



Australian Federation of University Women Inc.

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31 May 2009

The Hon Kevin Rudd MP
The Prime Minister
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Rudd

Re Need to Refer Childcare, including Out of School Hours Care, to the Productivity Commission

The Australian Federation of University Women (AFUW) has already congratulated your Government on its decision to fund paid maternity leave for women in the workforce, but we are concerned that the full benefits of this, not only for individual women but also for the Australian economy, will not be felt until there are better financial arrangements for childcare, which is a major factor affecting women's workforce attachment. Given the very valuable contribution made by the Productivity Commission in the matter of reviewing paid parental leave, AFUW believes that the Commission should now be asked to conduct a thorough review of all childcare arrangements, including out of school hours and vacation care, in order to arrive at recommendations for arrangements that would enable the maximum engagement of women in the workforce while also ensuring that the next generation of Australian citizens receive a standard of care that will result in healthy physical, intellectual and emotional development.

AFUW is an organization that supports the education of women in order for them to be able to develop to the full their potential talents, become financially self-sufficient and participate in public life and decision-making. While our attention has been mostly directed towards tertiary education, we have become increasingly aware of the growing body of evidence that indicates that early childhood is a crucial period for laying the foundations of all future educational development. Consequently AFUW participated vigorously in the WomenSpeak consultations on childcare conducted in 2006 under funding from the Office for Women and was thoroughly in agreement with the conclusion that the system needed a complete overhaul, with areas of particular concern being

- the overall lack of childcare that was available, accessible and affordable;
- the difficulty experienced by parents in making an informed choice of childcare due to lack of information and the complexity and diversity of arrangements;
- the quality of services, including issues of staff numbers, qualifications, and retention;
- the variable extent to which childcare offered experiences appropriate for the child's intellectual and social development

AFUW welcomes the steps the Government has already taken to address some of these concerns in its program to ensure at least one year of pre-school education for all children and in its work with COAG to enhance minimum standards of care for under-fives. We believe, however, that these initiatives need to be part of a complete system overhaul. Such an overhaul would also need to give serious attention to the problem of out of school hours care for young school age

children – say to age 14. These children need age-appropriate and stimulating programs in a safe environment before and after school hours and during school vacations. Their parents need to be able to concentrate on their own work and training commitments without the distraction of anxiety about the welfare of their children, and employers could well do without the interruptions to productivity caused by parents having to be absent from work because of their need to care for their children.

In the terms of reference for a comprehensive review, we urge that serious consideration be given to working on the so-called ‘one stop shop’ policy to develop co-location links between early childhood care and other health and education services. In the WomenSpeak consultations there was a strong emphasis on the benefits that would ensue from co-location of infant welfare, childcare, early childhood education, and school services. Community links would be strengthened and family life would be much less disrupted. Working parents who currently have to deliver children to several locations for their care services would have their transport costs in money and time reduced, children could receive medical attention without the need to summon parents from their workplace, children would find the transition to school easier in familiar surroundings, there could be better continuity in the availability of information on individual children’s health and educational status – the arguments are by no means exhausted in this list..

The need for out of school hours childcare was a major element in the Security 4Women Submission to the House of Representatives Inquiry into Women’s Workforce Participation. AFUW was one of the organizations assisting the National Foundation for Australian Women in the preparation of this Submission and hopes that the Government, in considering this request for a Productivity Commission review of all childcare provisions, will revisit this submission and the more extensive submission made by the National Foundation for Australian Women to the Senate Inquiry into the Provision of Childcare. AFUW believes that the evidence and arguments contained in these submissions provide compelling grounds for a Productivity Commission reference from your Government,

Yours Sincerely

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Cc: The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations; the Treasurer, The Hon Wayne Swan; the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Hon Jenny Macklin; the Minister for the Status of Women, the Hon Tanya Plibersek; the Parliamentary Secretary for Early Childhood Education and Childcare, the Hon Maxine McKew