

The issue of the professional recognition and registration of graduates with recognised early childhood education teaching degrees is of great importance to Early Childhood Australia nationally.

Margaret Young, National President ECA wrote recently: For many years early childhood teacher education has been delivered as a specific degree course in many Australian universities (most often within Schools of Education), and internationally, and has a very well established and developing pedagogy and research base. Further, and most importantly, research is increasingly showing that those early childhood programs that have the most significant long term beneficial effects for young children include highly qualified early childhood teachers as program leaders and facilitators.

It is of great concern that failure to accord the same level of recognition to early childhood teachers as to teachers working with older children has the potential to diminish their professional standing and career path options. This will lead to the withdrawal of skilled teachers from the early childhood sector, with a resulting negative outcome for young children.

Early Childhood Australia, National has already had discussions with the College of Deans of Education and Teaching Australia and the Board will be considering the question of further action when it next meets. ECA Queensland Branch has also met with the Director and Associate Director of the Queensland College of Teachers, Queensland to discuss this matter further.



We applaud Kevin Rudd's new directions paper for Early Childhood Education that promises all Australian 4 year olds a universal right to access early play-based learning and development programs delivered by degree-qualified teachers.

Reporting on "Investing in Early Childhood Education and Care- the science, the policy, the cost" seminar held at QUT, 24th January, 2007

Research presented at the seminar showed the links between access to high quality early childhood programs and positive life trajectories for children. The work of James J Heckman, PhD, Nobel Laureate in Economic Sciences, 2000 supported arguments that the real question is how to use the available funds wisely.

The best evidence supports the policy prescription Invest in the very young. Heckman analyzed the investments made in early childhood programs and learned that, at the same cost there are far greater gains to be had when children are younger. Dr. Heckman came to believe that one can make a bigger difference and have more of an impact with younger children because the social skills they learn in the very early years set a pattern for acquiring life skills later. **"On a purely economic basis," Dr. Heckman says, "it makes a lot of sense to invest in the young."**

Heckman argues that: An important lesson to draw from the entire literature on successful early interventions is that it is the social skills and motivation of the child that are more easily altered—not IQ. These social and emotional skills affect performance in school and in the workplace. We too often have a bias toward believing that only cognitive skills are of fundamental importance to success in life.

At the seminar, Kevin Rudd, Federal Labor Leader, presented the benefits of investing in early childhood education and care (ECEC), for the economy, increased productivity and workforce participation.

Jenny Macklin, Shadow Minister for Families & Community Services, Indigenous Affairs & Reconciliation, reiterated this position, and highlighted the benefits of investing in high quality pre-school education.

The importance of quality early childhood education was made repeatedly during the morning through informative presentations by Professor Karen Thorpe (QUT), Professor Collette Tayler (QUT) and Dr Gordon Cleveland (Research Economist, University of Toronto).

Dr Gordon Cleveland suggested that politicians should step in to change the way children are growing up as maternal employment increases. He provided some suggestions for Australian policy makers including:

- 12 months paid maternity leave – for either parent
- Good quality, developmental, play based care opportunities

Professor Collette Taylor argued that relationships with caring adults were essential for all children.

Some comments to ponder from some ECA members who attended the seminar:

Megan Gibson: Mr Kevin Rudd and Ms Jenny Macklin made the point repeatedly that they are "in the ideas business" so perhaps there is an opportunity in for ECEC policy in Australia to be reshaped. Imagine if the focus was to shift from "child care" (supporting workforce participation) to "early childhood centres" (based on education and care for children birth to school age). **It would indeed be satisfying to read in the OECD's "Starting Strong III" that Australia was a leading international example in regard to its innovative and supportive early childhood education policies instead of receiving the 'wooden spoon' award for coming last in expenditure on ECEC.**

Wendy Boyd: Jenny Macklin (Shadow Minister for Families and Community Services) expressed interest in having a preschool program for all children for the year before going to school (where does that leave Queensland?). She also suggested that parents suffer from guilt about having their children in care.

Gwen Rayner: Investing in the early years is finally getting state, national and international recognition and this important seminar has provided hope for many passionate and enthusiastic early years' professionals who have always known the importance and significance of the first five years in a child's life.