



**Education  
Standards  
Board**

early childhood to  
senior schooling



Government  
of South Australia

**OFFICIAL**

Feedback on

Interim Report of  
The Royal Commission into  
Early Childhood Education and Care

17 May 2023



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## Introduction

The Education Standards Board (ESB) provides the following feedback on the Commission's Interim Report, relevant to its scope, legislative and regulatory remit.

### 1. 'Quality markers' for 3-year-old preschool

As to the discussion throughout the Interim Report about 'quality', 'quality measures', 'quality indicators' and 'quality markers' and specifically, the Commission's Interim Recommendations 19<sup>1</sup> and 21<sup>2</sup>, the ESB offers the following feedback:

- a. Service quality markers for 3-year-old preschool already exist under the nationally agreed<sup>3</sup> National Quality Framework (NQF) and specifically the National Quality Standard (NQS).
  - i. Ratings under the NQS are not proxy quality markers or indicators: the NQS and the assessment and rating process under the NQF are robust in their theory and application and include quantitative and objective quality measures of service delivery and performance.
  - ii. Each service's specific context is considered in the assessment and rating of a service against the NQS.
- b. The creation of additional quality markers and of a South Australian Government only 'accreditation' scheme outside of the NQF and NQS, raises concerns for the ESB that these will:
  - i. potentially create duplication and create additional and competing quality requirements and standards;
  - ii. increase the complexity of an already complex regulatory environment in addition to the assessment and rating system; and
  - iii. impose further administrative burden on preschool providers.

As to the examples given by the Commission about 'quality markers' in a context where preschool is delivered in a number of different settings,<sup>4</sup> the examples given are already covered by the NQF and NQS:

- Setting and service specific context is always considered when assessing and rating any service under the NQF and against the NQS.
- 'Early childhood education expertise in leaders and local education teams' is covered by NQS Quality Areas 4 (Staffing arrangements) and 7 (Governance and Leadership).
- The 'need for early childhood teachers operating in long day care to be connected to networks of other teachers for their own professional learning' is also covered by NQS Quality Areas 4 (Staffing arrangements) and 7 (Governance and Leadership).

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<sup>1</sup> Interim Report, pages 92-95

<sup>2</sup> Interim Report, pages 92-94; 96

<sup>3</sup> The NQF and NQS are agreed by the Commonwealth and all Australian State and Territory Governments (the Ministerial Council: Section 5(1) National Law), as the quality markers and indicators for ECEC services, including preschool services

<sup>4</sup> Interim Report, page 72

## 2. State Government funding and support available to long day care services currently rated as ‘Working Towards’

The Commission states the following in the context of ‘Determining Quality’:<sup>5</sup>

‘ .... it should be noted that in all of the approaches, the Deloitte model has not expanded the capacity of long day care services assessed as working towards the National Quality Standards but not at those standards. Given the Commission’s focus on quality, one option could be to exclude offering a preschool program to children currently attending such services altogether. However, that would mean currently enrolled three-year-olds are still accessing a lower quality service. What may be more appropriate is to find a mechanism to ensure such services attain the National Quality Standards as quickly as possible. The Commission is seeking specific feedback on how best to remedy this quality deficit and will address this issue in its Final Report.’

The ESB provides the following context and qualification about quality in response:<sup>6</sup>

- Any service rated as ‘Working Towards’ under the NQF is still a safe service and although overall rated as ‘Working Towards’, a service can be Meeting or Exceeding in as many as 39 of the 40 elements within Quality Areas under the NQS.
- As at 4 April 2023, 31% of Working Towards services had only one or two Elements of the NQS rated as not met.<sup>7</sup>

Interim Recommendations 26 and 27, <sup>8,9</sup> recommend state government preschools receive *unconditional investment priority, with no conditionality being placed on the quality rating of state government preschools, as opposed to non-government preschool providers. Non-government preschool providers must meet conditions to be eligible for State Government funding and support to expand their preschool capacity and any current non-government service rated as ‘Working Towards’ under the NQS, are specifically excluded from funding and support eligibility.*

The ESB advocates for an overall approach that assists all preschool services (government or non-government) to achieve a Meeting or above NQS rating and where all preschool providers and services (government or non-government) are held to the same standard, to avoid placing a divide between provider types for the entitlement to funding and support for the creation of preschool capacity.

The ESB also considers State Government funding arrangements that are tied to quality markers, in and of themselves, are at odds with the Objects<sup>10</sup> and Principles<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Interim Report, page 91

<sup>6</sup> See also the ESB’s *Final Submission to the Royal Commission into Early Childhood and Care* [17 May 2023] and evidence given by Ms Kerry Leaver to the Commission on 14 April 2023

<sup>7</sup> National Quality Agenda IT System (NQA ITS) [Accessed: 4 April 2023]

<sup>8</sup> Interim Report, page 105

<sup>9</sup> Relating to content under the headings of ‘Supporting the change’ (page 102) and ‘Investment in additional capacity’ (pages 103–104)

<sup>10</sup> Section 9(1), State Act

<sup>11</sup> Section 9(2), State Act

of the *Education and Early Childhood Services (Registration and Standards) Act 2011* (SA) (State Act), specifically that:

- provide for a diverse range of education and early childhood services;<sup>12</sup>
- recognise the rights of parents to access a diverse range of education and early childhood services providers;<sup>13</sup> and
- parents and guardians should have the right to choose the best services for their family.<sup>14</sup>

It is also the view of the ESB that the recommended funding model approach is at odds with Commission's own principles in its Interim Recommendations:

- 2(c) of 'supporting equity for children and families, providing additional supports as required to reduce disparity in outcomes';<sup>15</sup> and
- 2(d) that 'the system should support families to be able to access a diversity of offerings dependent on their needs and interests'.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Section 9(1)(b), State Act

<sup>13</sup> Section 9(1)(c), State Act

<sup>14</sup> Section 9(2)(a), State Act

<sup>15</sup> Interim Report, page 38

<sup>16</sup> Interim Report, page 38