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New early childhood centres are great, but who's going to work in them?

The Independent Education Union of Australia NSW/ACT Branch welcomes the NSW Government's announcement that it will provide \$5 billion over 10 years for early childhood education. The plan includes building more centres in so-called 'childcare deserts' in suburban, regional and rural NSW.

However, the union, which represents degree-qualified early childhood teachers, has two key questions about this funding:

- How will these new centres be staffed? There are already serious staff shortages in the sector throughout NSW.
- What guarantees are there that the funding directed at for-profit centres will be used to improve low salaries to attract and retain staff, rather than to increase profits?

"Unless the fundamental problem of low salaries for early childhood teachers is addressed, the persistent problems of shortages in the sector will continue," said IEUA NSW/ACT Branch Secretary Mark Northam.

"Existing preschools and long day care centres are struggling to find staff to cover their rosters right now, so I am baffled about how the proposed new centres will be managed.

"Unless direct action is taken to encourage more people to work in the sector, and to stay working in the sector long term, the current crisis will continue.

"Our experience is that not-for-profit organisations better understand the value of retaining long term, highly qualified teachers by paying above award rates of pay and offering improved working conditions. Commercial operators generally tend not to pay above award rates."

Part of the NSW Government's package includes \$25,000 scholarships to study early childhood degrees. But again, what incentives will there be to encourage graduates to take up a career in early childhood education? Graduates qualified to teach 0-12s can achieve much higher salaries by teaching in primary schools.

"Until we recognise that degree-qualified early childhood teachers must be paid the same as their colleagues in schools, the drain from the early childhood sector to primary schools will continue," Northam said.

"We look forward to seeing further details from the NSW Government on just how it plans to 'grow and support' our workforce," Northam said.

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The IEUA NSW/ACT Branch represents over 33,000 teachers, principals and support staff in Catholic and independent schools, early childhood centres and post-secondary colleges.

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