

Australia is years 'behind the times' on childcare ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The Abbott government's \$3.5 billion childcare package treats the education of Australia's young children as "babysitting", a new report has claimed.

The McKell Institute report has found "serious flaws" in the package, which focuses on getting mothers back into work rather than ensuring children get the best possible early education.

Report co-author UNSW Professor Deborah Brennan said the package reflected a "philosophy that is decades out of date".

She said Australia has "missed the memo" that childcare was not simply child minding, but a vital part of education.

"The government's new policy treats childcare as a regrettable necessity, required mainly to get women back into the workforce," she said.

"Globally, however, early childhood education and care is seen as critical not just in promoting workforce participation, but in creating foundations for learning."

McKell Institute executive director Sam Crosby said he thought most people would be surprised to learn Australia spent half as much as New Zealand on childcare, as a percentage of GDP.

"In fact Australia actually spends less on childcare and preschool, as a percentage of GDP, than New Zealand did way back in 1998," he said.

"That alone should give an indication of just how behind the times we are.

"Like the UK, New Zealand has recognised the importance of universal early childhood education and offers 20 hours a week of free early childhood education for all three- and four-year-olds."

While Social Services Minister Scott Morrison has pledged the \$3.5 billion for the new package, those funds would come from cuts and slowing growth in funding across other social policy areas.

Labor and several Senate crossbenchers have refused to pass the package unless it is funded without those cuts.

-reprinted from The Morning Bulletin

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