

# MEDIA RELEASE

For release 15 November 2006

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## *Early childhood education at the crossroads*

Australia is at a crossroads when it comes to early childhood care and education services. In a new review of education released today by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) the provision of early childhood care and education services in this country is described as insufficient, fragmented, under funded and inconsistent.

There is no universal planned, systematic provision; rather, services have developed in an ad hoc way with a largely two-tiered but multi-dimensional system of 'care' and 'education' with blurring of boundaries in some areas. The result is a fragmented early childhood sector with a patchwork of services, little agreement on service types, functions or terminology and a 'mishmash' of funding and regulations.

*Early Childhood Education: Pathways to quality and equity for all children* by Dr Alison Elliott and published by ACER as Australian Education Review 50, calls for a coherent, long-term national action plan and timeline to develop and implement an integrated, well-funded, regulated and managed system of early childhood education and care with clear goals, priorities and outcomes.

The review describes the current provision of early childhood services in Australia and examines relevant policy. It also provides an overview of the early childhood education research, in Australia and internationally, and uses this body of work to identify and illuminate the central issues.

According to Dr Elliott, despite plenty of evidence showing the benefits of early childhood education, many children have a mediocre experience of early childhood education while others miss out altogether. Issues of supply, accessibility, affordability, funding, staffing and quality have remained volatile and unresolved for over two decades.

"What becomes apparent from the research and policy analysis work in the early childhood arena is that there is a strong evidence base about what works, but that improving access and quality requires both vision and commitment backed by policy and resources," Dr Elliott said.

"It is time to commit to national professional standards and guidelines, professional training, and good salaries and working conditions in the hope of securing the quality of early childhood educators in the decades ahead," Dr Elliott said.

Alison Elliott is Director of the Early Childhood Research Program at ACER and Adjunct Professor of Education at the University of Canberra.

Australian Education Review number 50, *Early Childhood Education: Pathways to quality and equity for all children*, by Dr Alison Elliott with a foreword by Professor Alan Hayes, Director, Australian Institute of Family Studies, is available for download from the ACER website at [www.acer.edu.au](http://www.acer.edu.au). Print copies can be purchased from ACER Press. Contact customer service on (03) 9835 7447 or via email on [sales@acer.edu.au](mailto:sales@acer.edu.au)

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