

CELA Response to the IPART Draft Terms of Reference for the review of NSW early childhood education and care affordability, accessibility and consumer choice

About CELA

Community Early Learning Australia (CELA) is a not-for-profit organisation with a focus on amplifying the value of early learning for every child across Australia - representing our members and uniting our sector as a force for quality education and care. Founded over 44 years ago we represent over 1,800 early education and care services employing 27,000 plus educators and teachers. Our national influence is extended through publications and social media which have a circulation of 52,000 per week and our learning and development program which trained over 8,000 educators and teachers in 2022, in quality practice and governance. More information about CELA can be found at www.cela.org.au

Summary

CELA welcomes the opportunity to contribute to shaping the terms of reference for IPART's review of NSW education and care services in NSW in relation to affordability, accessibility and consumer choice. Broadly, the terms of reference are appropriate, however we suggest elevating **access to high-quality provision** as a higher priority of the inquiry. We suggest that the Inquiry be re-named to be "IPART's review of education and care services in NSW in relation to **quality**, affordability, accessibility and consumer choice."

Quality is important because research shows that high-quality education and care can improve children's learning and development outcomes and this is the foundation on which the sector is built. CELA, along with other advocates for the sector have fought hard for our national quality framework and the elements which make up quality provision, such as a qualified workforce, educator: child ratios and an agreed curriculum framework. We see access to quality education and care to be more important than consumer choice.

Detailed suggestions as below are written in **bold**.

Detailed suggestions

1b – we suggest adding 'quality' so that this clause reads as:

“affordability, accessibility, **quality** and consumer choice across different children and family groups, geographies, service types and provider types”

We welcome the development of an estimate benchmark price that can be used as a standard to measure and compare ECEC fees, noting that such a benchmark will vary depending on geography and community context.

4. - we suggest including ‘quality’ so that this clause reads as:

“4. Recommend ways for the NSW Government to improve ECEC affordability, accessibility, **quality** and consumer choice relevant to the scope of these Terms of Reference.”

We note that in the draft Terms of Reference, IPART will not develop, investigate or recommend price regulation or price setting mechanisms. However, it may have regard to and develop recommendations about fee governance and its possible impacts on:

- a. accessibility, affordability, convenience, flexibility, quality and safety of ECEC for families, including families facing diverse individual circumstances
- b. the ECEC workforce
- c. service provision and operational and financial sustainability of sector participants at a service, provider and sector level
- d. barriers to entry for sector participants
- e. NSW and Australian Government legislation and policy and program objectives
- f. the capacity of the NSW Government to successfully implement them.

We support the inclusion of this, but suggest that this clause be described as “fee governance, **including parameters for receiving and acquitting grants and public funding** and its possible impacts on...”

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