



Review of early childhood education
and care

Public Hearing Transcript

October 2023

Zoom online

Acknowledgment of Country

IPART acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands where we work and live. We pay respect to Elders both past and present.

We recognise the unique cultural and spiritual relationship and celebrate the contributions of First Nations peoples.

Tribunal Members

The Tribunal members for this review are:

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The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal

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1 ECEC public hearing

1.1 Welcome

Mr Nicholls: My name is Andrew Nicholls, and I am the Chief Executive Officer of the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal or IPART. I'll be managing the public hearing today, so I'll start with a few housekeeping notes.

Firstly, please keep your microphone muted, if possible, when you're not speaking to avoid feedback and background noise. But we do encourage you to keep your cameras on if your internet connection is up to it, and you're comfortable doing so. Please make sure your name, and if relevant, your organisation is showing. There are instructions for doing this in the chat box. And to help with accessibility we have turned on Zoom captions. There's also a message in the chat on how to turn these on.

Now we'll be recording today's hearing to allow it to be transcribed. But we don't plan to make the recording publicly available. Instead, we will put up a copy of the transcript and our presentation slides on our website in a few days' time.

But being a public hearing, the media and others present today are free to publish and refer to what is said during this event. We also want to remind everyone that we have a responsibility to ensure a respectful environment today so that everyone feels safe to share their views.

Now in a moment IPART's Chair Carmel Donnelly will commence with a welcome. The review team will also give a short presentation overview of the interim report and then we'll open up to a question-and-answer session, to give everyone present the opportunity to have their say and to ask questions. The Q&A session is an opportunity to provide comments or feedback on issues that are important to you. Everyone is encouraged to share their views, and we'll be using something called Mentimeter for a few ice breaker questions. So please keep your phone or your computer handy for that. But first I'll now hand over to Carmel to welcome us all.

Ms Donnelly: Thank you, Andrew. And Hello, everybody. As Andrew said my name is Carmel Donnelly. I'm the Chair of the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal known as IPART for short. With me today are fellow Tribunal members Sandra Gamble and Mike Smart, and we're also assisted by members of the IPART secretariat including members of the review team. I know that there's a few of us here, but that's because it's very important to us to be able to listen to everyone's feedback today.

I'd like to start by acknowledging the traditional owners of the lands where we're all joining this meeting today. I'm joining from Yuin country. I know that we have people are joining today from the lands of the Darkinjung and the Gadigal, and also other country around the place we now call NSW.

We acknowledge the ongoing connection that Aboriginal people have to this land, and we recognise aboriginal people as its original custodians. We pay our respects to Elders, past and present, and we would also like to extend that respect to all Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people who are joining us today.

I want to open by saying how much I appreciate we on the behalf of the Tribunal, and welcome and value your input today, we really thank you for making the time to join us. And we're looking forward to a very constructive hearing. As I said, we're very keen to be listening for your feedback but we're also here to answer questions and discuss our recent interim report.

More generally our role at IPART is to help the people of NSW receive safe and reliable services at a fair price. Where we get involved in a lot of services that people can't do without and we give independent advice to government on those services, on prices and across other issues, across a lot of sectors of NSW economy and government.

In particular, this review arises because NSW Government is funding new programs to support more children accessing quality early childhood education and care across the state and they want to ensure that increased investment results in improved outcomes for children and families. So we've been asked to review the sector.

Our review aims to improve understanding of the sector, including particularly accessibility and barriers to accessibility, choice, affordability, and supply of quality early childhood services and ways to improve these across the sector.

I just will thank you very much for making the time, look forward to hearing from you during today's hearing. We'll have plenty of time for questions and for you to put your view, and I'll hand back to Andrew.

Mr Nicholls: Great, thanks Carmel. Well, we might pause here for a little Mentimeter ice breaking exercise. So some information about Menti will be put up on the screen for you to have a look at. We're just waiting for the tech and here it is. So, if you see on the screen there for those who haven't used Menti it works a bit like a live poll where we can answer questions from your computer or your mobile device.

Now to access Menti, you can either go to the link that we've pasted in the chat or enter the code that you've got on the screen there. So, you go to www.menti.com and enter the code that you can see there on the screen. Or if you've got a mobile device, just hold it up to the QR code there, and that'll take you straight to our questions.

I'll just give everyone a minute or so to open up Menti and I just want to let everybody know that all answers from Menti are anonymous. We can't see who has responded to any specific question. Now, if you get into Menti and I'll just give everybody a moment. You might have a go at answering the first 2 questions.

Now, if we move too quickly for you. You'll see there in the bottom left-hand corner we've still got the code and the QR for you. So, the first question is just so we can see what areas are represented today. We're asking about what location or area you're from or represent, just type in your suburb or local government area. If you represent services across multiple locations, feel free to put in NSW or Sydney, or even Australia and they're all starting to come in now in the form of a word cloud.

Looks like we've got a number of people who are representing at a whole of Australia level, whole of NSW, and whole of Sydney level. Also, terrific to see a number of the regions represented today as well as a number of the suburbs here in Sydney. I'll give everybody another moment. A few from Port Macquarie. it's growing along the Parramatta, great to have you here as well. People from all parts of Sydney and all parts of NSW, it looks like. Let's give everybody another minute or so. It looks like we've got most people in.

So, we will move to the second question, and this is where we would like to know what type of services that you represent or the type of services that you use. You can select more than one type if you use or represent multiple services.

So, long day care seems to be out in the lead, but we've got a good mix from right across the board it looks like. Of course, if you don't specifically represent one of those you can pick other as well. Just gives us a good sense of the profile here. So, a lot of people who either use or from long-day care I can see there and a good mix, though, from everywhere else. I'll just give you all another few seconds.

Alright, well, thank you everyone that's been really helpful to get an idea of where you're from, and what services that you use or represent. What is great to see is that we've got a great representation from right across the State and in all the different service areas, which is terrific. It means that I think we should get some great feedback from you all as we go through the Q&A session today.

Now, before we get to the Q&A session, what we will do is walk you through a presentation which gives you an overview of our interim report. Then, after that we'll have an opportunity to talk about that and the issues that are important to yourselves. But I might now throw to Jennifer Vincent to walk us through her presentation.

1.2 IPART presentation

Ms Vincent: Thanks a lot, Andrew, and really glad to see how many people have joined us today. Our interim report has been available on our website since the 20th of October, and I encourage you if you haven't already to have a look at it there. But for the purposes of today I am going to quickly run through an overview of everything that's in the interim report.

And I'll just start with a quick review of the tasks in our terms of reference. We had 4 essential tasks, the first of which was to review the market and report on factors driving affordability, accessibility, consumer choice, and supply of services.

Secondly, to collect cost and revenue data from services and a household information on household out-of-pocket costs from families.

The third task was to estimate benchmark prices that reflect the costs of providing quality services for the purposes of being able to compare service fees.

And the fourth task was to recommend ways for the NSW Government to improve the affordability, accessibility, and consumer choice in early childhood education and care services and we were specifically directed not to develop, investigate, or recommend price regulation or price setting mechanisms as part of our review.

And to recap on what we mean by early childhood education and care services. That covers services for children aged 0 to 12 years, including long day care, family day care, and occasional care. NSW Department of Education preschool, community and mobile preschool and out of school hours care, so before and after school care and vacation care.

So, the scope of these services differs from the scope of the current ACCC inquiry as they're just looking at service types that are funded by the Commonwealth Government Child Care Subsidy, whereas we're looking at the full range of services, including preschool.

Our review commenced with draft Terms of Reference in December last year, we've moved through a process of releasing an Issues Paper in April, we held public hearings in May. We have been meeting with people in the sector, undertaking research, we've received data from various sources, and we released an interim report on the 20th of October.

Today we're having this public hearing, and from here we will take the feedback we've heard here today, anything we receive in submissions, and we are required to report to the Government by December this year.

In our report, we highlight 4 overarching findings that came up again and again as we undertook our review. They touched on different parts of our Terms of Reference, and we consider that they underpin accessibility, affordability, and supply in the early childhood education and care sector in NSW and indeed in Australia.

So, firstly, we found that the funding system for early childhood education and care services has an impact across the board on affordability, accessibility, and supply and that the current system is complex and fragmented, potentially inefficient, and can lead to unintended negative outcomes. This is because the funding comes from Commonwealth and State and territory governments through subsidies and families through fees. It's a mix of demand-driven subsidies to families, and special purpose programs with different but overlapping objectives, eligibility, and administration.

Secondly, we found that workforce availability and expertise are critical to the supply and accessibility of quality early childhood education and care services. I'm sure that's no surprise to anybody here and we also heard from stakeholders that the sector is facing persistent and pressing issues with the attraction and retention of educators and in particular early childhood teachers and workforce shortages are having a significant impact on the supply of services and workforce turnover and burnout have a negative impact on quality of education and care.

A third draft overarching finding is that families need accessible and accurate information to make informed decisions about early childhood education and care, and this can be lacking, making it hard for families to find, choose and use services. And we also found that there's untapped opportunities to develop digital tools to help families navigate the early childhood system. So, it's more than the provision of information. It's also about engagement with services.

We also consider that providers and policy makers need better access to data to help with decisions about where to locate services and what programs are needed. And throughout the review to date, we've experienced significant issues ourselves with data, as sources are very fragmented, hard to access and often inconsistent.

Our fourth draft overarching finding is that there's scope to improve access to services and support in services. Inclusive services allow every child to meaningfully participate in activities, receive adequate care and enjoy the benefits of early childhood education and care alongside their peers. All children have the right to inclusive early childhood education and care. But unfortunately, not all services are inclusive for all children, and this is especially so for children with disability or additional needs.

Moving on to our draft priority recommendations. Firstly, our recommendation addressing funding is that the NSW Government should advocate for Australian state, territory and Commonwealth governments to work together to develop an integrated funding approach to early childhood education and care.

In particular, Governments should clarify the objectives of the funding approach, including that all governments are committed to early childhood services as both enabling inclusive early learning for children and workforce participation for parents.

And that the funding approach should prioritise improving affordability and accessibility for families with lower incomes, families living in regional or remote Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, and families with multiple vulnerabilities.

We've also found, as the ACCC inquiry did, that the activity test for receipt of Child Care Subsidy acts as a barrier to access to services and should be reviewed as a priority. This is a Commonwealth responsibility, but throughout our report we have made some recommendations like this one to the NSW Government, that the NSW Government advocate for changes at a federal level.

Secondly, we understand that the national workforce strategy for early childhood education care is underway, but we recommend that the NSW Government refresh its state level workforce strategy and focus on ensuring that enough educators are available to provide the services that are needed, and that so educators are enabled to deliver those services at a high quality.

And thirdly, we recommend that the NSW Government should develop a digital service and data strategy for the early childhood education and care sector, so families can more easily find, choose, and use services that meet their needs, and providers and governments can make better informed decisions. And we set out some of the key elements of the proposed strategy in our report, and they include practical online tools for families to access information, choose a service, understand out-of-pocket costs, enrol, or join wait lists and book casual places.

And that the strategy should include accurate up-to-date information on what services offer, fees and vacancies. And that as well as the digital elements of the strategy that acknowledging that some people do have digital access issues, that there should be complementary in-person support as part of the strategy.

Turning to factors that drive accessibility and choice of services. We made draft findings and draft recommendations across these 4 subcategories of accessibility. Firstly, in looking at availability our findings included that there's underutilised capacity in some services, that families need more flexible options. This follows on from the finding that the NSW Productivity Commission made that NSW has a lowest proportion of services offering extended hours within Australia. So, we've made a draft recommendation that the NSW Government develop a digital tool for matching places that aren't being utilised with unmet demand for occasional or casual bookings.

We also found that remote families face more barriers to access, and as we'll discuss a bit later, NSW Department of Education service provision becomes a larger part of the picture of provision of early childhood places the more remote the area in NSW. But the hours of traditional preschool may not suit the community's needs. So, we've made a draft recommendation that Department preschool hours should be designed to suit the needs of the community. We haven't specified what model that should follow. There's certainly a range of options there for ensuring that services are available over extended hours in remote areas.

With regards to inclusion, we found that there's scope to improve allied health service provision in services and our second draft finding there is that Aboriginal Community-Controlled organisations provide culturally supportive education and family support services and our draft recommendations centre on ways of providing more inclusive and culturally safe early childhood education and care across the system and developing a model for wrap-around support for children and families who are experiencing disadvantage or vulnerability.

In terms of information these draft findings were wrapped up in the overarching draft finding that I discussed earlier and included the fact that families need more meaningful information to help them choose services.

We found that rating information is not routinely shared for families who are already enrolled in services. And, as I mentioned before, that digital access can obviously impact families' ability to navigate and engage with the system. So as part of the digital strategy that we're recommending that the tools be developed to allow better engagement, and that also there be complementary in-person support and we considered in terms of better access to information about inclusion that the NSW Government should advocate for the national quality framework and ratings to highlight inclusion at different services.

On funding arrangements, we have made that overarching draft recommendation about governments working together to improve the design of the funding system overall. But we considered that pending that larger review, that there's scope to improve the design of existing funding programs in particular to better support inclusion.

Moving to factors that drive affordability, we looked at out-of-pocket costs. So that's the amount that families pay once subsidies have been taken into account. We found that the Commonwealth childcare subsidy has improved affordability generally, but may not be enough for some families, especially for those experiencing high levels of disadvantage or vulnerability.

And with respect to out of school hours care, we found that additional out-of-pocket costs associated with vacation care are often not subsidised, so that affects the affordability of out of school hours care and in response to that we made a draft recommendation that OSHC providers be required to include excursions in their advertised daily rate rather than as a separate cost.

In terms of funding arrangements that could improve affordability, as mentioned, before we focused on the CCS activity test as a barrier for some families to access early childhood education and care. And furthermore, that the CCS application process can be difficult to navigate and that families experiencing disadvantage or vulnerability would benefit from additional support. So, we've made a draft recommendation that the Commonwealth Government review both the application process and eligibility criteria.

This next slide presents the average family out-of-pocket costs per child in NSW. This is based on analysis of CCS data from the Commonwealth, from community preschool census data and early childhood service websites. And you can find this table in section 5.1 of our report if you'd like to peruse it in detail.

And as we noted previously, the figures on the slide don't include any additional out-of-pocket costs such as materials parents have to provide for themselves or for excursions or extracurricular activities.

Just comparing the service fee per hour in the second column and the out-of-pocket costs per hour in the third column, shows that on average over 50% of the costs of using early childhood services are subsidised. Average fees and out-of-pocket costs are generally higher for long day care and family day care compared to outside school hours care (OSHC), as we'd expect mainly as a result of higher labour costs due to staffing ratio requirements for younger children.

On this next slide we've had a look at average family out-of-pocket costs per child in NSW both as a proportion of yearly household income on the left and that's just for long day care. That shows that where the impact on affordability is really being felt is in the lowest 3 brackets, and in particular the lowest 2, where a much higher proportion of income is spent on early childhood services. So that's why we've made our draft recommendation around families that are in those income brackets.

The second chart on the right shows that the real out-of-pocket costs over time. So that's with the impact of inflation removed shows that since 2018-19 real out-of-pocket costs have actually gone down for long day care and OSHC showing that subsidies have generally been effective in improving affordability for families using those services.

However, the average out-of-pocket costs of using family day care services have increased slightly since 2018-19. And it's not clear what the reasons are for those changes. But I think generally speaking this slide does show that the subsidies have been effective in reducing or improving affordability to families by reducing their out-of-pocket expenditure, which is counter to, I guess some of the anecdotes about services just increasing costs as subsidies increase, so that there's no improvement in affordability. This shows that on average there has been an improvement in affordability.

Turning to factors that drive supply, again, we have had access to service level data from the Commonwealth, and that covers all the non-preschool services. And then we've had data from the various preschool censuses, and we found that the key factor driving supply is not surprisingly population level. And that, as we'll see in the next slide, there's actually a pretty consistent number of places per population of relevant age children. It's okay. We can stay on the slide. No, go back to the one that we were on previously. Thanks.

However, for out of school hours places, remoteness of location is associated with a lower number of places per school age child and as a draft recommendation that responds to this, we've suggested that as part of its digital strategy that the government should advocate to the Commonwealth to provide better access to CCS data to inform planning of location of services.

We also found that different providers respond to different incentives. So, for example, for profit services are more likely to establish in areas with more economic resources. This is similar to the finding that the ACCC made, and that as remoteness increases, there's more preschools and fewer long day cares and that mix of services is quite different as remoteness increases and population centres are more isolated.

The third key factor driving supplies workforce availability and has been mentioned before recruitment and retention of workers is an issue across the sector. We think there's an opportunity to progress some of the elements of the national workforce strategy here by updating the NSW workforce strategy.

In terms of day-to-day availability of workforce, staff absences can significantly impact families, and I know that there has been some media coverage recently around daily absences and requirements for families being asked to keep children at home as a result of insufficient workers being available to cover ratios.

And we understand, we've made a draft recommendation, and we understand that there may already be some work being done on a short-term educator relief policy to address these daily shortages.

And other factors that were raised in terms of being factors that drive supply include not-for-profit services lacking access to capital. That regulatory and planning constraints can affect the ability to expand services or establish new services, and the availability of premises can be an issue.

Our draft recommendations responding to these include reviewing the process and criteria for applying for capital grant funding, investigating better coordination in particular of regulatory and planning processes, and exploring partnerships with providers to co-locate services on school premises in regional NSW.

Okay, now we can pop to the next slide, which is the analysis of data that shows the number of licence places per children aged 0 to 5 years on the left there and you can see that while the total number of places per 1,000 children is very similar in the 4 remoteness categories, major cities to remote, and only in very remote is there a lower number of places per 1,000 children. But the key difference is that the more remote you get, the more the mix tilts towards preschool and away from long day care.

And then on the right that chart shows the share of licence places by profit status and remoteness and again the more remote you get, the more likely a place is to be provided by a not-for-profit service.

Turning to our analysis of provider costs and revenue. We worked cooperatively with the ACCC who were requesting the same data across services, as we were requiring, to do an analysis of costs. And we'd like to thank the many services who did return the data to us which has been very helpful, and we appreciate the amount of work that the sector has gone to participate in the multiple reviews that are going on at the moment.

And this slide shows the average cost of the main expenditure categories for large providers per year per place offered and this analysis comes from the large provider return. So that's providers with 30 or more services. And, as you can see, the largest category, is labour costs, which accounts for over 70% of costs in every provider type.

And our findings, our draft findings on provider costs and revenue included that the current funding is complex and fragmented, as we've already mentioned, and pending a national review of the funding system in the short term that NSW funding programs and grants should be reviewed.

And in terms of data transparency collection and sharing that data sources for cost and revenue data are varied, fragmented, hard to access and often inconsistent and that reliable government administrative data on funding other than CCS is also difficult to aggregate and reconcile. We considered that as part of the NSW Government's digital strategy work on improving data transparency, collection and sharing arrangements would be beneficial.

Moving on to the final task in our terms of reference which was to develop draft. Oh, sorry, no, not moving on yet.

Just looking at average provider revenue in NSW from fees. This is the provider revenue per child per year across the 3 service types, and the 4 categories of remoteness. And you can see here that clearly across the different types of service, that the provider revenue from fees per child is greater in the cities and drops off as remoteness increases.

Okay, moving on to next and these are, in fact, our draft benchmark price estimates. We used 2 methods to calculate draft benchmark prices. On the left you can see the actual fees method and we used the CCS child level data here to calculate the fees per hour that were being charged by services. This is per hour data because that's the way that CCS is calculated. And then we used an assumed number of hours per day of care to drive the benchmark daily price for long day care, family day care, OSHC. And for community preschool we reviewed websites and gathered data that way.

The other method we used to calculate draft benchmark price estimates is a cost per place method. And for this we used the cost data that we had gathered, which I discussed previously. And we did a cost build-up based on the total costs of the service allocated per place. And we used a range here because we recognise that there's a range of costs, and in particular rental costs can be quite variable between regions.

So, we note that the estimates are limited by data quality and completeness, as well as other factors and assumptions that we've made including around the margins that a service might be targeting. They're based on the best available data and serve as a starting point for families, providers, and policy makers wanting to measure, compare, and understand fees for early childhood services in NSW at a high level.

You can see that long day care and family day care have a similar price per hour, while, as you'd expect, OSHC has a lower price per hour. And generally speaking, the prices as measured by actual fees, reflect what we found in terms of cost per place.

In some cases, the draft benchmark estimates based on the cost per place are higher than the draft benchmark estimates based on actual fees paid. That's due to several factors, including that the cost per place estimates don't deduct subsidies, grants, or funding that services may receive directly. They only take, because they would act as a negative cost on the service, but we didn't have sufficient data there to be able to confidently apply that to the cost per place.

And the prices don't account for cross subsidisation that providers might do between services or groups of children within a service and that brings me to the end of my presentation and back to you, Andrew.

1.3 Q&A session

Mr Nicholls: Thank you very much, Jennifer. Well, in a moment we'll be opening discussion to the floor and the rest of the session today is really a Q&A, an opportunity for everyone here to share your views and to ask questions.

Now the way we'll run it is that you can either use the chat box in Zoom so let us know if you have a question by entering your name and your the organisation, and we can come to you, or you can write your question directly into the chat box, and we'll aim to come to as many questions as we can, and if we can't get to them we will respond to them out of session.

You can also virtually raise your hand, and I'll aim to try and come to you as quickly as I can. So, they're the 2 ways to let us know if you've got a question in the chat box or virtually raising your hand.

But first to get a sense of what people think are the biggest issues to discuss today, we're going to use Mentimeter again. And so that we can make sure we can get through all of those topics we'd like to do a quick poll on Mentimeter to see what you think of the most important topics for today.

If you could again use Mentimeter, you've probably already got it open. But if you haven't, you can use the QR code or go to [menti.com](https://www.menti.com) and enter the numeric code that you can see there in the bottom left-hand corner, and we'll bring up a word cloud that will show what you see as some of the biggest issues. And we'll aim to get to those questions today.

So, you can see, workforce is coming through very strongly, along with inclusion, accessibility. Now this word cloud we will use publicly as something that we're using as part of our reporting. So, another minute or 2, as you get a chance to jump in and let us know what you think are the important issues.

Quality, affordability, cost, workforce shortages. Certainly, some consistent themes here from the elements of our interim report. Let's give everybody a few more seconds. Compliance costs, wages, other themes that are coming through, salary. So quite a few that relate to workforce coming through there.

Alright well, we've probably got most people now. So, thank you very much for giving us today that word cloud and we'll aim to have a discussion around any issues that you think are important will aim to cover some of those big-ticket items, particularly around workforce, quality and affordability and accessibility which come through here today.

Alright, so, at this point we might jump to Q&A, so this is the opportunity to hear from yourselves. It's always hard being first so I'm just having a look. There's a couple of questions here. They've already appeared in the chat. A question from Brenda Jones around being intrigued why preschools were not included in the provider cost analysis. Just wondering if one of the team wanted to respond to that unless Brenda would like to add anything to your point there. But I think it's a fairly straightforward question.

Ms Clough: Andrew I'm happy to respond to that one, Jess here.

Mr Nicholls: Thanks Jess.

Ms Clough: Hi, Brenda, thanks for your question. So, in our provider cost analysis, we did look at preschools when it came to the overall breakdown and cost and there's a bit of information there in chapter 7 of our report, I think around page 144.

The analysis is not quite as detailed as for the long day care, family day care, and OSHC and that's around the fact that the data that we received for those was not as, we didn't have as much data around the cost analysis. So, the provider returns that we received were mainly from large, long day care and OSHC providers and I know Claudio Campi is on the line who did most of that analysis, Claudio, if there's anything that I've left out in that response, please feel free to pipe up and add to it. But hopefully that answers the question, Brenda.

Mr Nicholls: Okay, thanks Jess for the additional comments there. Hopefully that's answered the question. Chiang Lim from ACA NSW, has got a question about the dividends of early childhood education, particularly for children who are later in their lives, 6 to 18 years of age and a question or perhaps it's a statement about whether ECEC should be in families and communities rather than education. Is there anyone on the team would like to respond to that, or happy to take that as a comment. Or did you want to speak to that point, Chiang, that might be helpful.

Mr Lim: Sure, I will thank you. Prior to 2012, under the current system for the National Quality Framework this sector used to be not regarded as part of the education portfolio. I'm not suggesting for a second that we do return to families with community services. What I'm asking for is if the focus of this review and therefore the government is about affordability and workforce participation, and not so much, if not any, about the dividends of early childhood, then will IPART also then recommend that they actually remove us from the education portfolio, I mean, after all, that's the what's the point then about the education, the educational dividends of children in their latter lives. If the focus is about affordability, only about affordability and workforce participation.

Ms Donnelly: I could make some comments on that, Chiang thank you for that. Look our terms of reference did ask us to look more closely at accessibility and affordability, choice, and supply. But from my perspective it starts from a very clear acceptance that early childhood education and care is linked to good outcomes for children and part of our recommendation about improving the funding system starts with clarifying across all government funding systems the objectives.

And what we meant by that was accepting and making it very clear that there are objectives around education and education outcomes as well as workforce participation and you can't deal with one without the other. So actually, we are very strongly reinforcing that it is education, not education sometimes and care sometimes.

We're saying that there needs to be a funding system that assumes that all of these early childhood education and care services are enabling both education and good outcomes as well as workforce participation, and you can't separate them so certainly wouldn't be seeing I think the sort of scenario that you were concerned about.

Mr Lim: Thanks Carmel, I appreciate that. But the way, I must keep reminding myself this is an interim report this is not your final report. So, I'm hoping that your final report will give the credence that early child education does deserve, and that is one of the challenges, I guess of the early child education and care offerings that we provide also is impeded by its complexity.

The way how the regulations are applied in NSW compared to rest of the country, the higher requirements that are required in NSW compared to the rest of the country. The way how we do assessment of ratings in NSW compared to the rest of the country. The way how we do our qualification requirements. And how we apply qualifications in NSW compared to rest of the country, and it also goes down to the way as important an issue of vocational satisfaction, and therefore, educators and teachers' recruitment and retention.

This report seems to be more focused on the affordability and rightly so, I get that to a point, affordability, workforce participation. But it seems to have insufficient emphasis on what is the dividend and therefore the interconnectivity to schools and the dividends for children over for the rest of their lives.

Ms Donnelly: Okay, look I will just say Chiang you're very correct, this is an interim report. We have an open mind and take on board all the consultation, and we'll be considering everything that's said today. And it's very important to us that we get good feedback in both the public hearing and submissions, and we'll take all of that into account for our final report.

We are of course, we've got terms of reference that perhaps not as broad as you're suggesting, but I do think that the Tribunal has room to make comments that appreciate the complexity and the complexity of the system I think you've made some important points there that we'll take on board. We see that there are interactions between the different elements and areas of complexity. And I think you've highlighted them quite well. We'll take that on board, but we do see that it's more complex.

Mr Nicholls: While you have the mic, you've asked another question there or raised a comment about regulatory costs. I was just wondering if you wanted to elaborate on that at all.

Mr Lim: Sure. In your slide 14 earlier there was, understandably talk about the data being reliant upon from larger providers, not necessarily small to medium sized providers. I wonder how you calculate regulatory costs, I mean, is it by certain positions that larger providers have that are dedicated to responding to the regulator's requirements, and actions and activities, whereas with small to medium sized providers you you're looking at existing educators and teachers and staff to respond to those. So, they don't have dedicated staff to do that. So how do you then calculate regulatory costs in smaller medium sized services compared, to say, large providers.

Ms Donnelly: I might ask the someone from the team to talk about how we calculated that, and then I might jump in with some of the suggestions that we're making that are relevant. Thanks Claudio.

Mr Campi: Happy to answer. Yes so, the data return that we sent to large providers included a specific category that asked them about their regulatory costs. So that's how we calculated them. We just took the information that was reported as regulatory costs of compliance regulation.

We did consider that a lot of these costs might not have been captured in that category as you said, it might be flow on effects on labour costs because of additional educator hours having to be spent to comply to regulation and our analysis, as you said, is all is based on large providers.

We're looking into more data from small and medium providers. And a lot of these regulatory compliance costs might be captured in labour cost, and we note that in the report and that's something we're looking more into for our final report.

Ms Donnelly: So that's sort of part one of the answer, and I will just say that it became very clear to us throughout this review from what we've heard from families and also people working in the sector that there is a burden of regulatory and administrative work that could be eased.

So, for instance, we heard from people that working in the sector that they're spending a lot of time on top of, or instead of being on the floor or working with children undertaking administrative tasks, but also that some of that is driven by the complexity of say, the funding system and the difficulty for families in establishing, what they're entitled to, etc. And then the workers in the sector assisting families with that.

So, we felt that as part of this idea of a digital service and data strategy. There may be a way of reducing the administrative burden, both on families making it easier for them to perhaps not need to be on the phone to lots of different childcare centres. But if they've got digital access and skills being able to do it you know more easily anytime, night and day, you know that suits them getting information, etc.

But also, that there may be ways that with better systems people working in the sector don't need to keep repeating provision of the same information more than once. So, we're looking at ways, that where there might be ways of making it a bit more efficient and easier, and reducing some of the administrative burden. I know that's different to regulatory requirements, but it's linked to it as well. I'll just leave that there and see what people might have to say about that, although I can see that there are, Elizabeth's got a hand up, and there are comments in the chat. I, maybe Andrew, I'll hand back to you to see who comes next.

Mr Nicholls: Sure, thanks, Carmel. Well, I will go to Pamela West. You've had a couple of comments up there that for a little while now. Did you want to add to your comments about the workforce crisis, and other things that you think should be included in our report that's not there about that, without putting you on the spot, if that's ok.

Ms West: Yeah, the word crisis is probably more my word just in recruitment and retaining of staff and pay and all the rest of it. And I think I'd just like to know a little bit more detail about what actually updating the workforce national workforce strategy will actually do to help the issues and what other recommendations you're putting across to sort of help in regards to retaining and recruitment of staff, especially, Do you know what I mean, early childhood teachers in the sector, where you know we're all struggling to try and retain teachers when they can go off and earn a lot more money working in NSW schools and the like.

Ms Donnelly: Look I might just make a few comments there, that recommendation is meant to drive a broad range of action not just to have the strategy, but obviously implemented and deliver it. There's definitely general recognition about inadequacy of the salaries to attract and retain the workforce. But we also believe that the strategy needs to include ways of making the workforce better recognised for the work that they do and the contribution. Making some changes that would assist with workers being able to deliver the quality that they want to deliver, having more time off the floor to reflect and to plan.

Better support them in ongoing education as educators. So, you know, we heard about problems with people not being able to afford to go and do the practical work as part of their qualification, the difficulties of releasing people for educational purposes, needing more mentoring and support as part of their education. So, we do expect that that strategy would be broad and would not be a plan on a shelf, would be implemented and would lead to action. Our suggestion is that it needs to be developed at NSW level updated but refreshed to meet the challenges of today. So, I'll stop there, and I might see if anyone else from the Tribunal or the team wants to add to that.

Mr Nicholls: It's probably a good segue to Lisa's question in relation to pay increases for teachers and the implications for this sector. Lisa James, did you want to add to your comments there.

Ms James: I just wanted to say that we're constantly getting feedback from teachers to say they're not getting their non-contact time for their programming, their critical reflection. Directors are having a hard time getting their administration time because of the staffing shortages.

And now that teachers in schools if they're a proficient teacher on the most experience level. I'm sorry for my camera being off. I'm actually on a train. They're on \$122,000 and the modern award for early childhood teachers in long day care is about \$90,000. So, you can see that is significant. So even with the case that we're working on, the supported bargaining agreement. If we got the best possible outcome of the 25%, we're still going to be behind by 15%.

Ms Donnelly: Thanks. That's useful input. Definitely acknowledge that.

Mr Nicholls: Thanks very much like Lisa. We'll go to Meg next, and then Elizabeth who is waiting patiently with a hand up. I'm just trying to get these in the order that they've come in so Meg Mendham from CCSA, you've made a question here around the references to short term educator relief and wanting a bit more specific detail. And is it looking at what the department has already done, happy for you to add to that Meg, if you'd like to.

Ms Mendham: Thank you, Andrew, I think it's pretty self explanatory at the moment. I mean I was just interested in the term that you use short term educated relief. Will you also then be thinking about medium and long term. I mean, we do need a response right now. And how will it look different I mean, you know, we're talking about recruitment packages, retention payments, housing supplement payments, travel incentives, paid practicums, you know what is the detail that's going to be in a short relief package?

Ms Donnelly: Okay, Meg, thank you for that. I would probably say firstly, we're very keen to hear from people to drop down to the next level what should be in a package, what should we be including when we prepare our final report. And if it needs to be broadened, we're definitely very keen to hear from people about that. I probably will leave it there because I would like to hear feedback about what should be included in that short term educator relief policy.

Mr Nicholls: And Sandra, one of our other Tribunal members has just got a hand up. So, I might jump to Sandra's question.

Ms Gamble: So, I'm interested in both financial and non-financial incentives for educators as well. So, I think Meg mentioned a few things like professional development, what are those things that are really going to motivate people to stay and enjoy their work and do their best and provide the quality that our children need.

One of the things that we've heard from some of the other stakeholders is concern about issues of professional profile, that early childhood educators are not recognised by the community as much as they should be, for the professionals that they are. What could a workforce strategy do about that, I'm really interested in that.

Ms Mendham: Yeah, thank you, Sandra. And I mean, you know, ACECQA, you would know their report already, and I guess what I'm really seeking here is not a repetition, I think you know collectively, a voice saying the same thing is important, but here lies the opportunity to actually give some really practical detail to the department, which is not going to be new by any means, because most of us here are in an advisory body, anyway. But I guess that's what I'm really seeking here is those real incentives and responses to the short-term crisis as Pamela or someone referred to before.

Recognition is important, but we need staff to stay in the sector right now, and it is around pay and conditions and all of those other things that's actually going to bring the satisfaction to them to stay longer as well. But it is that monetary piece that is required, because of the cost of living and their own responsibilities and wages that they're managing in their own world. So, I don't think we can exclude the financial response that is required at this point in time.

Ms Gamble: Thank you.

Mr Nicholls: Thanks for that Meg. Elizabeth, thank you for waiting very patiently, I might throw to you, and thanks for your comment in the chat box.

Ms Death: No problem, thank you. And I think it's, without repeating everything I've put in the chat. I think it's a fabulous initiative that you've taken that to suggest we actually have all governments working together.

We have a situation where often levers are pulled at different levels of government that impacts different parts of the sector negatively with unintended consequences. The streamlining of funding is to avoid the duplication, but also to avoid the complexity for families is such an important piece that we need to, the nut that we need to crack. And it's not an easy one.

But I think it's really important that whatever's done in NSW is done in keeping with the Commonwealth and other jurisdictions, so that we can actually avoid the complexity. And we can avoid the duplication.

For example, even in the digital strategies, I'm very keen to hear what investigation you've already done around the ACECQA starting blocks website which was developed, that was in place of childcare finder the Australian Government used to have, starting blocks website has the fee information. It's scraped daily from the childcare subsidy system with Services Australia. It also has the vacancies, and it also has quality ratings.

So, I would be really keen to hear or to see further investigation and conversation between ACEQUA and IPART on this particular strategy and also to look at potentially realigning the national quality framework assessment rating standards that NSW has diverged from Australia and started with a star rating system, whereas the rest of Australia is on the national quality framework rating system that was originally established, and to be able to move with that when and if that shifts in language down the track.

But I think it's really important that we look at other jurisdictions as well. For example, around assessment and rating on the South Australian Royal Commission has that been taken into account around the commitment from South Australian Government to fund and enable their regulatory authority to have a 3 year turn around for assessment and rating for every service, so that we're not waiting years and years, and having that out of date and also the aligning with the Australian Government's workforce initiatives not replicating.

I agree wholeheartedly with Meg, not replicating what's happening at the Federal level, but aligning with what's happening at the Federal level and making sure that NSW funding is front and centre for NSW services.

For example, in Victoria they fund remote incentives of \$50,000 for their early childhood teachers to go to hard to staff places across Victoria. We need similar strategies in NSW, but also to align with things like the paid practicum initiative, that the Australian Government's rolled out and then covering the rest of NSW, it's not covered by the Australian Government's pay practicum initiative and also the professional learning funds. So, I'm keen to hear about what's the appetite and what investigation has been done, so that we avoid the duplication of those particular items.

Ms Donnelly: Look, I might kick off Elizabeth, and thank you for that. I will obviously take into account everything that said today. But I've made a few notes and there is quite a bit in what you've just suggested. And we will follow up on all of those points such as engaging with the ACECQA or looking for these areas of potential alignment.

We do think, generally the amount of fragmentation and complexity and different approaches has made the sector more difficult for people to deal with, whether they're families or people working in the sector or people wanting to expand their service, and so on. So, I'll just say that we take all that on board. It was very helpful feedback. I'm not sure if anyone else from the team would like to add to my response on that.

Ms Vincent: No, that's good. Thanks, Carmel.

Mr Nicholls: Great. Thank you. And thanks, Elizabeth, for that really helpful input really appreciate it. I think Melissa was next, whose highlighted an important nexus between the challenge of delivering better salary outcomes, but also affordability for families. Did you want to expand on that point at all?

Ms Messina: I think it's probably the most important part of the investigative process, and without salary incentives or subsidies to attract new talent or attain the educators that we have in our workforce, the other recommendations won't have the impact that we need for the sector right now. I mean, it is a crisis, and you know, can the workforce related recommendations be weighted in the final report, as some of the most pressing and important things to be done. I applaud the other recommendations, but without that foundational piece I think we're still going to be in quite a world of pain.

Ms Donnelly: Look Melissa, thank you for that. We'll certainly take that on board. And looking at your comment in the chat. I'd want just to acknowledge the tensions between increasing salary costs and affordability and share with you some of the intention in the interim report so far.

We've highlighted and you know, you've seen that in the presentation today that there is some data that affordability is more problematic for the families in the lower income brackets as a percentage of their income. And we have some recommendations around increasing support for the most vulnerable families, those particularly on the lowest income.

We also have a couple of parts of our intention about review of the whole funding framework is that there may be ways to make the whole system a little bit more efficient, if there's less fragmentation and complexity to navigate, which could return some value that perhaps isn't delivering good benefit in the administrative arrangements.

But also, that there may be some perverse outcomes, such that the families that potentially need the most support with affordability in order to be able to have their kids having early education may not be getting the support that they need from the current funding system. So, we've got 38 draft recommendations, quite a lot of them interact. But we definitely are interested in all feedback about how to deliver that solution to the workforce shortage, including financial and non-financial and also enable affordability and participation by more families.

Mr Nicholls: Thanks Carmel. That's probably a good segue way to Chris Legg's comments as well about a multi-employer bargaining process at the Federal level and asking whether that's something that could be considered here on happy to open it to you Chris to speak to that point.

Mr Legg: Yeah, look, I would just like to say that there's no doubt teachers everywhere and educators particularly in early childhood clearly need a wage increase. But I am concerned that the current multi-employer bargaining is segmenting the sector a bit, so I would hope that you recommend a similar process for States to follow as well. Otherwise, we're going to end up again with quite a divided sector.

And I'd just like to make a comment on raising the status and standing of the of the sector. One of the things I think we suffer from is the myriad of language that is used to describe what the sector does, and I constantly still hear it being referred to as an industry.

So, I think that we need to change our language and start calling it a profession and really look at the language that we use. The media have a lot to answer for. They constantly call it childcare, and we don't hear those references to school. So, I feel very strongly we belong in the education sector.

And ECA actually did put out and did do brochure about language to use which, you know, we distributed very widely, and I would like this sector as a whole to start using that language. To get some common understanding. It's such a minefield for families to understand. And I think to get to some agreed common language would be a really good start. So, thank you.

Mr Nicholls: Thanks Chris. Anyone wanted to comment on that or take that as a comment. Great. Thank you I might go to the gentlemen with his hand up, who according to me, is G8 corporate but I suspect that's not their name, so I might ask you to also let us know your name as you ask your question or make your comment.

Mr Okhovat: Good morning. Sorry. That's the name of my device, and my name is Pejman Okhovat. I am from G8 Education. We have 150 services across NSW serving circa 14,000 families. And we really love working here.

Thank you firstly for your interim report we share and applaud many of the findings and high-level recommendations that the IPART review has brought about, similar to all the other participants here. Just couple of things out, if you wouldn't mind, I'd like to add and build on, and perhaps where Elizabeth was interjecting here.

Number one, working between a State governments and Federal government to reduce complexity. We really would love you to make that a pretty prominent one. But in pursuing that we would urge you not to duplicate any data or activity already exists. And I think, as I said, this ACECQA data is already available and is pretty much up to date.

The second one I think was also raised by a couple of other members on this, on this call. Is also really encouraging NSW government to look at the level of regulatory compliance that they require compared to other states, with NSW it does tend to be higher. Any additional figures your requirement and compliance does come with cost, which does impact our ability to deliver quality.

But certainly from a workforce point of view again, with this being the largest state does require a lot of support, we would again encourage both IPART and NSW Government to work and recommend in any shape that we can to increase attraction and retention in our sector for educators, and one of those, again would be the, you know, NSW does have a higher requirements for early childhood teachers and compared to any other State. And we're not saying that's wrong. But unfortunately, it does cause a lot of issues with the significant workforce shortages that exist.

And we're more than happy to work with the IPART or the team if you wish. On any of these matters separately, we have a lot of data, as I said 150 centres across NSW plus 14,000 families. We have a lot of data that we would be able to share with you and perhaps engage more meaningful and detailed.

Ms Donnelly: Thank you very much for that, and I think we'll take you up on your offer to assist, and with extra data out of session. That would be extremely helpful.

Mr Nicholls: Alright, I think I've got Meg's comment next. And then Kerry, who's got a hand up. So, Meg you asked a question about additional operational funding to support governments. Did you want to speak to that point at all?

Ms Mendham: Sure, thanks, Andrew. I guess you know we're hearing reference and the highlight of the responsibilities around regulations and governance and management, and that all equals quality in the sector. And we're certainly advocating that we don't want to see any of that watered down. Rather the recognition of those responsibilities in services and really, funding models are based on utilisation of children and families at the moment, rather than the business model that requires some sort of additional operational funding to support the business.

If this is not supplemented, services will need to employ more management and administration staff. Hence increasing fees, so will there be consideration to recommend operational funding to support the business model.

Ms Donnelly: Meg, I'm not in a position to say what the Tribunal will decide when we come to considering our final report, but I think if I've understood you correctly. I just want to reflect that back.

You're really picking up on the fact that while others here have said, can we have a look at the regulatory compliance requirements, alignment with other states compared to other states. If I've heard you correctly, you're saying, well, look some of those regulatory requirements may be important to drive the quality and the outcomes it may not be so much about, you know reduce them all out of hand. Think carefully about that.

But then think about what kind of operational funding is needed to enable centres to meet that regulatory requirement without reducing either, without an undue burden on the workers, on the educators, or perhaps taking them off their core role, that's contributing to outcomes for kids, or increasing burnout. So, they're the sort of things that you'd like us to consider.

Ms Mendham: Thank you. Camel, Can I just expand slightly on that. I'm also talking about the administration and management that's required to run these services. I mean, over 80% of the services are run on the shoulders of volunteer management committees, and that cost is not taken into consideration.

And we see a lot of the workforce taking on both the management responsibilities and the educator responsibilities whilst we don't want to separate those responsibilities because it is one business, but there is no recognition or support for the management responsibilities. It's not a corporate operation where there's HR, Finance and etc. There is a small group of administration people that are taking care of management, but then also reporting to a volunteer management committee and approved provider. So there lies another whole untold cost that's not recognised anywhere.

Ms Donnelly: No. And I take your point. Thank you for that. Can I just clarify with you, is this the issue in part about the commercial providers being able to fully incorporate the costs of running the business versus not for profit. Or is it just across the board?

Ms Mendham: I think we need to look at it across the board in the sense that good governance equals quality service. So, I don't really want to define these separately. I think we just need to look at the responsibilities that are not necessarily supported in funding models. But look at the larger portion of the sector that is small standalone services with volunteer governance.

Ms Donnelly: Okay, thank you.

Mr Nicholls: Great thanks, Meg, for those comments. Kerry. Thanks for your comments online. A couple of comments there about allied health services and NDIS. It sounds like some of our debate is shifting into the question of inclusion. But Kerry over to you.

Ms Dominish: Oh, thanks and thanks for the opportunity. I guess I'm representing about 15 different early intervention services, early childhood intervention services who are supporting about 15,000 children across NSW and we're also, I guess, really focused on improving the opportunity to support children and be included in their early education settings. Some of the people involved in this group the Best Practice and Early Intervention Network, actually have education services as well.

EarlyEd doesn't. But that's a historical thing. So, I was interested in, personally interested in the comment about looking at other ways of services getting together to collaborate in the future for new preschools being developed, particularly in areas of need.

But I guess the big thing we were really looking at is trying to make it clear that there is an NDIS review coming out really soon, and there'll be some really significant pieces in there. I think that's also being touched on by the Disability Royal Commission that's come out as well. And looking at the rights of children to be included in early education is the starting point for them, and recognising that it's really challenging right now for educators to have multiple practitioners coming in and out all the time. There's child protection issues around that. There's logistical issues. There's disruption to the service. And you know, it's not really necessarily giving the optimum support that we know could be given if we could be able, were able to collaborate more fully.

So, I think I guess I'm touching on an issue where this is time to maybe look at different ways to do things. And this is not just with NDIS services but any allied health person coming into a service is going to get better support for a child if they can connect with the educators, and I guess too I think it has a bit of a link to the retention and as well, as of educators, because we're giving them more and more responsibilities. But if we can truly support them, they'll be more comfortable in their role as including a child and will be learning and feeling really supported.

So, I think it's time to kind of break down the silos and bring the early child intervention piece in here. Not just look at it from a health point of view which the allied health conversation does. And our group would be really interested to talk a lot more about how the key worker model can help there. But also, how can we really support educators in their role in inclusion and get more opportunities for children to be included in a service as well.

Ms Donnelly: Kerry, I just want to thank you for those insights. And I certainly, we're very open to understanding and improving what we put in our final report around this, so I won't try and respond to everything you said there was a lot in there, and I also want to make sure we keep plenty of time for other people to have their say, but I'd certainly be keen to see some really good insights in submissions as well for us to consider on that, in that space.

Ms Dominish: Yeah, and I imagine once the reviews are out, we will have lots to say. So it'll be a time of good reflection, so really keen to share that, if necessary, in the future, if possible.

Ms Gamble: Yeah, and Kerry, the next level of detail is important to us, too, especially around how the key worker model could work. Some of the things around wrap around services and key worker models have been around for a while. Well, in terms of concept, anyway. So what would make the difference to actually getting it off the ground and making it work effectively. What would be the success factors?

Ms Dominish: Thank you. Thank you for listening.

Mr Nicholls: Thank you, Kerry. We might keep some of this theme running, Kylie Streatfeild. I see you've put a couple of comments there. Would you like to speak to those?

Ms Streatfeild: Yeah. So just in relation to, definitely support everything that Kerry said there, and I am part of the early childhood intervention best practice network, along with Kerry and a number of other providers. So, I think you know, we'd love to continue working with you. And welcome that invitation.

The only other thing for me to add from what Kerry's talked about there is in relation to one of your tables in your interim report around the description of that key worker model. I think there are some areas there, and I'm sure our best practice network would love to work with you on just ensuring that the description of that model is maybe a little bit more accurate in its true form, and how it is delivered by early childhood intervention services.

Ms Donnelly: Well, thank you, Kylie. We'll take you up on that, we'll maybe have a conversation offline, get some information from your network with an end to improving what we put in the final report. Thank you.

Ms Streatfeild: Thank you.

Mr Nicholls: Thanks, Kylie. Tracy, you've got a comment there about children with developmental delays and disabilities just wondering if you wanted to expand on that point at all. If you're there, Tracy, if not, I might keep moving, then. I might jump to Kay Turner, then, Kay, you've got some interesting reflections about the relationship to the NDIS, and I'm just wondering if you wanted to explore that a little bit more as well.

Ms Turner: Thanks Andrew. Ditto to the things that have been said about the key worker model and so on, but I think there would be value in IPART looking at that direct link, if that's possible, with the NDIS review, because the change in the state funding model, the transition of NSW funding across to NDIS, that didn't stay in the states, that the NDIS previously referred to as Tier 2 model, has really, has really also impacted the ECEC sector and the types of capacity building support that they could receive.

And so well, and that's what we're making that assumption, or we're seeing that anecdotally, that's say, that link between that NDIS and the transfer of state funding to the Fed's NDIS has most likely changed the support available, and the data may be showing that that has then impacted some services confidence in giving access to those children. And I mean well, that could be a wide cohort, but particularly if those children who are on the borders are not eligible for NDIS and those in particular, that may have, be demonstrating some behaviours of concern that services may find challenging to include. So, it's not just about the inclusion support, but the direct access to specialist practitioners to give them advice rather work directly with children.

Ms Donnelly: Yeah. Some good points there. Look, we'll certainly do what we can to take that into account. I understand what you're saying, and I'll also just note that Amanda Walsh has a comment related to that. So, we'll do what we can to link those insights from the NDIS review.

Mr Nicholls: Okay. Thanks for that. Changing gears slightly, Meg, you've got some comments here about digital literacy, which I think is worth exploring. So, I wondered Meg if you'd like to speak to that point.

Ms Mendham: Oh, Andrew, it was just raising the point, in reading the report where there was a reference to digital literacy and the impacts of access to families. And yet another recommendation is looking to digitalise more access points in platforms. So, I was not sure how that worked. And certainly, I would support advancing digitalisation of platforms and the collection of data, and that internal management response.

In addition to that, I would like to make comment that very few early childhood services have good IT infrastructure and training in this area. So, if we are actually recommending that reporting and analysis and data collection is more cohesive. We absolutely need to have grants that are giving out laptops and IT servers and all that support that's required. Otherwise, it's just going to fall over.

But I am also concerned around the assumption of families needing or accessing their booking services through a digital digitalised platform. I think that is risky. And I think that's actually going to create a greater division and more responsibility on the families.

Ms Donnelly: Thank you for that, Meg and we were very aware of how those 2 things sit together. And that it would need to be worked through carefully and sensitively. So, what we're not suggesting with there being a digital service and data strategy is that the face to face, on the phone sort of support would be withdrawn. And we definitely acknowledge, that there are many families for a range of different reasons, that are not in a position to either want to or be able to engage digitally.

But, on the other hand, there we saw that there would be some families who might prefer to do that. They might find that they're just working in a place, whether it's their own small business or whatever their role is, we're hanging on the phone, waiting and making calls and so on during business hours is not their thing, but accessing information digitally out of hours might be more accessible to them. And so, there's a range of needs.

We definitely heard that there are some excellent providers who are for instance, the ones doing sort of wraparound services that are doing a lot of outreach and a lot of support and engagement and helping families navigate the complex system of subsidies and funding, and a lot of other things beside. And the amount of time that that takes so the thinking at the family level is that perhaps more digital tools would take some of that work and give it in a more flexible way to the families who are preferring to do things digitally, but not to take anything away from the others at all.

I take your point that a strategy like this is not something that would happen overnight. We've been asked by NSW Government to make recommendations that would help investment and get better accessibility and affordability, supply, and choice.

And we know that this sort of strategy would take quite a lot of time, need investment over time, not just the technology, but building the capability. But if you don't start you may not attain the sort of infrastructure and supports and efficiency in getting good data that we see in other sectors.

So that's really the sort of intention that we had. There's a reason why we're both calling out the fact that digital access and literacy is an issue, and then at the same time saying that the sector could invest more in a more strategic way, and that would also help some families, help with worker, the admin load, or some of the demands on their time, and probably also provide better information that it would enable a provider to make a decision to expand their services and help government policy, including where to put the funding.

So, it's multi-layer, and not one or the other. So, definitely appreciate you calling this out because it is an area where we wouldn't want to have unintended consequences from doing it. The idea is to have a positive impact. Sandra, I know has got a hand up and might want to add to my comments.

Ms Gamble: Oh, I think Carmel you've covered most of what I would have said. I'll just make a couple of other comments though. Meg, we would really be interested in what the starting point is. I guess our feel is that a digital strategy could be a fantastic thing if it is done well. So that means really understanding where people are at right now, both families and centres and services, so that the whole thing can be designed from the ground up to work well, not assuming that people have IT systems or are computer literate. That has to be part of the process.

And there's a change piece in there about moving from one point to another. But we can just feel the potential of this and the potential burdens that it can remove from service provider and families, if indeed, we're able to capture the benefits through human centred design, and proper transition. So, it's not assuming that you know anything's necessarily in place.

But what we'd be really interested in is submissions that could help tell us what we're dealing with in the first place and so that we can give the strategy or the recommendations some insight into where the challenges are going to be in terms of making the digital work. So, that's what we'd be really interested from you.

Mr Nicholls: Great Thanks, Sandra. Chiang Lim, you've made some comments there about child outcomes and the national quality framework. I also acknowledge that you've also made some earlier comments about costs. Did you want to jump in and talk on that topic of the National Quality Framework or any of the other matters that you have raised there Chiang.

Mr Lim: Sure, so very quickly not suggesting for a second that we lower regulatory requirements at this point in time for NSW. We do not want staff to be even more burdened by loss of their peers. No way, would that be ever accepted.

But while we're still having the number of educators and teachers, for example. One potential way to addressing affordability and operational viability would be that the NSW Government also just bite the bullet and assist in terms of the higher costs because of the higher regulatory requirements in NSW.

Similarly, I also made some comments also about given that there is also differences between governance settings in terms of for example, taxation. If we were to keep an eye on affordability and also paying our staff more, perhaps, for example. And let me, and I'll will be very selfish and say, private services may also consider some reprieve from company taxes and payroll taxes then as well to also help achieve the goals of affordability and financial viability of services, particularly the smaller services, for example.

Oh, and then with regards to maintaining the higher staffing requirements. Perhaps we also should consider how do we then leverage the higher staffing requirements that we have already, particularly in terms of, not just from international benchmark, but also national benchmarks. There remains an absence of consistent view of how those outcomes are to be perceived or read, that results in higher staffing requirements to the children's outcomes and the fact that we have the discussion now about the preschool outcomes measure is also, I think, symptomatic of that broader discussion.

Mr Nicholls: Great thanks for summarising those points. Did anyone want to respond to those or take those as comments.

Ms Donnelly: No, I think we'll just take all that on board. Thank you very much.

Mr Nicholls: Thank you. Really appreciate the richness of all of those comments that you put in there Chiang. I'll go to Michelle Carnegie back on the workforce crisis issue. And you've got a suggestion around setting some targets that perhaps you'd like to elaborate on.

Ms Carnegie: Oh, thank you, Andrew. Look, I guess. You know, for many of us in this meeting we have been speaking to government for a long time about the workforce crisis and we really don't see anything moving forward in terms of solutions, and particularly given amongst this group and everybody else that you've spoken to how important solving the workforce crisis is.

I'm wondering if the IPART might consider making recommendation to Government that they actually set targets for recruiting qualified staff potentially returning or supporting staff, new staff into the sector. Setting a target, may ensure that the government is actually responsible for that. And then, I think, what would flow from that is the suitable level of investment that would be in place to have appropriate strategies and incentives.

So, I guess that's my question or comment would the IPART consider actually locking in or making recommendations for targets. I just feel like we're going nowhere until we've got something really firm that government can respond to. And then, of course, you know the things that need to be prioritised is government funded wage increase for educators and teachers. And, as Chris said, ensuring that it's not just long day care it's across the whole sector, leadership capability, professional development, administrative support and you know the list goes on so that would either be a comment, or you may like to respond. I'm not sure.

Ms Donnelly: Oh, look I'll just say, Michelle. We will take into account everything that's been said today, including considering whether we add to our recommendation about the workforce strategy, in some of the details that you've mentioned, whether it be the targets, or what government should fund or the professional development, etc. So, thank you for that.

Mr Nicholls: And Sandra, I'm not sure if you wanted to comment on that specifically.

Ms Gamble: Yes, I did. Thank you. Thanks, Michelle. So measures and targets is a really interesting space, and of course, you can have leading indicators and lagging indicators, and the actual recruitment of people is to some degree a lagging indicator. Because it's sort of measures after the fact.

What would be interesting to know is what some of the leading indicators might be. What would be measures that you could use to determine whether things were going to happen in the future around workforce. So, what might that be, might that be university places, might it be, I don't know all sorts of other things, but if you, or anybody can submit to us some material about that, I think we'd be really interested in reading it.

Ms Carnegie: Happy to. Thanks, Sandra.

Mr Nicholls: Great, thank you. I might go to a Meg with your hand up.

Ms Mendham: Thanks, Andrew. I just wanted to move slightly into a couple of different areas, but quite specific and close to our heart here at CCSA, you know the consideration for a specific rural and remote strategy that is actually required outside of the utilisation funding models that exist both across the Australian Government and NSW, as well. We know that that utilisation model doesn't necessarily work. I mean NSW has a service safety net model which is working fundamentally quite well at the moment. But that rural and remote strategy really does need to be expanded a lot more and be quite specific in designing the viability and support of services in a holistic way in thin market areas.

And second to that, I guess the opportunity to make a really strong recommendation of the expansion and also the development of new Aboriginal-controlled services. I know SNAICC and I see Angela on here as well, are doing a lot of work around this at the moment, so I don't wish to speak on your behalf rather the support.

But I think that this is a really good option for IPART to make a really strong recommendation, that ACCO services are expanded and supported to grow more new services, particularly when we're looking at some of the Government's policy priorities. And also looking at that greater need, and particularly for also a lot of mainstream services that have a high percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children enrolling their services. We do need to look at that specifically into the future.

Mr Nicholls: Good, thank you that's good input. Did anyone want to respond to that, Angela are you online? Did you want to say anything on that point, at the risk of putting you on the spot?

Ms Donnelly: I will just say, look, we definitely acknowledge, and all credit to the work that the Aboriginal Community-Controlled services have been doing and particularly some of those that are delivering in the wraparound kind of model as well. That was quite inspiring for us. So, we'll take on board what you said Meg.

Ms Bodini: Yeah, I think there's a lot of work that, that we're doing behind the scenes with government and so forth, with the addition of new services, and utilising the services that may already exist within any particular area to work with that sort of the expansion.

And when you mentioned the wraparound services, so many of the services have got that, or are seeking that with increased funding. And really the services work 24/7. They don't work normal timeframes. And I know you've had a lot of input from our sector. So, thank you.

Ms Donnelly: No, thank you. It's been very, very useful. And we'll take on board what more we can do in that sort of direction.

Mr Nicholls: Thanks Angela. Kylie.

Ms Streatfeild: Thanks, Andrew. I just wanted to again support Meg's comment there around a strategy for rural and remote services. I did comment earlier on in the chat around the newly released community based or any preschool in NSW, the funding models around the SIEFA funding that's just been put out.

And I've just been having a look at that for both my own service in a regional town, but particularly in relation to Meg's comment for that rural and remote you know, we've got some of the littler towns around where we're located regionally NSW. And there, if we're looking at the new model around the rankings there, some of those little towns are going to get less funding than what they currently are getting.

And then you look at the cost of staffing. They're paying more for staff because they harder to get in the rural and remote sort of areas. So, I think that whole model really does need to be looked at and I'm not sure whether IPART are thinking about reviewing or making comment in their final submission.

But even from my own perspective, I live in a regional town, and because our address is based on a population of a component of an area in our town, I'm going to be receiving, we're really small, we're a 40-place centre, I'm going to be receiving \$28,000 less for my centre than every other preschool in our town and our town is, you know, we we've got 40,000 population, and it's just because of where we have our address.

And we don't service children, it's a northern area of the town, we don't service children just based in that northern area, we service children based right across our town. So, what for me it's like, well, you know, what's the inequality of our funding compared to every other preschool in our town?

I mean, we're located less than a 3-minute drive from another preschool and based on the same number of children they're going to be getting \$28,000 higher in funding and I think the other thing there is in relation to the inclusion. We have a higher number of children with additional needs in our service, above ratio, but less funding, and how are we going to support those children, and how are we going to retain staff.

Ms Donnelly: Kylie, we'd be quite interested. Obviously, we will have captured in the transcript what you've told us today, but quite interested to hear more about the analysis in your particular example in your service. And we can reflect on that as we consider whether or not we look at the new SEIFA funding models as part of finalising our report.

Ms Streatfeild: Yeah, great we would love to, thank you.

Mr Nicholls: Thanks, Kylie, and on the same theme, Katy Mooney, if it's not putting you on the spot, you've dropped in a comment there about the need to get staff into regions and keep them there. I wonder if you wanted to comment on that.

Ms Mooney: Hi, sorry I won't stay on long, because I have construction happening outside my window. I think we'd like to echo obviously, the comments that have, that been around staffing and resources generally. We also have in regional areas here, we operate in the Hunter and go up to the lower and hunter areas as well as out as far as Denman and into the Mid North Coast. And we have areas where we can put in facilities, we just don't have the staff do open them. So it's really about being able to attract staff into those areas and be able to keep them there and make it a worthwhile experience for them in those areas as well.

And I'd also like to also echo that compliance and regulatory costs are really burdensome for us and I just like, I know we, we want to recognise that there needs to be quality and reassurance of quality services and safe services in the sector. And that's very paramount for us as well. But sometimes we feel like some of the compliance is compliance for compliance sake, and there's no consideration of what is practical and what is realistic for services in their day-to-day operations. So, we'd really like the department to be able to recognise some of those things.

Ms Donnelly: Thank you.

Mr Nicholls: Thank you. Okay. I noticed that there's a couple of themes on the chat emerging, ones around ratios, and ones around education standards. Kate Damo, you've touched on, sorry qualifications I should say, Kate Damo, you've touched on both of those. So perhaps you'd like to reflect on those comments.

Ms Damo: Yeah, sure, I just was, can you hear me, I don't know.

Ms Donnelly: Yes, we can hear you.

Ms Damo: I just wanted to say that we at the IEU wouldn't support lowering the ratios for teacher qualified. I think children in early childhood should be able to access teachers in the schools. The other thing is attracting and making it a profession that young graduates want to go to, because now you've got these, birth to 12 degrees where university qualified teachers are going into schools because of pay and conditions.

And we want to match those pay and conditions to attract those new graduates into early childhood. But at the moment there's in their first year out there's a \$17,000 difference between working in early childhood and working in a school and as a new graduate who's got a HECS debt to pay off, why would you go into early childhood.

So, I don't want to reduce the number of teachers. I want to increase the number of teachers that go into the profession, and this is where we need our best and our brightest because early childhood is, as everyone knows, here is laying the foundations, and if we get it wrong in those critical years, it affects a child for the rest of their schooling.

So, we're setting them up for the teachers in primary school, and we want to attract the best and the brightest, we want specialised teachers in early childhood, and we want to keep them. And because the impacts of not having a quality experience are lifelong.

And we talk about having, you know, parents accessing care or early education. But it's not just about a place. It's got to be a place that is adding something to that child's life. It's got to be valuable, and it's not just to allow a parent to return to work. It's got to be of value to the children, and that's why I would be going the best and the brightest to educate these young minds. So that's the Union's position on that. And that's sort of referring back to that gentleman before talking about you know, qualification and ratios and services.

Ms Donnelly: Thanks Kate.

Mr Nicholls: Thanks Kate. Alright, and Amanda Walsh, would you like to reflect on those comments. You've raised some similar issues, and also some other questions about, comments, I should say about inclusion.

Ms Walsh: Yeah, sure. And I will check that you can hear me, because I've just plugged in some new device.

Ms Donnelly: Yes, we can hear you.

Ms Walsh: Excellent. Yes, similar to the last contribution. We at ELACCA are very conscious of the fact that while this is an inquiry into cost, it is also, as you'd pointed out earlier, Carmel. It is also about outcomes for children, and there's a base level understanding that the outcomes for children are an absolute priority, that they're not questioned, that there's a general understanding of an acceptance of the evidence base for what high quality education provides. So that's not in question, but I guess the flip side of that is that we have to safeguard the things that we know contribute to quality and safety as well, I mean, I won't go into the reasons why safety is at the top of everyone's mind at the moment.

But you know both the quality of the program and of each child's experience and the safety of each child. Those are things that are just at the core of what services do. I think that's uncontested. And when we sort of talk about reforms and the cost base, I think we do need to accept that there are some parts of that cost base that we really can't, we can't shave. We can't introduce, you know, efficiencies without losing things that we just are not willing to sacrifice. So you know I'm sure I'm preaching to the converted here, and this is something that everyone knows, but that was just something that we wanted to highlight in terms of what's shaping our thinking.

Ms Donnelly: Thanks, Amanda. No. Acknowledge that. Thank you.

Mr Nicholls: Thanks, Amanda. And now, just looking at people we haven't heard from, Mary-Louise Clifford, I don't think we've heard from you today. You raised a comment about capacity building.

Ms Clifford: Hi, how are you, I'll just try to turn my video at the same time. Sorry. I'm just sitting in the worst spot in terms of lighting. Everything that you've been saying, I agree with wholeheartedly with all of the other speakers.

And just would like to reiterate about quality comes with experience, comes with having really strong processes and procedures and commitment of people, and which to see as part of ongoing planning for that capacity building to be built in, so that we have that consistency across sector and that capacity of the educators just being continually built, because I'm sure that many of you would agree the reason that we're seeing people leave is that they're overwhelmed.

And they're struggling and whilst the greatest educational institutions are preparing some really great educators. It's that on-the-job experience, having those fantastic mentors and just building in that continual skill development and that underlies everything, because that changes your cost structure, changes everything. So, thank you for the opportunity to listen to you all. And I'm looking forward to the final report.

Ms Donnelly: Thank you.

Mr Nicholls: Thanks very much for that Mary-Louise. Alright. I'm just looking. We're starting to slow down on our comments online. Are there topics that we haven't covered yet from our interim report that you'd like to comment on, that anyone would like to comment on by putting up your hand or dropping a comment in.

Otherwise, I might go to Meg again to reflect on her comments about the funding models and making some recommendations about timely approaches by the department.

Ms Mendham: Thanks, Andrew and I was going to introduce a new comment but I'll get to that in a moment. I wanted to cover the recommendations around the department schools. But look it's more of a statement I put in there.

This sector is really reeling a lot of stress and pressure at the moment. The funding model for 2024 for start strong was only released last week and there is no calculator. There is no tools, there is no sector support. There is nothing for these services, and they are still waiting on even understanding or knowing what amount of money they are going to be receiving next year, which is transitioning the sector to a calendar year as well.

Parents and children, they've already gone through the enrolment process and services aren't even able to tell them how much the fees are going to be. So, for me IPART is looking at, you know independence and pricing. We absolutely have to get a process that government is accountable for and responsible to the sector to run effective and viable businesses in the early childhood sector.

It's just really not good enough, but I won't say any more about that, but if there can be a recommendation around the interaction of funding and services in their contractual arrangements, but vice versa the Government's responsibility to the sector as well.

I just wanted to explore the comment around the department schools hours and needing to, I guess, adapt and suit to community needs. And I'm really curious about this and how it's going to work with the 100 preschool's public announcement, which is only for 4-year-olds which is going to be fee free. And in stark contrast to the community sectors viability and the coexistence. We have real concerns about this. And IPART are looking at saying department schools need to be more flexible. So, I'm just not sure how that would even look regardless of the 100 school preschools initiative.

And also, there's another 12-month model that's been released around flexible initiatives within the community. That services can apply for to extend their hours. But it's only for 12 months and services need to have an exit program out of that. So we're really concerned around this school public preschool space and the reliance on the community sector to still exist and coexist in this light. But and little investment in that or little detail around the investment in that. But you know you're saying here the department schools should be more accommodating to community needs. So would that go as far to include 3 and 4- and 5-year-olds. Or is that more around the hours of business.

Ms Donnelly: Meg, well, I'd be really keen to hear more about some of the concerns that you raise about how that would work. Where we were coming from was recognising that particularly in remote areas. But you know the more remote you get and regional, that as had been talked about, say, from the Mitchell Institute. You know the childcare deserts, and they're not being long day care but what we could see from our analysis so far is that, in fact, that had meant that people were relying more on preschool, and indeed family day care in those remote areas.

But that the hours of preschool were not necessarily a good fit for what people needed in order to be able to participate at work. So, that recommendation is really starting the conversation about whether there's a way that the educators and education services that do exist in remote communities can not just meet some of the needs in terms of children and education and the child's outcomes, but perhaps contribute more to workforce participation.

So could that be, but I think you've raised a number of concerns about, you know, how broadly would that work. Would it be sustainable for the services, we'd be definitely interested in hearing feedback about whether that is a viable way to go or not.

Ms Mendham: Yeah, thanks. This is a really big conversation. I don't wish to take too much time up, but we are treading on dangerous territory when we're starting to introduce a workforce policy, that under pins an education policy, as a rural and remote strategy as well. And I think we need to be careful around the department's response to the, well their responsibility in that they are an approved provider, and they need to have the appropriately qualified staff in these services as well, that are culturally inclusive, community inclusive as well, particularly in rural and remote communities where that you know interacting communities sometimes is a challenge as well. But I think we need to be very careful about the recommendations that sit under this.

Ms Donnelly: Okay, well perhaps we'll take that on board. But also, I think the earlier comments about having a rural and remote strategy maybe another way forward in looking at that particular need.

Mr Nicholls: Great. Thank you. Michelle Carrick. You put some comments about inequality in funding models. If it's not putting you on the spot.

Ms Carrick: Hi, sorry. That's okay. Yes. So, my comment was mostly about it's really quite difficult hearing you know of some providers where management are receiving very high salaries and benefits in the sector where you know other say, for example, providers are finding it very difficult to meet day to day financial sustainability where we're taking on I guess the community load of inclusion support and also big gaps for under 2 children in our services, which also have high costs.

So just making a statement there that I think something needs to be definitely looked at in terms of that, because I know that educators do see some of the statements that come out of some of these very high salaries that are being earned, and then also educators being underpaid.

And it just, doesn't sit well for people. And it doesn't really inspire educators to feel motivated about the work that they do, the sector that they're in. Yes, so that is what I was trying to say there so definitely a review of funding models. And why are some providers being able to be paid these enormous salaries. When others are really struggling to make day-to-day financial decisions and being sustainable.

Ms Donnelly: Thank you. Thank you for that.

Andrew Nicholls: Thanks Michelle. And Maurita. You've also got some comments about funding models, if you'd be pleased to talk to that point.

Ms Cavanough: Yeah, thank you. I just wanted to, I think some of the recommendations around the, and highlighting the stuff, the great work that ACCOs do on the ground you guys have captured really well, but I just really wanted to bring that up again, just to reinforce that, that we've got 3 different service types that ACCOs use to deliver an EC program. But it often looks the same and the funding that they get is so different. So a lot of these programs are more than often not funded properly.

And also too just talking about the preschools today. I'm really concerned like these guys just get hammered every time, every time that there's a brand-new policy that comes out, there's a change. These are the guys that you know in our regional and remote communities that they fill the gap for communities that don't have long day care.

In our ACCOs communities where we don't have, there may be long day care centres that may be mainstream, but if there's an Aboriginal preschool, children that are at risk of being removed from their families, will often choose to use the preschools and the funding model that they have there means that services will often, because of their community accountability will provide spaces for 5 days a week, but these spaces are not funded.

So it's so complex. But I feel like our services often get overlooked, and I know that SNAICC is doing a lot of work at a national level, just to try and get like a contextual sort of funding model for our ACCOs, but I think that we need to look at that at state level also particularly for our preschools.

Ms Donnelly: Thank you for that. Some good points there. Thank you.

Mr Nicholls: Thanks Maurita. Chiang, you have put a couple of comments in about the regulatory costs and also workforce planning. Did you want to talk to those points.

Mr Lim: I was just suggesting that those could be references to how you consider regulatory costs. So, the impact of regulatory activities given that NSW occupies between 54.39% and now 64%. Last year was 65.26% of the national total of breaches and non-compliances.

That in itself looks odd but the fact that it actually exists shows the fact that I think there is, a there is an impost in terms of operational costs to service the regulatory activities. That the regulator is giving. And to be honest, we've had conversations with the regulator themselves, and they're not shall I say, they're not disagreeing with the perhaps the quantum or the dimension of the size of their breaches and non-compliances that they are imposing on NSW.

Ms Donnelly: Thanks.

Mr Nicholls: Thank you, thanks for that comment, Chiang. Chris. You've also got a comment about funding models.

Ms Legg: I think I'm just wanting to comment about the inclusion support programs, both Commonwealth and through the NSW State Government. There's not many providers that I'm aware of, not having to meet the shortfall in the costs. I know in our organisation the number of children who are presenting with additional needs, or who our staff have identified were double that in June, of what we had for the whole year.

So, I suspect the sector is starting to see some of the impact of COVID in terms of vulnerability of children and also mental health issues with families. And this shortfall is getting larger and larger and larger. Which are obviously, then, you know, does contribute to the costs. It's a cost that our organisation is willing to meet because of our commitment to inclusion of children, but also to the social impact that, we know that can have on families. But I do think it needs to be brought to the attention of both governments.

Mr Nicholls: Thanks, Chris. And Melissa I think you were supporting that. Did you want to add anything to that, Melissa, that point.

Ms Messina: Oh, just that, no one gets paid \$23 an hour. That's the funding that we receive. And you know, for a small organisation like where I'm from, we only have 12 services, and the subsidies is almost \$400,000 a year gap and that cost is passed on to families as an increase in fees. So, if we're talking about affordability and accessibility for all children. If we're funded to the level that it costs us to support those children, that would actually make affordability more viable for families, for all families.

Mr Nicholls: Thank you for that too. And Mary-Louise, you've got a similar comment there did you want to add anything to that?

Ms Clifford: Yes, just definitely would reiterate that same discussion that when the ISS funding rate doesn't even come you know, close to factoring in the hourly rate of even your least expensive person to employ, let alone any of the on-costs. Services are bearing the burden of supporting these children, who, you know, are our focus, to have within our services that they're with their peers. But their needs are very, very complex, and I can understand why some services are saying, you know, we just don't have capacity now, to support these children. And we're seeing post-Covid such a jump in really, really complex and really challenging behaviours that in my nearly 30 years I have never, ever you know, come across.

And I just think that must be really difficult for those families who have a child with really complex behaviours actually getting them placed in a service, and that service continuing to support that child and their family. So, thank you.

Ms Donnelly: Thank you.

Mr Nicholls: Well, we are down to the last 5 minutes of Q&A so if I could encourage you to come forward with any burning issues that haven't already been raised. If there's any topics that we haven't covered here today that you'd like to touch on reflecting on our Interim Report and the recommendations, I'd encourage you to come forward now. If we don't get time to go through all of the comments, please keep them coming, we will go through all those comments but also encourage you to put up your hand in this last 5 minutes so I can make sure I can get as many of you as possible in the time remaining.

Angela, you've got a comment about family day care and regulatory requirements being overwhelming. Would you like to comment on that Angela, if not we might ask for any other questions from the floor. Well, Kerry, you've got a comment about innovative solutions funding.

Ms Dominish: Yeah, I was just going to say that in our experience. It's quite a large piece of work to apply and so a lot of services don't apply, you know, it requires you to be able to sit back and reflect, and take some time out, and then and then getting the support is also takes some time as well, and that you've got to be in a, you know, mental state to be able to take on all that learning as well, and sometimes services apply, and then the director leaves, and then the new person goes well, I don't know what this is for, anyway, and then it all falls over again. So, it's just not quite working well.

Ms Donnelly: Thank you for that. Yeah, we'll take that on board.

Mr Nicholls: Alright. And the last couple of minutes. Are there any last questions or comments while you've got the opportunity. If not, I will thank you all for the very robust way that you've asked and raised a number of points. and I'll throw now to Carmel Donnelly to say a few closing remarks.

1.4 Closing remarks

Ms Donnelly: Thank you, Andrew. And look, thank you on behalf of IPART to everyone who's been participating today. Like to thank you very much for all your input it's been extremely constructive. And of course, we will take everything that's been said today into account. As we finalise our report as well as obviously like to thank people who have given us submissions and data and survey responses so far and thank you in advance for submissions that we are taking until the 17th of November, and we'll take all of that into account as well.

A transcript of today's discussion will be on our website in a few days. And we look forward to hearing from you before Friday the 17th, you can get all the information about how to put in a submission or have your say through our website.

If you would like to talk to someone about the review, someone at IPART, please get in touch with us. I know that a few people have indicated they've got some further data or some details that we'll definitely take you up on, that you've offered. But if you consider anything else, you'd like to have a conversation with us they're the contact details for Jennifer and Jessica on our screen at the moment, and we'd be very happy for you to get in touch.

I do want to just finish by saying how helpful this has been and thanking you for your contribution. Hope it's been as helpful for you as well. Thank you very much and have a good rest of the day everybody.

Mr Nicholls: And just before you will leave. There is a survey for you to complete. If you wouldn't mind doing that before you jump off Zoom, and we'll put the Menti details up on the screen shortly and then, as soon as you've completed your Menti feedback, feel free to jump off then again with all of our thanks. We'll just get the get you to go jump onto Menti. Here we are. There we are.