

# Dressed to oppress <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

Child care giant ABC Learning is making staff buy their own uniforms while pocketing a cool \$40 million in profit.

Carers, some of whom earn as little as \$420-a-week after tax, are having to shell out more than half that for pants and shirts featuring the ABC logo.

Meanwhile, Australia's largest childcare company is making huge profits from its national chain of 660 centres.

Adding insult to injury, ABC has removed the \$10-a-week allowance given workers to pay for their laundry.

Staff were reluctant to criticise their employer yesterday.

However, Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union president Jim Lloyd said: "If the employer tells the employee they have to wear a uniform, then there's a logic that the employer should pay."

Buying a basic uniform of three T-shirts, two pairs of pants, a top, a jacket and hat would cost \$236.

ABC chief executive Eddy Groves confirmed contract staff were required to pay for their own uniforms and laundry.

He said this was more than compensated by a share plan which gave employees 150 shares if they signed individual contracts, plus further shares for each year of service.

"If they want a uniform instead of a carers' share plan I would be millions of dollars better off," he said.

However unqualified workers &em; those paid the least &em; are ineligible for the share plan.

Mr Groves said staff not on contracts were "encouraged" to wear a uniform.

ABC has rocked the childcare world with its rapid expansion and huge increase in profit and earnings and has also come under fire for its connection with senior Coalition figures.

Board chairwoman Sallyanne Atkinson is a former Liberal lord mayor of Brisbane while fellow director Larry Anthony was minister for children under the Howard Government.

Smaller operators fear ABC could use its huge market power to undercut their prices or buy them out.

The company this week announced it was giving parents an immediate discount based on the Government's 30 per cent rebate, something most smaller operators are unable to match.

Mr Groves denied ABC was seeking to undermine other operators.

ABC also operates on the minimum regulation staff-to-child ratios &em; the number of carers with children &em; which some rivals say are too low.

- reprinted from the Daily Telegraph

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