



Submission:

**Inquiry
into the delivery of quality and affordable early childhood
education and care services**

**Committee Secretary
Senate Education and Employment Committees
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600**

Submitted March 2014

1 Public Service Association Coverage

The Public Service Association (PSA) is a registered union under the Industrial Relations Act 1996, representing New South Wales public sector employees and general staff in universities. The union represents approximately 41,000 members spread over 4,000 worksites.

The PSA's membership includes:

- People who work for NSW government departments
- Correctional Officers
- Juvenile Justice Officers
- Sheriffs
- School and administrative and support staff in NSW public schools
- People who work in NSW budget funded agencies
- General staff in NSW universities
- General staff in TAFE
- Non-uniformed staff in the Police Service
- Some classes of employees in statutory authorities and State Owned Corporations such as Landcom, Pillar Administration electricity generators, Roads and Traffic Authority and many others.

Of the 41,000 PSA members, approximately 60% are female.

2 Survey Results

In January 2014, an electronic survey was distributed to all female members of the PSA in relation to the delivery of quality and affordable early childhood education and care services.

A total of 430 responses were received.

Not all respondents answered all questions.

The survey results were as follows:

Prevalence of the use of childcare

- 77% of respondents use some kind of childcare

Form of childcare utilised

Of those who use some form of childcare:

- 49% use long day care;
- 43% use informal arrangements (eg family and friends);
- 30% use before/after school care;
- 14% use a preschool;
- 11% use family day care and;
- 2% use a nanny.

Note: some use more than one form of childcare.

Childcare available and parental needs

Of those who use child care:

- 69% said it met their requirements and
- 31% said it did *not* meet their needs.

Common reasons why childcare was not meeting needs were inflexibility (especially for shift workers, on call and casual workers who work irregular hours and/or non-business hours), childcare hours not catering to the needs of shift workers was a particular concern, insufficient places at childcare facilities, childcare not being available for long enough hours, no facilities for sick children, prohibitive cost, no regular staffing, long waiting lists, no vacation or weekend care, and the distance/location of the facility from place of work or home.

Important factors in choosing childcare arrangements

The most important factors in choosing childcare facilities were (in order of importance):

- the quality of care and service delivery by trained workers;
- cost;
- the provision of a stimulating environment;
- flexible hours;
- the social environment at the childcare facility;
- early childhood learning framework and;
- convenience.

Remuneration

- 80% of respondents indicated that they do not think childcare workers are paid enough for the work they do;
- 6% believe childcare workers are adequately remunerated for the work they do and;
- 14% indicated they were unsure.

The ratio of carers appropriate for the care of children under 3 years

- 61% of respondents stated that a ratio of 1:3 for carers and children under 3 years of age was appropriate;
- 35% indicated a ratio of 1:5 was appropriate;
- 3% said a ratio of 1:8 was appropriate and;
- less than 1% felt a ratio of 1:10 was appropriate.

Training to ensure quality education and care

- 88% of respondents indicated that childcare workers should be trained to provide quality education and care;
- 2% indicated this was not appropriate;
- 10% were unsure.

Current amount paid for childcare arrangements (in total for all children)

- 11% of respondents pay nothing
- 3% pay only out of pocket expenses
- 19% pay less than \$50 per day

- 25% pay \$50-\$80 per day
- 25% pay \$81-\$120 per day
- 14% pay \$121-\$200 per day
- 3% pay in excess of \$200 per day

It is important to note that not all those who are paying a high price are doing so through choice, nor due to their ability to pay. Some women in rural areas indicated they had no choice but to employ a nanny because there was no childcare available in their area. Some women stated that almost their entire wage was being spent on childcare and transport.

Affordable quality childcare, if available, that better suited needs, would result in increased use of childcare

- 54% of respondents indicated they would use more childcare if it was available and met their needs;
- 33% indicated they would not increase their usage even if it was available and;
- 13 % stated they were unsure

These results clearly indicate a need for more childcare.

Type of childcare that would be chosen if cost were no barrier

In order of preference, respondents indicated they would prefer to use:

- long day care;
- before/after school care;
- a nanny;
- preschool;
- informal arrangements and lastly;
- family day care.

Other options raised by respondents included:

- a preference to stay home with the children if they could afford to do so;
- a combination of the above options;
- husband staying home and;
- vacation care.

Government subsidies accessed for childcare services

- 14% have access to the CCB;
- 61% have access to the child care rebate;
- 21% cannot access either of these and;
- 4% are unsure.

Types of childcare subsidies preferred by respondents

In order of preference, the subsidies preferred by respondents were:

- child care rebate or CCB;
- tax deductible status for formal child care;
- subsidies to employers to establish work based child care;
- vouchers which could be put toward the cost of child care.
- a small number of respondents (around 11%) indicated they do not agree with any form of subsidy for child care.

Concerns expressed about (potential) voucher systems

In order of importance, concerns respondents expressed about voucher systems for childcare were:

- an undermining of quality childcare;
- increased child care costs;
- a proliferation of untrained carers in the home and;
- greater government subsidies for informal care such as nannies.

Type of childcare preferred by respondents:

- 47% of respondents indicated they prefer to use not for profit childcare;
- 20% of respondents indicated they prefer to use employer provided child care;
- 15% of respondents indicated they prefer to use government provided child care;
- 10% of respondents indicated they prefer to use for profit and;
- 8% of respondents indicated they were unsure.

Support for the option of locating long day care on existing school premises

A significant proportion of the cost involved in establishing childcare centres is due to the infrastructure. Further, convenience is a major factor in most people choice of their childcare providers (see above). The option of locating childcare on existing school premises would make better use of existing infrastructure, as well as limit double drop offs and pick ups for carers.

- 70% of respondents indicated they support locating childcare facilities on existing school premises;
- 14% of respondents indicated they did not support this;
- 16% of respondents indicated they were not sure.

Employer sponsored childcare

Case Study: Nanbaree

Nanbaree is an employer sponsored child care centre located in Margaret Street, in Sydney's CBD. The inner city location is very accessible to public transport and close to many public sector workplaces.

Nanbaree offers long day care with high quality and engaging early childhood programs specifically designed for children aged 6 weeks to school age.

Nanbaree is managed by Gowrie NSW on behalf of the NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet. It offers 42 public sector, employer-sponsored places, though families from the broader community also use the service.

The centre is well equipped, including a large 'grassed' indoor play area containing a sandpit and plenty of natural light.

Nanbaree goes beyond the provision of basic childcare, seeking to create a sense of connectedness and belonging through an emphasis on the learning experience and positive relationships between staff, children and their families.

The centre's high staff-to-child ratios, a comprehensive professional development program, community affiliations, as well as the participation of family members are integral in achieving the vision of quality care.

The minimum staff to child ratios for babies (under two years) is 1:4, but Nanbaree provides a ratio of 1:3; for toddlers it is 1:8 but have Nanbaree provide 1:5; for pre-schoolers it is 1:10 but Nanbaree provide 1:6.

In addition to these high staff to child ratios, Nanbaree also have more qualified early childhood educators. The required minimum for a centre their size is two, but Nanbaree have three university qualified teachers on site.

Visitors are always welcome (visits can be arranged by calling the Director, Osanna Giang, to make an appointment).

In addition to the high quality care, there are some other specific benefits to employees of using employer sponsored childcare:

- There is a discount available to relevant employees, providing a cheaper rate because the centre is sponsored by the employers.
- In addition to the discounted rate, parents can also salary sacrifice the cost of childcare to help with cost. This further reduces the cost of childcare.

- Perhaps the most tangible benefit for people who work in the CBD, is that the location is close to work. In addition to the logistical benefits of childcare that is close to both work and public transport, is that women who are still breast feeding can attend Nanbaree in their break and feed their child. Appropriate facilities are available for this.
- The number of employee sponsored places (which give prioritised placement) make it easier to access suitable childcare and this in turn enables women to return to work earlier than they may otherwise be able to. Difficulty accessing childcare and/or difficulty accessing flexible work practices that accommodate available childcare are is one reason many women need to take additional leave following their initial break on maternity leave.