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National Convenor Report

Prue Warrilow, National Convenor

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As ever the last quarter has been very busy for ACCS.

I attended the Prime Minister's Child Care Summit with other peak group representatives, children's services operators with multiple services and unions. The key discussion points were affordability, flexibility of service delivery and quality. The PM chaired the meeting and I found the discussion fruitful. She iterated this Government's strong commitment to continuing the National Quality Agenda and working with the sector to ensure the ongoing successful roll out of the NQF. She said that she wanted to continue a dialogue and this is happening, with Minister Ellis, who was also at the PM'S Summit. Minister Ellis called another meeting where we continued our discussions. This most recent meeting also included ideas on building and retaining a qualified children's services workforce and strategies to assist this.

ACCS also participated in the Opposition Leader's child care summit – see inside for more details.

ACCS is participating in a loose alliance of children's services peaks and large children's services providers, including private providers convened by Goodstart.

This group is discussing what we have in common and ways we can lobby the Opposition so that if there is a change of Australian Government the NQF does not get rolled back as threatened by the private child care sector peak group. The private groups in this loose alliance are committed to the NQF, its timeframe for implementation and the positive impact these reforms will have on good quality education and care for children, families and staff working in services. So not all private child care operators believe the NQF is bad - the Child Care Alliance does not speak for all as they claim.

Preliminary data from the ACCS national children's services survey shows that respondents were positive about the NQF, however there were some teething problems such as increased paper work, identifying appropriate courses for staff to up-skill and recruiting suitably qualified staff. With any new system there are things that go smoothly and some that do not. It has been unfortunate that the National Quality IT System was not ready for the 1 January 2012 implementation. Once this is up and running all services will be able to do all their business transactions online through this system. A lot less paper work!

ACCS website!

You can find information about your national peak body by visiting

www.ausccs.org.au

Your Peak Body In Action

Barbara Romeril, National Secretary

ACCS participated in the July meeting of the National Children's Services Forum – this was an historic event, the final meeting supported by Pam Cahir of ECA as the national secretariat. Pam retired after decades in the sector having attended every meeting of the NCSF since its inception 15 years ago. Her replacement Sam Page attended to observe and meet the national peak body representatives she will be working with in her new role as CEO of ECA.

ACCS acknowledged Pam's strong contribution to the early childhood sector and the national quality reforms in particular in our report to the Forum. We also reported on our engagement with Government and Opposition, progress on the Trends in Children's Services Survey and the success of the ACCS conference.

The Forum struggled for the first time ever to find consensus in support of quality reform; in the past the commercial sector national peak body Australian Childcare Alliance has either agreed to support the broad thrust of the reforms while expressing concern about the cost of implementation or absented themselves from the discussions. But this time they participated and stood out firmly against agreeing to any and all aspects of quality improvement, even to the notion of improved wages and conditions if fully funded by government. It appears that their campaign to derail the National Quality Agenda is now in the open. We were pleased to see other national peak bodies such as Family Day Care Australia join ACCS and ECA in our strong stance in support of improved quality; but the debate continues and it appears that the biennial lobby day may be deferred until next year while we try to find common ground. ACCS is concerned that this will be too late to genuinely influence the election policy platforms which will be much more fluid and therefore open to change this year than next.

The Forum met with both the Chairperson and CEO of ACECQA which was a very useful way of exchanging information and opinions to support this important new quality body.

While in Canberra the ACCS Executive met with Education Minister Garrett and shared ideas for extending the take up of national early childhood workforce strategies including the support for Recognition of Prior Learning. We also raised the urgency of resourcing Budget Based Funded services such as Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services and Mobile Services for rural and remote families to participate in the National Quality System.

The ACCS Executive also met with senior managers in the DEEWR Office for Early Childhood Education and Child Care; we raised concerns about continuity of support to the sector during the transition to new contractors for the Inclusion and Professional Support Program and the need for robust evaluation of the effectiveness of this program in changing practice in the sector.

You will see elsewhere in this edition of the national newsletter that ACCS has been involved in many advocacy activities as well as the inaugural Trends in Children's Services Survey.

ACCS Advocacy CSHISC Training Package Review

Brian Newman, ACCS Representative

As reported in the term 2 edition of ACCS In Action, ACCS is front and centre in advocating for education and training that properly skills educators to deliver high quality education and care to all areas of Children's Services. Currently, part of this work is participating in the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council's (CSHISC) review of the training packages for Children's and Youth Services.

I hope that, as the ACCS Representative on this review, we can help ensure that the 'streamlined' training package better serves the sector and that the views of the community sector influence the discussions as well as the end result. ACCS is represented on both the broader Industry Reference Group and the Children's Services Subject Matter Expert Group that will contribute to the development of the revised training package. My experience teaching in the TAFE sector and in managing children's services has demonstrated the importance of having education and training systems that engage students in the reality of work in Children's Services and provide them with the passion and understanding to contribute to the sector.

The current training package is now out-dated and was developed before the National Quality Framework set new expectations for Children's Services. For example, reflective practice and intentional teaching are integral to implementing 'Belonging, Being and Becoming', and must be integral to all education and training for Children's Services. There is also considerable evidence of poor teaching and even poorer assessment by some private registered training organisations (RTOs), leading to graduates who do not have the skills needed to do the work. We have all seen the advertisements for fast tracked qualifications, that all too often are awarded through 'tick and flick' assessments that fail to truly assess the underpinning skills and knowledge of students. With so much government funding being put into further and higher education qualifications it is tragic to see this wasted by organisations chasing easy profits before quality - we have heard this story before with ABC Learning. The recent Productivity Commission report on the early childhood workforce highlighted the need for far more stringent monitoring of the training provided through the current system and we must make certain that this happens. Ensuring genuine on-the-job assessment is also critical to giving students a genuine experience in the workforce as we are still hearing of people earning qualifications without ever actually working with children. This is inexcusable.

ACCS' main aim is to ensure that the revised training package delivers qualified, skilled and committed educators to work in the range of children's services. However wider than this, this review presents us with an opportunity to look at the broader issues such as, does a competency based system deliver what is needed in our sector, and how can better pathways be established to enable educators to continue to build their qualifications once in the workforce.

In late August I will be meeting with the CSHISC subject matter expert group to discuss the details of skills required and roles. We have high expectations, and hope that ACCS can gain support for improvements to the children's services training package that will produce educators with the ability and passion to really deliver quality early childhood care and education to all children. I will report back on this process in the next edition.

Federal Opposition Leader's Child Care Summit

Barbara Romeril, National Secretary

Leader of the Opposition Tony Abbott convened a round table discussion on child care in June with some national peak bodies (though not those for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services, mobile services for rural and remote families) and a newly formed peak body for nanny services.

ACCS tabled a paper incorporating some of the relevant policy demands from ACCS' last federal election campaign and our response to the Opposition's public discussion of extending CCB to nannies. I was able to introduce all of the key ideas into the discussion around the table with some vigorous objections from the commercial child care peak body which argued openly against the full implementation of the National Quality Reforms.

ACCS Trends in Community Children's Services Survey

Cara Gleeson, Policy and Advocacy Coordinator, CCC Victoria

The first wave of the ACCS Trends in Community Children's Services Survey (TICCSS) has seen over 650 services responses from services who have shared their experiences. The ACCS research team is now busy analysing the data and finalising the reports and will shortly be sharing with you the findings. The data will be able to shed light on the community sector's experiences with daily fees, recruitment, waiting lists, staff: child ratios, vulnerabilities in their communities and the implementation of the National Quality Framework.

ACCS Response to the Coalition's Nanny Question

Cara Gleeson, Policy and Advocacy Coordinator, CCC Victoria

Over the course of 2012, the Opposition has proposed many policy ideas on early childhood education and care. ACCS has continued to be one of the key stakeholders by both sides of government in their consultation and development of policy. From March onwards the media has certainly enjoyed the Opposition Leader's proposal to extend government subsidies (CCR and CCB) to cover care offered by nannies, proving to be a headline grabber.

ACCS responded to the proposal around nannies by reframing the discourse to be how we can ensure every Australian child has the right to accessible, affordable high quality education and care that is flexible to their individual needs and the needs of their families. This response was formally tabled to the Coalition at their round table discussion in June 2012 attended by ACCS National Secretary Barbara Romeril. Below is a snippet of the full policy position that can be found at www.ausccs.org.au.

ACCS Response on a Proposed Productivity Commission Inquiry into Government Subsidies for Early Childhood Education and Care

In March 2012, the Federal Opposition proposed a study be undertaken by the Productivity Commission to examine how to make early childhood education and care (ECEC) services more flexible, such as expanding limited subsidies for in home care to cover nannies without increasing the total government investment...

ACCS believes that the proposed Productivity Commission Inquiry presents an opportunity to reform the current funding system to provide flexible government support for ECEC services options for Australian working families...

ACCS recognises the changing experiences of Australian families. There has been a significant increase over recent decades in dual income families, in women's workforce participation and in non-standard hours of work. There have been changes in the level and type of support available to families including child care rebates and child care benefits, family tax benefits A and B among others. More recently, we have seen the introduction of the Paid Parental Leave Scheme.

ACCS believes the regulated ECEC sector has adapted to these changes and continues to play a vital role for children, families and the communities in which they operate. We acknowledge that the current service system has limitations on availability (especially for babies and parents who work non-standard hours) and affordability (especially for families on low incomes).

There are also limitations on the capacity of ECEC services to meet the needs of vulnerable families and children at risk.

ACCS believes extending government support to nannies is not the answer. ACCS proposes a better alternative would be a re-examination of the social and economic policy goals of public funding to ECEC services and then the development of new mechanisms to deliver this funding in ways which make sense to families and to service providers and which give government direct control over the policy outcomes of this investment.

ACCS proposes that these policy goals could include:

1. All families, regardless of circumstance, can afford the cost of attending quality children's services
2. Public provision of 90% of child care costs for low income families and 100% for at risk or vulnerable children and families so that these families can afford to access quality children's services
3. Establishing a nationally consistent system for state and federal subsidies for all children's services which fall under the National Quality Framework (including preschools and kindergartens) to ensure affordability for families
4. Flexible options to meet the needs of Australian families, including extended morning and night options and weekends...

ACCS Advice to Ellis on the next steps in early childhood education and care reform

Cara Gleeson, Policy and Advocacy Coordinator, CCC Victoria

In July 2012, ACCS was asked by the government to submit policy positions on future reform for early childhood education and care focusing on accessibility and affordability.

As part of this advice, ACCS participated in both the Prime Minister's initial child care summit in June and Minister Ellis' round table on child care issues in August.

We were also invited to submit written advice to the Minister. Normally with advice such as this we firstly consult with our membership base, collate and then submit. However given the tight timeframe, this time we submitted preliminary policy

directions with the promise of further details after proper consultation. Below is an extract from this submission. If you would like to discuss this submission please get in contact with your ACCS state delegate.

Submission to Minister Ellis

As the national peak body for community owned, not for profit children's services Australian Community Children's Services (ACCS) welcomes this opportunity to provide advice on further reform of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) beyond the National Quality Framework (NQF).

Next Steps

ACCS fully supports the national quality reforms that commenced on the 1 January 2012, and what they will mean progressively over the next decade for the quality of early childhood education and care received by Australian children and for the development and empowerment of the sector.

We believe issues of affordability and accessibility are not solely a consequence of the NQF. The issues with the funding system of Child Care Benefit (CCB) and Child Care Rebate (CCR) have existed long before the commencement of the NQF, as recognised in the recommendations in the Henry Tax Review in 2010.

Now that the quality reforms have commenced, it is an opportune time to look at the whole funding system to clarify the social and economic objectives of Government investment in early childhood. We now have the sector working towards delivering a more consistent level of high quality through the NQF; it is time to act to ensure all Australian families can access and afford this education and care.

We urge the Government to take a holistic approach to reforming funding; solutions like increasing the CCB income limit or the maximum payout of CCR will not provide enduring solutions in the long term...

ACCS strongly believes the current system of CCR and CCB is broken; it is overly complex and inhibiting for both the sector and Australian families.

Recommendations:

1. Establish a nationally consistent system for state and federal subsidies for all children's services including child care, preschools and kindergartens to ensure affordability of early childhood services.
2. Roll the investment of the CCR into the current CCB, consolidating government support to one payment.
3. Develop the newly combined payment to be delivered by one agency and to be accessible and transparent for families and services
4. Increase the payment to meet 90 per cent of child care costs for low income families and 100 per cent for at risk or vulnerable children

ACCS recognises that Government does need to look at immediate and short term solutions in relation to affordability. Short-term ideas for improving CCB include:

5. Increase the family income limit of \$139,000pa for eligibility for CCB.
6. Differential CCB for babies.
7. Differential CCB for rural and remote communities.
8. Differential CCB for children's services located in areas of vulnerability as defined by SEIFA.
9. Differential CCB for services who employ a degree qualified early childhood teacher prior to the 2014 requirement...

Keeping an Eye on Corporate Child Care

ASIC bans ABC Learning Centres auditor

Ben Collins, The Financial Standard, 9 August 2012

The Australian Securities & Investments Commission has banned an ABC Learning Centres auditor from practicing for five years.

The Australian Securities & Investments Commission (ASIC) said it has accepted an enforceable undertaking (EU) from Brisbane auditor, Simon Andrew Peter Green.

The EU follows ASIC's investigation into Green's conduct of the audit of the 2007 financial report of ABC Learning Centres Limited (ABC).

Childcare centre operator ABC Learning collapsed in 2008 owing creditors \$1.6bn, forcing the sale of 1200 childcare centres.

Under the EU, Green is prevented from practicing as a registered auditor for a period of five years.

"Auditors are important gatekeepers who are relied upon to provide assurance and market confidence in the quality of financial reports", said Greg Medcraft, ASIC Chairman.

ASIC said that during the audit of ABC's 2007 financial report, Green failed to perform adequately and properly his duties as an auditor.

Early recommendations of 'not buy' before ABC Learning exec sold childcare centre sale

Liam Walsh, The Courier Mail, 24 May 2012

A trial examining the controversial acquisition of an ABC Learning Centre executive's three private childcare facilities has heard three initial recommendations: Not buy. Not buy. Not buy.

The initial recommendations came from an executive at a contractor for Brisbane-based ABC, but the court today also heard that later recommendations involving the contractor were in favour of the purchases.

The initial not-buy recommendations contained details of alleged problems ranging from a centre being too small, to too many competitors nearby, to a facility not catering for babies.

These recommendations, shown to a jury today, each contained the phrases "not buy, but if so instructed" to only purchase centres at certain prices.

The initial recommendations were penned by Robbie van Kampen, of 123 Global Australasia, a private business which sourced centres for Brisbane-based ABC.

Mr van Kampen was appearing as a witness at the criminal trial of Martin Kemp, a former executive director and head of ABC's Australian and New Zealand childcare operations.

Kemp has pleaded not guilty to two Corporations Act charges related to ABC's \$3 million-plus purchase of three of his privately held childcare centres and a block of land on January 11, 2008...

ABC Learning Centres: The perils of small government (extract from “Big Society and Australia”)

Christopher Stone, *The Centre for Policy Development, 2012*

The Centre for Policy Development is a public interest think tank dedicated to seeking out creative, viable ideas and innovative research to inject into Australia's policy debates. The following piece originally appeared in CPD's recent report on Big Society and Australia, which can be downloaded at: <http://cpd.org.au>.

The ‘small government’ zeal of the UK’s ‘Big Society’ can have impacts that extend well beyond service delivery. As Gallop’s ‘four roles of government’ framework illustrates, the public sector also plays an active role in making laws and rules, developing, monitoring and enforcing policies and programs, and managing government finance. When these functions are neglected, there is considerable risk. This brief case study of a corporation that briefly dominated Australia’s childcare industry illustrates the risks of ‘small government’ neglecting to regulate or monitor corporations that deliver essential community services.

Australia’s approach to pre-school childcare is not an example of outsourcing or privatisation. The care has never been provided by government and so has not been outsourced; rather the childcare welfare payments to parents effectively provide a significant level of government subsidy to the industry. However, this is an area where the private sector has been expected to provide a significant proportion of the service, and this has had consequences for the quality and reliability of the care. The case of ABC Learning Centres Limited shows the risks of having large profit-driven entities responsible for the care of pre-school children.

Late 2008 saw the financial collapse of Australia’s largest provider of childcare services. ABC Learning had a market share of approximately 25 per cent; it owned over 900 centres, employed more than 16,000 people, and cared for the children of more than 95,000 families.ⁱ Its insolvency led to the longest period of receivership in Australia’s history, required negotiations with the federal government and resulted in special subsidies to 262 unviable centres and a \$15 million loan to the eventual purchaser of the other centres.ⁱⁱ A critical reason for the unique approach to this insolvency was that, unlike most businesses, operations could not simply be shut down.

The loss of a childcare place will, for many families, mean that one parent will not be able to go to work. Placing 95,000 families in this situation (on top of the 16,000 jobs directly threatened) simply could not be allowed to happen.

In this case, due to the scale of the problem, government action was taken. But for individuals the problem is just as severe if even one childcare centre is forced to close unexpectedly. Private sector competition means the possibility of failure, and such failure saddles young families with a difficult problem and the resulting financial and emotional stress.ⁱⁱⁱ The failure of ABC Learning required government subsidies and loans, showing the need for government backing of pre-school childcare. It is interesting to note that, despite the severity of the issue, government made it clear that it would not be taking over the operations of the centres.^{iv} This is unsurprising since it had no capacity to do so. With the exception of local council run childcare centres, the government has no involvement with the operation of pre-

school care and thus lacks the experience and institutional structures to take it on.

Even before the consequences of ABC Learning’s financial failure became apparent, another issue was being raised: the quality of the care provided. It has been observed that childcare has a number of features that make it problematic for private provision.^v As well as the consequences of centre failure, the difficulty for parents of measuring the quality of care means that there is little control on the profit maximisation motive of the private sector leading to compromise on care standards.

Also, the high demand and geographically uneven distribution of centres can substantially limit real choice. Empirically, a survey of staff in childcare centres indicated a significantly lower standard of care in ABC Learning centres as opposed to community-based centres. Reports that some ABC Learning centres instructed their staff not to complete the surveys may mean that the worst centres are not included, so these results may be an underestimation of the problem. As well as the results listed below, other cost-cutting practices, such as not hiring professional cleaners, which reduced carer time with children, were also reported to impact on care standard in ABC Learning centres.

Percentage of staff holding the following opinions of centre care ^{vii}		
	Community-based centres	ABC Learning Centres
Staff always have time to develop relationships with individual children	54%	29%
Centre provides a good variety of equipment for children	66%	37%
Centre always provides nutritious food	74%	49%
Standard staff-to-child ratios are above legal minimum	40%	15%
Staff ratios never drop below legal minimum	77%	52%
I would not enrol my child at the centre due to quality concerns	4%	18%

The problems associated with ABC Learning show clearly the risks involved with allowing childcare centres to be run by corporate chains. This is of particular concern since the proportion of childcare centres run by chains is increasing.^{viii} This means that if childcare is left to the private sector, it could result in a reduction of the standard of care given to children, and increase the burden of uncertainty placed on young families. And the rapidity of ABC Learning’s growth—from 43 centres in 2001^{ix} to 940 in 2008^x—shows how quickly this process can accelerate.

ⁱ Cowling, D. & McCoy, O., 20/5/11, ‘The ABC of a successful corporate rescue: Lessons from the Court receivership of ABC2 Group Pty Ltd’, Clayton Utz [retrieved 8 March 2012] http://www.claytonutz.com/publications/news/201105/20/the_abc_of_a_successful_corporate_rescue_lessons_from_the_court_receivership_of_abc2_group_pty_ltd.page#.T2BuXXnwWSp

ⁱⁱ Bitá, N., 31/5/10, ‘Hiccups in takeover of ABC childcare centres’, The Australian [retrieved 8 March 2012] <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/politics/hiccups-in-takeover-of-abcchildcare-centres/story-e6frgczf-1225873224304>

ⁱⁱⁱ Hill, E., & Pocock, B., 2010, 'Work and Care' in Davis, M., & Lyons, M. (eds), *More Than Luck*, Centre for Policy Development, Sydney, pp 91-102 [retrieved 10 March 2012] <http://morethanluck.cpd.org.au/sharing-the-luck/work-and-care/>

^{iv} Carson, V., 6/11/08, 'ABC child care goes under', *The Sydney Morning Herald* [retrieved 8 March 2012] <http://www.smh.com.au/business/abc-child-care-goes-under-20081106-5iys.html>

^v Pocock, B., & Hill, E., 2007, 'The childcare policy challenge in Australia' in Hill, E., Pocock, B., & Elliott, A. (eds), *Kids Count: Better early childhood education and care in Australia*, Sydney University Press, Sydney, pp 15-37 [retrieved 14 March 2012] <http://ses.library.usyd.edu.au/bitstream/2123/2120/3/KidsPocockCh1.pdf>

^{vi} Rush, E. & Downie, C., 2006, *ABC Learning Centres: A case study of Australia's largest child care corporation*, Discussion Paper Number 87, The Australia Institute, Canberra [retrieved 14 March 2012] <http://www.tai.org.au/documents/downloads/DP87.pdf>

^{vii} Adapted from Rush, E. & Downie, C., 2006, *ABC Learning Centres: A case study of Australia's largest child care corporation*, Discussion Paper Number 87, The Australia Institute, Canberra [retrieved 14 March 2012] <http://www.tai.org.au/documents/downloads/DP87.pdf>

^{viii} Rush & Downie, 2006.

^{ix} Burrow, V., 30/5/07, 'ABC handed a \$1bn lolly', *The Age* [retrieved 14 March 2012] <http://www.theage.com.au/news/business/abc-handed-a-1bn-lolly/2007/05/29/1180205249974.html>

^x 262 "unviable" centres (Cowling & McCoy, 20/5/11), plus 678 centres sold to the not-forprofit GoodStart consortium. See: Kruger, C., 11/1/10, 'ABC change gets off to a good start', *The Age* [retrieved 14 March 2012] <http://www.theage.com.au/business/abc-change-gets-off-to-a-good-start-20100110-m0mz.html>

General Media

Government's threat to childcare centres over fees

Caroline Marcus, The Daily Telegraph, 27 May 2012

The federal government warned it would publicly name childcare centres using reforms as an excuse to jack up prices after one centre tried to gouge parents an extra \$46 a day.

As Prime Minister Julia Gillard last week commissioned work on ways to help struggling families by capping or freezing childcare price rises, a centre in Rose Bay wrote to parents saying it was raising fees from \$100 a day to \$146 for toddlers and from \$110 to \$149 for babies...

Under national reforms that began in January, centres had to increase the ratio of staff to children.

From January 2014, every childcare worker will have to have at least a Certificate III qualification and every centre will have to employ a four-year university-trained teacher.

Federal Childcare Minister Kate Ellis said excessive fee rises would not be tolerated.

"If any childcare providers are using this government's reforms as an excuse to raise fees above and beyond what is required to cover the cost of these reforms, we will not shy away from publicly holding them to account," she said...

A Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations spokesman said modelling estimated the impact of the reforms to result in increases of \$8.67 a week...

What comes after ABC?

Cosima Mariner, Brisbane Times, 20 May 2012

"Eddy came by helicopter, I come by Mini." That's how Julia Davison, the new boss of Australia's largest childcare chain, sums up the difference between her and her predecessor.

The vivacious British-born Davison is overhauling the former ABC Learning business founded by Eddy Groves, which collapsed in 2008 with a \$2 billion debt.

To break with the chain's controversial past she has rebranded it Goodstart Early Learning, referencing its new non-profit owners and the shift in focus to fostering childhood development rather than maximising profits.

But still the ghost of the fast-living Groves and his McDonald's-style "one size fits all" approach to childcare looms large over Goodstart. ABC Learning was in the headlines again this week, with its former chief executive Martin Kemp on trial in a Brisbane court for breaching the Corporations Act in the company's dying days. Groves, who faces similar charges, is to stand trial later in the year.

The fact that Groves still attracts more media coverage than Goodstart highlights the challenge Davison faces: can she convince parents the company, which looks after 72,000 children, really has changed for the better?

Davison, who joined Goodstart in March last year, doesn't like to spend much time talking about the Groves era. "I've never met Eddy," she says. "My goals, I think, are different ... I don't know what the old ABC vision was, it felt like it was maximising returns for shareholders."

Kylie Stevenson, who runs the flagship Goodstart centre in Indooroopilly in Brisbane's west, vividly recalls the old regime.

"It was like we were puppets - 'This is what you can and can't do,'" she says. "There were very strict procedures and policies, head office said yes or no. We made no decisions as directors. It was all about the money."

A standard eight-week menu which had to be served to every child at the 650 centres across the country on the same day, and opening hours were uniform, regardless of location. Staff had to call head office for permission to change even a light bulb.

Now directors are being given much more autonomy to decide what best suits the families at their particular centre. "With Goodstart the barriers have come down," Stevenson says. "There's no scariness, there's no reprimands. [Head office is] there to work with us, not against us. Now the centres are all for the children. The old company wasn't exactly like that."

Yet some Goodstart staff who spoke to *The Sun-Herald* on condition of anonymity say they haven't seen much change at work. Cost-cutting is still rife (some staff are paying for resources out of their own pockets), staffing levels are so stretched that centre directors have to cover to meet government-regulated staffing ratios, and draconian disciplinary procedures are still being enforced.

While they're impressed with Davison (whom many have met), and her plans for the business, disgruntled staffers say many long-serving middle managers are inculcated with the old ABC culture.

"Eddy Groves is gone, the CFO is gone, but everything else remains the same," one staff member said. "These people have been brought up on a 10-year culture of keeping people in line, keeping things under wraps."

Davison predicts it will take 10 years to turn Goodstart around. "This is a huge cultural shift ... Like any cultural change you will have some people who are not aligned with the new vision, who don't have the skills. It would be naive to say that's not the case."

ACCS in the Media

Fees top PM roundtable on childcare

Patricia Karvelas and Natasha Robinson, The Australian, 8 June 2012

Julia Gillard is considering a shake-up of the childcare system, with the government modelling radical new ideas including paying childcare centres directly in exchange for moderated fee rises, creating a single childcare payment and subsidising staff pay.

The Prime Minister hosted a summit of key figures and unions in the childcare sector in Sydney yesterday, around the same table at which the cabinet meets, to discuss rising fees, costs and possible changes to the system...

Australian Community Children's Services National convener Prue Warrilow wants the two childcare benefits combined. "We want to roll the Child Care Benefit and Child Care Rebate into the same payment to get more money for low-income earners, and create a means test at a higher level," she said...

Childcare operators call for means test on rebate

Stephanie Peatling, Sydney Morning Herald, 17 June 2012

Childcare operators are pushing the federal government to consider a means test on the childcare rebate as part of its policy shake-up.

The rebate is the only family assistance payment that is not subject to an income test and pays parents up to \$7500 a year for each child to help cover the cost of care.

"If you're earning \$200,000 you can afford other childcare choices that someone on \$70,000 can't," the national convener of the Australian Community Children's Services, Prue Warrilow, said.

She said the government needed to follow the recommendation of the Henry tax review and combine the two childcare payments into one means-tested payment.

At present, all families receive the rebate regardless of their income while families on annual incomes of up to about \$130,000 also receive the means-tested childcare benefit. In the 2010-2011 financial years 65,000 high-income families received more than \$259 million in childcare subsidies...

Gwynn Bridge, from the Australian Childcare Alliance, said the childcare benefit, which is targeted at families on low and middle incomes, was "not adequate".

Ms Warrilow agreed the childcare benefit payment was no longer achieving its aim of helping low and middle income families.

"The benefit should be increased to meet 90 per cent of childcare costs for low-income families and 100 per cent for at-risk or vulnerable children and families so that these families can afford access to high-quality children's services," Ms Warrilow said...

Branch Reports

SA Branch

Verity Bierenboim

Since our last report the ACCS SA branch has been fairly quiet. We have been involved in the SA Health & Community Services Skills Board workforce discussions on

improvements that need to be made to the EC sector training packages, especially for the Cert III and the Diploma. ACCS SA believes that they should deliver high quality education and care in all areas. The SA Health & Community Services Skills Board has been asked by the Department for Education & Childhood Development (DECD) to organise a plan for the State to meet the National Quality Standards. As well as the improvements needed for the Cert III and the Diploma there are ongoing negotiations between the Board and one of our Universities to develop a new bridging course between the Diploma and the Bachelor of Early Childhood Degree.

The Hon Grace Portolesi, the Minister for Education and Child Development, released a discussion paper seeking the community's views on how we can better support children and young people in South Australia. The Minister said "the discussion paper, *Every Chance for Every Child*, is the first part of broader community consultation on this important issue". Comment is being sought from all sectors of the community about the issues raised in the paper. ACCS SA is currently in the process of reviewing the paper. The paper can be accessed www.everychild.sa.gov.au

Community Children's Centres SA has been successful in securing grant funding from the federal government department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency to help Community Children's Centres in South Australia become more energy efficient. Participating Centres will pay \$200 dollars to access the \$3000 grant program.

QLD Branch

Frances Snedden

We have been pleased to welcome a number of new members to our Qld ACCS branch over the last few months, particularly those from Limited Hours Care and Kindergartens. This provides us with a valuable opportunity to gain even broader perspective than has previously been possible with members now representing a more diverse range of service types within the children's services sector.

The increased Educational Experience discount (now 20%) has been particularly attractive to prospective and continuing members as they plan the purchase of new and replacement resources and equipment.

We held our AGM in late June with all Management Committee members standing down and re-elections resulting in the following elections to executive positions: Frances Snedden, President; Cathy Kennedy, Vice-President; and Kerrie Wilson, Treasurer. Together with the other committed members of our Management Committee. State representatives are elected from the committee at the first meeting following the AGM each year – currently scheduled for September.

We were fortunate at our AGM to have the opportunity to discuss the initial assessment process for the NQF with a representative from the Qld Office of Early Childhood Education & Care (OECEC), who provided an update on the progress and implementation of the NQF process in Queensland and the opportunity to ask questions. Feedback from member services indicates the initial assessments have been a positive process with educators being comfortable with the tools applied and the notice period. While initially anxious due to the 'unknown', services and educators have experienced a collaborative process with positive outcomes for both the service and OECEC perspective. Some concern was however expressed in regards to the inability of the new system to accommodate 'emergency care' provisions. This

had been previously included in the Qld regulations by the provision to extend licensed capacity on an 'occasional' (not on-going) basis for this purpose.

ACCS Qld is particularly pleased at the response rate from services in Queensland in the first round of the National ACCS research 'ACCS Trends in Community Children's Services'. We thank everyone who took the time to provide their valuable input to this exciting research and who assisted in achieving such a great response rate by forwarding the survey to their professional networks. This has resulted in a range of service types across the state being able to contribute towards the National data. We look forward to reading the report and sector responses to the implementation of the NQF.

A couple of ACCS Qld members also joined state & territory colleagues from the community based sector in attending the National conference - 'Change & Leadership - Who's the Ringmaster?' in Wollongong in May. One of our far Northern and very isolated LDC centres from Horn Island in the Torres Strait was also successfully selected to attend and participate in the professional mentoring program – an extremely valuable and positive experience for these professionals as I am sure it was for their mentors!

ACCS Qld looks forward to a positive and exciting year as the roll out of the National Quality Framework continues.

Victorian Branch

Barbara Romeril, Community Child Care Victoria

The big news for CCC is the announcement of a change of Professional Support Coordinator for Victoria in 2013. In June we received the disappointing news that we were unsuccessful in our application to deliver the Professional Support Coordinator (PSC) contract for 2013 to 2016. We are proud of our record as the first PSC for Victoria in planning, developing, contracting and delivering high quality professional support for the last 6 years and a half years. The messages of support we have received since the announcement have affirmed our sense that our work is valued by a wide range of stakeholders across Victoria and nationwide in supporting high quality learning and care in children's services.

Our capacity to work towards our vision rests on finding new sources of income to support our role in providing leadership, advocacy and support to build the capacity of the children's services sector and promote public support for community owned, not for profit services.

We are consulting with our members and conducting market research to settle on a suite of services which will best contribute CCC's unique capabilities. Our Annual General Meeting in November will be an opportunity to formally launch the new look CCC. We have invited the new leader of children's policy in the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to meet our members at the AGM.

CCC has written to a number of Ministers and Shadow Ministers with responsibilities for vocational education and/or workforce skills complaining about the poor consultation by the Industry Skills Council in the review of relevant training packages. We also complained about the poor quality of graduates of some private Registered Training Organisations. It is pleasing to receive active responses from the Minister for Tertiary Education and Skills and the Shadow Minister for Childcare who have both raised our concerns with the Industry Skills Council.

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