out getting through their day and the paperwork currently required without having to read the national law, the national regulations, the new quality framework and the new workplace health and safety legislation. We are feeling very intimidated by the amount of work that is in front of us and the fact that at this time—October—we have not seen the final regulations or the final national quality framework.

CHAIR: In the broader sense about seeking qualified people, is it the case that it is not sufficiently remuneratively attractive?

Ms Bridge: I gather you are referring to the early childhood teachers. That could be the problem in some areas but it is certainly not the problem in a lot of areas. We do have an awful lot of early childhood teachers working in the long-day-care sector in Queensland. That gained momentum with the introduction of the kindergarten program. Some teachers choose not to work in the public sector. A lot of them found they were on contract and they could not get loans. They preferred to come to the long-day-care sector. Their wages are very negotiable with whoever their employer is. Some may not be doing add-on. Whether they keep them will be other things that they may offer.

There certainly is a huge demand for early childhood teachers to meet the current kindergarten rollout, and that is not meeting the federal government requirements that are coming in as well. If you are a child-care centre in Queensland and you choose not to have a kindergarten program at the moment you do not have to have an early childhood teacher, but by 2014 you will have to have one in every centre.

Dr FLEGG: I was going to ask something along the lines of what Kerry asked in relation to the relativity of wages for teachers between long day care and schools and what, based on comments here and elsewhere, looks like some sort of inevitability that teachers in long-day-care centres are going to end up at one point being paid similarly with schoolteachers. Can you comment on that if that is how you see it? What do you think the cost impact of that is?

Ms Bridge: The cost impact on our families would be huge. Whatever people may want, you have to realise that the consumer is the family. All these costs are going to be passed down. Quite honestly, I do not think 12 weeks holiday in the long-day-care sector would ever be appropriate because we are open 52 weeks of the year. I have no answers for it, ultimately, just the fact that the cost is there. The kindergarten funding is a huge advantage but you cannot equate that across all services who have kindergarten programs either, because one centre may only have 15 children doing the program where another centre may have 40 and the funding is per child. I think we have to be aware of all the differences because of the different sized services and the different delivery.

CHAIR: Would you concur with the sorts of costs estimates that C&K indicated that would be about \$5 a day?

Ms Bridge: C&K said \$5 to \$6 but did not say whether it was per day or per week.

Dr FLEGG: I think it was per day. I think we can assume that it was per day.

Ms Bridge: Realising that most C&K centres only have a few rooms—I think two or four; I am not sure—whereas long-day-care centres may have six rooms or they may be a double centre with eight rooms, we are seeing our costs as almost double that for the implementation of the whole regulations. We do not know what the implementation of the national quality framework is going to cost us. We have no idea. It was not costed in the Access Economics document that came out.

Dr FLEGG: I note there were some relaxations on some of the original things that came out, which I think everyone was fairly pleased to see. How significant is the structural change to buildings with the drop in ratio from four to one to three to one for the littlies?

Ms Bridge: We estimate an average loss of six places per day per centre in Queensland, and that is 42,000 places per week that we could lose under the new ratios. That is very significant for Queensland. People are doing it tough in Queensland at the moment. Our occupancy levels are not as good as they have been in the past, but the thing is the banks have loaned to small business operators on the licence capacity of a service and we are already seeing banks calling people in because they are looking at the debt to asset ratios. That is a huge concern.

Mrs SCOTT: I just looked around the table and all of the members here are all in the south-east corner. I am just wanting your comment about what is happening in regional centres but more the smaller centres in Queensland, because we are a very diversified state geographically.

Ms Bridge: We are.

Mrs SCOTT: I imagine if it is difficult in areas like mine in Woodridge it is perhaps even more so in some of the smaller centres.

Ms Bridge: As with the C&K model, a lot of the areas which are remote are clustered and they can service, but our concern is for those centres that are servicing a local community but have no support network at all, no backup. How on earth is this whole sector going to bring every staff member up to speed by 1 January 2012? A lot have not even started on it because the regulations are still in draft form. The quality framework is still in draft form. Those services are going to need an awful lot of nurturing. We do not know what people's private financial position is, but we do know that some people are getting quite concerned about viability. I think the federal government's figures on utilisation Australia-wide at the moment are 72 per cent. Break-even in the child-care centre is about 75 per cent, but we do know some centres that are running at less than 50 per cent.

Mrs SCOTT: Is there online professional development available?

Ms Bridge: There is. There is what they call little vignettes, but the thing is that staff then have to have time to watch them if we have not got enough staff to call in to replace. Our work just cannot be put aside and built up. We have to be face to face all day long and it is those additional staff. I do not know how true this is, either, but I have heard that the Australian government is maybe not going to be sending out printed copies of all of these documents to every centre in bulk. If that does not happen, I do not know whether they expect it to fall back on to the states to do it or not, but it will be a huge cost and human resource impact on the services if we have to print for every staff member. You have to realise that our staff are not learning these regulations in college. They know nothing about it. The colleges are not even starting to teach this yet. So it is up to each individual licensee, whether they are in the city where they can get the support, or in a rural or remote area, to bring their own staff up to speed.

I will say one more thing on the fact that we will have difficulty getting our early childhood teachers, and in some rural and remote areas they will have trouble getting their qualifications as well. Under the new national quality framework we can apply for a waiver for 12 months and the most we can get on the staffing is two years. But if we apply for a waiver it does not matter how wonderful that centre is, you cannot reach national quality standard. We are being punished because of a regulation that is coming in. How, then, is it going to make this sector look Australia-wide if, because of no staff pool, a large percentage will be sitting under the national quality standard level? I think that is a major thing that needs to be looked at—maybe move down one level but not go from a high-quality centre to not meeting national quality standards.

Dr FLEGG: Some of the independent assessments of it have indicated that waivers might be required in fairly large numbers. I am sure you would have seen that report. Is that how you see it?

Ms Bridge: I see it in large numbers when the requirement for the early childhood teacher comes in, because our staff must be studying now. We have been building our certificate III and diplomas for a while, but we still need more, of course, because we see ads running constantly. If you ever have five minutes spare, just have a look at the Seek ads on the internet. The positions vacant that are advertised every week are huge.

CHAIR: If there are no further questions, I thank you for your attendance today and for the submission that was made.

Ms Bridge: You are welcome.

CHAIR: Thank you all for your attendance at today's public hearing. I believe the committee has gathered some very valuable information that will assist in its inquiry. I would like to formally place on record the committee's appreciation of the assistance that all of those involved in the inquiry have provided. I now declare the hearing closed.

Committee adjourned at 12 pm