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Canberra's early childhood educators call for fair pay: Fed up workers march on Parliament House [1]

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EXCERPTS

For Emma Jayne Peard and her colleagues, the pay rises are few and far between even though they may be wiping hundreds of hands and bottoms.

The early childhood educator who started her career in the daycare industry 21 years ago said directors in her sector hit a pay ceiling at $33 an hour.

By this stage directors were overseeing 100 children or more plus staff.

All of this was done in a highly-regulated, professionalised industry in which workers closely watched the children to discover the best way the youngsters wanted to learn.

One of the biggest challenges they faced was high staff turnover. Employees moved on within three to six months, to chase more money at centres paying more than the award wage or to switch careers.

Trainees in the sector could earn as little as $9.85 an hour, she said.

"Canberra is a very expensive city to live in," she said.

Many trainees and their colleagues still lived with their parents.

As Australians awaited the rollout of the federal government's childcare package, a group of female early childhood educators dressed in men's suits protested at Parliament House on Monday and argued their low pay was directly linked to their gender.

Ms Peard said early childhood educators were among the lowest paid professionals in Australia, earning one third less than those educating children in the school system.

"We are highly skilled and highly trained professionals but our wages don't come near reflecting that," she said.

"Our work used to be seen as 'women's work', minding children which women did for the love of children.

"We believe we are undervalued and underpaid because the vast majority of us - over 90 per cent - are women."

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