



The Hon Julia Gillard MP

**Minister for Education. Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations
Minister for Social Inclusion. Deputy Prime Minister**

20 June, 2008

Speech

LHMU Big Steps in Childcare Campaign

Launch of LHMU Big Steps in Childcare Campaign, Sydney, 20th June

Acknowledgments

- The Gadigal people - traditional owners of the land we are meeting on
- Louise Tarrant, National Secretary, LHMU – The Childcare Union
- Margaret Young, National President, Early Childhood Australia
- Distinguished guests

Introduction

Thank you for inviting me to join you in launching *Big Steps in Childcare*, an LHMU campaign to reform the child care sector.

The Rudd Labor Government shares the LHMU's desire for a stronger child care sector to help give all Australian children a good start in life.

We have placed early childhood learning and child care front and centre of our social and economic agenda.

It is a central part of the Government's plan to create a modern, prosperous and productive economy.

We know that investing in the early years makes sense. The research shows that it reduces later demands on

government spending in remedial education, health and welfare services. We also know that providing quality, affordable child care will allow more parents to return to the workforce.

And we know that getting the early years right sets children up for life and learning. Too many children miss out on the developmental opportunities they need in the early years.

That is why we have committed to ensuring that all children have access to a quality early learning program, delivered by a university qualified teacher, for 15 hours a week, 40 weeks a year, in the year before formal schooling.

That is why we have committed to integrating early childhood education and child care, starting with our commitment to establish up to 260 additional early learning and care centres over the next 6 years, and implementing new quality standards for child care and preschool services.

And that is why we have made 'kids at risk' a particular focus of our Social Inclusion Agenda.

These measures are all part of the Rudd Labor Government's ambitious agenda for Early Childhood. We know that in order to achieve it we need to work closely with our state and territory colleagues.

And we know that in order to achieve it we need to raise the skills, qualifications and standing of our Early Years workforce.

Challenges in developing a high quality workforce

We know there are significant challenges to be addressed in our effort to build capacity in the early childhood workforce. Some of these challenges are longstanding and will require the concerted effort of governments and the sector.

Job turnover is high, with over one-in-five child care workers leaving the occupation every year. Pay and status in the profession are low. And enrolments in Diploma child care courses – the minimum typically required to be considered 'qualified' – have fallen since 2002, in spite of the recent growth in Certificate III child care enrolments.

Without adequate intervention, the challenges faced in the sector will ultimately lead to significant shortfall in a number of Early Childhood Education and Care workers.

This is a significant challenge, which makes it imperative that we work hard, and work together, to attract and retain staff, and to invest in their skills and development.

I welcome the LHMU's positive and timely contribution through the *Big Steps in childcare*, and recognize their ongoing work to improve the standing of the early years workforce.

The child care workforce issue cuts across the education as well as employment and workplace arenas and, as the Minister responsible for both, it is my view that most importantly, any reform must ensure the early childhood workforce is appropriately qualified. This means:

- for child care workers, increasing the proportion of those with qualifications at the Certificate III and particularly the diploma level;
- for teachers, a four-year early childhood teaching degree or a postgraduate degree specialising in early

- childhood education; and
- for centre directors, developing high level leadership skills.

Addressing the challenges: Education Revolution Budget measures

To address these challenges, the Rudd Labor Government has committed to helping build the highly skilled and capable workforce necessary to implement our ambitious Early Childhood reform agenda.

The package of measures is aimed at increasing the supply and skills of the early childhood workforce, and at attracting staff to remote and disadvantaged areas.

The package delivers on the Government's election commitments by providing funding to:

- support around 8000 child care workers to gain a qualification by removing TAFE fees for child care diplomas and advanced diplomas from 2009
- create additional university places for early childhood teachers, starting with 500 places in 2009 and rising to 1500 places by 2011. This could lead to up to 4000 additional early childhood teachers by 2014, and
- reduce up to half of the HECS-HELP debts of early childhood teachers who work in regional and remote areas, Indigenous communities and areas of high disadvantage.

In addition, through our Productivity Places program, we are already supporting almost 1900 people to undertake Certificate III training in Children's Services. Around 800 of these people have commenced their studies.

Addressing the challenges: Reforms to the workplace relations system

The Australian Government is committed to ensuring that all child care workers are appropriately rewarded and recognised for their important contribution to the Australian community.

The Government's new fair and balanced workplace relations system will play a significant role in meeting this commitment.

A key feature of the new system, which I expect to be fully operational by 1 January 2010, will be a set of new modern awards that build on the ten National Employment Standards that I released earlier this week.

The new awards will provide industry-relevant minimum entitlements, including terms for minimum wages that allow for skill-based classifications.

The award modernisation process is already under way and is being conducted by the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC). The process is due to be completed by 31 December 2009.

I note that the LHMU is actively participating in this process, having recently provided both oral and written submissions to the AIRC.

The Government's new workplace relations system will also facilitate multi-employer collective bargaining for low-paid employees or employees who have not historically had access to the benefits of collective bargaining, including those in the child-care sector. This will provide an opportunity for child care workers and their employers to enjoy the benefits of collective bargaining.

Bringing it together: Development of the National Early Years Workforce Strategy

In the context of our existing workplace relations and early years agenda, we are also working with our state and territory colleagues on a National Early Years Workforce Strategy.

The strategy will provide a long-term blueprint to improve recruitment and retention of the early childhood workforce, develop pathways that reward and support workers, and raise the level of qualifications.

We welcome the LHMU's input into this work. I recognise that we may not always see things in exactly the same way, but I am confident of a constructive and productive dialogue.

Vision for the future

It is critical that we raise the status of the early years workforce and ensure that people are recognised and valued as essential to our children's development and, more broadly, to the Australia's productivity.

We must embrace a vision where Australia has a professional early childhood workforce that delivers quality services for children and their families.

To achieve this vision, we must engage all stakeholders to support the training, supply, retention, development and deployment of the early childhood education and care workforce across government, community and private sectors.

There are exciting times ahead for the early years in this country, as we work together to strengthen the sector.

Thank you.

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