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### **Union welcomes Productivity Commission report on universal early childhood education**

The IEU welcomes the report released today by the Productivity Commission, *A path to universal early childhood education and care: Inquiry report*.

The Independent Education Union of Australia NSW/ACT Branch represents university-qualified teachers in long day care centres and non-government preschools in NSW and the ACT.

Reforms that raise the maximum rate of the Child Care Subsidy and remove the Child Care Subsidy activity test will expand access to early learning for children of low and middle-income families.

“This is an important investment in improving outcomes for children and their families,” said IEUA NSW/ACT Branch Secretary Carol Matthews.

“A strong, high-quality, accessible early childhood education and care sector is crucial to increasing workforce participation of parents, particularly women.

“And removing the activity test means parents in casual employment and those seeking more hours of employment will be supported to do so.”

The IEU also welcomes discussion of accelerated qualification pathways to help address staff shortages, but cautions against compromising on quality. “We need to ensure quality is maintained in training, and that universities are not pressured to cut corners,” Matthews said. “Rushing through training will not solve staff shortages if teachers end up leaving the sector over pay and workloads. More still needs to be done to ensure teachers receive pay comparable to teachers in schools.”

The Inquiry Report recognises the under-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in early learning. The IEU supports the report’s call for sustainable funding for Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and publicly funded professional development to ensure cultural safety and inclusion practices that increase the participation of First Nations children.

The IEU also supports expanding access to early learning for remote, regional and rural communities experiencing disadvantage, as the Inquiry Report recommends. “Recent news reports have revealed the prevalence of ‘childcare deserts’, and access to quality early education should not depend on where a child lives,” Matthews said. “We cannot depend on the market to solve this issue, so universal access means a more effective funding model will be necessary to ensure staff are incentivised to live and work in the communities where they are most needed.”

The IEU looks forward to discussions with key stakeholders over the coming months to achieve these important reforms.

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*The IEUA NSW/ACT Branch represents over 32,000 teachers, principals and support staff in Catholic and independent schools, early childhood centres and post-secondary colleges.*

**Authorised by Carol Matthews, IEUA NSW/ACT Branch Secretary**