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A Great Step Forward for Australia's Children and Families

Prue Warrilow, National Convener

Well – finally the new *Education and Care Services National Regulations* are here. Coincidentally they were released on the last day of our two-day National ACCS meeting. So we were able to celebrate together this great step forward for Australia's children and families which enables children's services staff to deliver even better quality education and care.

These Regulations are good for children, providing improved child:staff ratios, more staff with formal and higher qualifications, national consistency and a more rigorous system to improve quality. Remember all states and territories are already implementing some of the improved conditions under the Regulations. There may be some fee increases to families, but it will not be as much as the scaremongers are predicting. The changes are progressive to 2020 so any potential fee increase to families should be gradual, and *not* immediate. Don't let the privates win their campaign to try to stop the introduction of these important early and middle childhood reforms.

Also it is important to understand that the new National Quality Framework (NQF) is about your services' philosophy, beliefs and relationships with children,

their families and your community. This is not something you can buy a solution for. You need to think, reflect and consider and do your own work. Beware the pre-packaged solutions – they'll be emerging out of the woodwork before we know it.

13 and 14 October saw representatives from most ACCS state/territory branches in Sydney for our national meeting. It was a full two days looking at a range of items. Key highlights for me included the state/territory round ups with common themes of:

- universal access to 15 hours of preschool generally not working as 15 hours does not represent any current child attendance pattern;
- in some states long day care is *not* part of universal access and will not receive state/territory funds to assist in providing this;
- the late 1970s/1980s community-owned capital works buildings are old and tired and many need significant work; it is unclear how the new regulations will impact on these buildings; and
- recruitment and retention of qualified/trained staff in rural and remote areas is a major challenge.

ACCS website!

You can find information about your national peak body by visiting www.ausccs.org.au



Change & Leadership
"Who's the Ringmaster?"

ACCS National Conference

Friday and Saturday 18 & 19 May 2012
Novotel, Wollongong, Northbeach

SAVE THE DATE



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Dr Fran Press presented a thought provoking discussion asking us to consider, in the brave new world we're about to enter, why ACCS is important and what is it about community-ownership that is important now and into the future. Some interesting ideas from Fran for ACCS to consider are - from Peter Moss - community-owned children's services are of, for and embedded in a community; and from OECD 2006 - they are also about "support[ing children in] broad learning, participation and democracy".

I attended the farewell for the National Childcare Accreditation Council. It was a good send off for a national child care accreditation system that really did put Australia at the cutting edge of the international quality agenda in 1993 when the NCAC commenced. We have learned much from this quality system that has informed the new NQF. I want to acknowledge Denise Taylor, her team and the NCAC boards over the past years for their roles in *Putting Children First*.

Lastly I want to say I am looking forward to seeing where the NQF takes us. It's been an interesting journey to get to where we are now and I anticipate we'll have a few more bumpy bits to get over in the next little while. I want to believe the NQF will truly be a partnership of continuous improvement between services, children, their families and state/territory quality assessors that will improve outcomes for children. Naive, perhaps, but it's the starting point I choose.

Your Peak Body in Action

Barbara Romeril, National Secretary

ACCS held a highly productive face-to-face meeting in Sydney in October; we reviewed our policy platform in light of emerging social and political issues affecting children, families and communities and developed a plan of action to both strengthen our internal operations and our public advocacy.

The national executive will attend the National Children's Services Forum in November; we will also seek meetings with Members of Parliament on all sides of politics as well as key bureaucrats in DEEWR to advocate for policies to support community children's services.

ACCS Advocacy

In recent months ACCS has focused on the commencement of the introduction to the National Quality System scheduled for 1 January 2012. We celebrated the release of the final National Regulations on Friday 14th October 2011 at our annual face-to-face ACCS meeting in Sydney. Along with this landmark for our sector we continue to advocate and lobby that the Government proceeds full steam ahead in preparation for 1 January 2012.

In line with this ACCS has not halted on ensuring the views of our members and our sector are heard. The following are a few snap shots of ACCS advocacy in action!

Qualifications of Assessors

Concentrating on some of the finer, yet important, areas of the NQS we have been in correspondence to Minister Garret, Minister Ellis and ACECQA around the ambiguous matter of qualifications for assessors under the new system.

ACCS has written to Federal Ministers and ACECQA calling for early and middle childhood degree qualifications for assessors in the new National Quality System. We are also encouraging our state and territory branches to write to their Minister calling for support for this position.

At the national face-to-face meeting in Sydney we further developed our position and will now write calling for all assessors to be enrolled in relevant degree courses by 2012 for completion in 2014.

In our view, assessors without relevant early or middle childhood qualifications and experience would present a critical risk to the success of the NQF. This concern is based in evidence. The early and middle childhood sector is expecting assessors who have relevant degree qualifications. A recent survey of the sector in New South Wales revealed that 96.5 per cent believe that Assessors need relevant qualifications. Furthermore the sector sees the early and middle childhood qualifications for assessors as:

- Upholding the credibility of the NQF
- Ensuring credibility
- Ensuring respect from the sector
- Understanding and assessing best practice in the specialised areas of early and middle childhood education and care...

All Assessors in the new National Quality System should have early or middle childhood degree qualifications or above; the content and philosophy of the degree should be appropriate to the range of service types they will be assessing.

Further assessors should have experience working in the type of service they are assessing – long day care, outside school hours care, family day care etc.

The system must contain the capacity for assessors to retain currency in their academic qualifications and in their direct experience working in the sector.

Where an assessor is not qualified they must be working towards this level of qualification by enrolling by 2014 for completion by 2018.

Quoted from letter from Barbara Romeril, ACCS Secretary

Appreciation by Minister Ellis

ACCS has received an encouraging response to our letter from Minister Ellis' office. While acknowledging that ACECQA will ultimately decide this question, the Minister's advisor commented:

- ACECQA could specify both minimum 'essential' qualifications and higher 'desirable' qualifications
- Qualification requirements could be implemented over time to be achieved by the start of 2014, which is similar to the timelines ACCS has decided to advocate for
- It is acknowledged that familiarity with current practice in early childhood education and care and school age care services should be emphasised

The letter also expresses appreciation for ACCS' ongoing support for the NQF.

The letter from the Office of the Minister Ellis stated:

ACECQA has the responsibility for determining qualifications for authorised officers as outlined in the National Law under Part 11, Clause 225(1)(o). It is proposed that ACECQA will liaise with Regulatory Authorities to set minimum qualification requirements.

In line with the broader workforce requirements under the NQF, qualification requirements for authorised officers could be implemented over time with the expectation that it is achieved by 1 January 2014, and allowing authorised officers to be 'working towards' agreed qualifications... It is also acknowledged that emphasis should be placed on familiarity with current practice in early childhood education and care and school age care services... In order to formally assess and rate services against the National Quality Standard, consideration may be given to requiring authorised officers to combine existing qualification with successful completion of the assessor training package under development.

Quality Costs Campaign

ACCS members have jumped into action to combat the many misleading reports of exorbitant cost increases to child care with the introduction of the new minimum standards.

In recent months there have been several misleading propaganda fueled articles in major newspapers threatening increases in costs of up to \$25 a day in long day care. These claims were part of a campaign by commercial providers to postpone the introduction of the reforms. ACCS feels strongly that this is another example of companies putting profit ahead of the best interests of Australian children. In recognition of this, ACCS members across Australia have united in force to making sure relevant Ministers at the State and Federal level know that they are ready and eager for the new reforms.

Rather than misleading the public ACCS members are concentrating on delivering high quality care to Australian children and their communities. A recent survey of long day care members of ACCS Victorian branch Community Child Care showed that most services are already meeting the standards at affordable prices for their families:

- Most community child care centres in Victoria are already operating at or exceeding the new minimum staff to child ratios so meeting the new standard will not add to fees for families
- Half of services predicted a modest rise in cost in 2012 of less than \$5 a day (reduced to \$2.50 a day for families eligible for Government assistance)
- Most other community child care services predict only a slightly higher increase of less than \$8 a day (again reduced by Government assistance)

Haven't taken action yet? Get to it. ACCS can provide you with all the necessary tools to make sure your opinion is heard. Just follow the links to the ACCS Discussion Board on www.ausccs.org.au or email cgleeson@cccinc.org.au to join the campaign!

Reports from ACCS Representatives

National Children's Services Forum

Frances Snedden and Barbara Romeril represented ACCS at the August meeting of the National Children's Services Forum (NCSF).

The National Association of Mobile Services is keen for mobile services to be included in the National Quality

Framework and to access government funding to improve viability; Universal Access to 15 Hours of Preschool is reducing access to spaces for mobile services.

ECA is advocating for NQS assessors to have early childhood degree qualifications by 2020 in addition to robust training in the skills of assessment; they propose that preference in recruitment be given to graduates.

The biennial lobby day of Federal Parliament was eventful as usual; we took the following four agreed points to about 30 MPs:

- The National Quality Reforms must stay on track and include investment in workforce development;
- No children to be held in detention;
- Increase investment in children's services to contribute to Closing the Gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders; and,
- Flexible funding models are necessary for services for children with additional needs including rural and remote services and occasional care.

On the final day of the NCSF we met with United Voice to discuss the Big Steps campaign for direct government funding of professional wages; they estimate this will cost \$1.4 billion per year not including OSHC. They propose that the subsidy be delivered through CCMS in a similar way to ISS subsidy.

DEEWR informed the NCSF that the second last draft of the National regulations included more logical order and tighter wording. A short overview guide to the NQF will be produced, as well as a plain English guide to understanding national quality standards and regulations and a guide to the Quality Improvement Plan. A number of fact sheets are being released through CCMS – DEEWR wrongly understood that national peaks have received these; they will now arrange for distribution.

Consideration of Out of Scope services will commence in the 2014 review of the whole National Partnership and will include Regulatory Impact Statements for each service type and will require all governments to agree to their inclusion.

The next contracts for the Inclusion and Professional Support Program will be offered by March 2012; DEEWR is aware of concerns about the poor transition to the first IPSP contracts.

Automation of ISS applications starts in early October; will simplify the application form after the current contract ends; training will include face to face and video conferencing.

All governments met in August to discuss the Early Childhood Workforce Development Strategy; they conducted a stocktake of current initiatives of individual governments and next will develop collective commitments informed by the Productivity Commission report.

Victorian Branch

Barbara Romeril, CCC Victoria

CCC is pleased to have won a contract with the Victorian Government to deliver training to the Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) and Family Day Care sectors on the new national Framework for School Age Care My Time, Our Place and its relationship to the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework. The early childhood education

and care sector received dedicated training and resourcing for the national Early Years Learning Framework Belonging Being and Becoming and its relationship to the VEYLDF, so it is affirming that OSHC is also receiving dedicated support.

The CEO of the new quality authority ACECQA, Karen Curtis will speak at CCC's annual general meeting; it is vital that she quickly learns about our sector so she can provide wise management of the new mechanisms to assess quality and inform families so they can make good choices for their children.

At our AGM we will celebrate our 40th anniversary with the awarding of certificates to long standing members and staff. And we are hoping to introduce an exciting new way of using information technology – we will make short videos of long serving members speaking about why they are members of CCC and put these on our website to put the human face to our most vital resource, our members.

How to Contact ACCS State and Territory Branches

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NEW!

ACCS Member Discussion Board

You are invited to join in the discussion!

We have created an exciting new space, the ACCS Member Discussion Board, exclusively designed for members to engage in discussions with other like minded ACCS members across all states and territories of Australia.

Perhaps you'd like to raise concerns about implementing the National Quality Frameworks? Or you'd like to brainstorm lobbying strategies to advocate for a professional children's services workforce? Perhaps you'd like to launch into a robust debate about ACCS' current policy positions?

We hope you'll join us in the discussion. Please contact your ACCS state or territory Delegate who will verify your membership and provide you with an access code for entering the site.

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