

NATIONAL CONVENOR REPORT

Prue Warrilow, National Convenor

It's been a busy start to 2013 and it's likely to get busier as we draw closer to budget time (early May 2013) followed by the federal election 14 September if Government lasts that long.

ACCS has been starting to try to influence political agendas working with the Greens to develop the capital expenditure proposal and the ECT HECS waiver idea. Sadly we had little and zero influence respectively on the flexibility announcements and the announcement of the Early Years Quality Fund that occurred the week of 18 March 2013.

I acknowledge that the Government managing to find \$300,000,000 wages in long day care in a time of great fiscal restraint is an achievement. This is an important step with the Government recognising for the first time that it has some role to play in children's services wages and affordability. I get that a \$3 per hour increase for a Cert III is a lot – for a full-time Cert III this equates to around \$114 per week before tax and when your current hourly rate is \$18.56 possibly moving to \$21.56 is good. I am really worried however about what this will do to the children's services sector. I have been really struggling to get a good spin on this but it just raises my social justice hackles. I think it's going to create services that are the 'haves' and more that are the 'have nots'.

My concerns are as follows.

- It's only available to staff working in long day care centres, what about if you're in a preschool, an Outside School Hours Care service or a MAC? There are ACCS members who operate preschools and long day care centres from the same premises, what will this mean for these services in practice?
- A service must have/enter into an Enterprise Agreement (EA) and be able to undertake the internal processes required of an EA to have it approved and registered. I want to say that the EA itself is not the concern as this is a tool that protects employees and employers; it's the time and resources it can take to negotiate, develop and register an EA that worries me. What will this time and cost impact mean for small services, rural and remote services, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services?
- It will only cover between 20% to 40% of the existing long day care centre workforce. If you are successful in receiving this money, what happens if you expand and employ more staff or staff with different more expensive qualifications?
- The funding is only guaranteed for two years and is only appropriated through the budget on an annual basis.

What happens if there is a change of government before the second year of funding?

Some of these issues will be worked through by the Early Years Advisory Committee that will be appointed to oversee this funding. This Committee will include government (DEEWR), employers and peak groups. It will be an interesting conversation when this group considers conflict of interest if one of the employer representatives applies for this funding. I would have thought that given the contentious nature of this funding and the limited availability, that any employer representatives in this Committee should be automatically excluded from obtaining any of these funds.

There will be a Pay Equity Unit established under the Fair Work Commission and one of its key pieces for work will be to look at gender equity issues relating to children's services wages and salaries. The last pay equity case for children's services took at least two years, so it will be a long time holding your breath if you're one of the unsuccessful applicants for this money.

I know this sounds a bit doom and gloom. I fear for services that are grappling with the NQS, looking at possible fee increases in early 2014 to meet the new ratio and qualifications requirements and now need to consider are they likely to be in the 20-40% or part of the 60-80%.

ACCS has written to Kate Ellis MP Minister for Early Childhood and Childcare and Peter Garrett AM MP Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth raising these concerns and asking to be considered for representation on the Early Years Quality Fund Advisory Board

Let's hope the budget has a few tastier morsels.

YOUR PEAK BODY IN ACTION

Anne Kennedy, National Secretary

The ACCS National Convenor and myself as the new National Secretary, attended the National Children's Services Forum (NCSF) lobby days in Canberra on March 18 and 19. The NCSF members who attended the lobby days represented major peak bodies in the early childhood education and care sector, except for the Australian Child Care Alliance (peak for the for profit services) which did not send any representatives.

The NCSF members agreed on six key advocacy priorities to present to the politicians. In brief these were:

1. Maintain the implementation of the NQF to 2020
2. Bring 'out of scope' services into the NQF with appropriate adjustments
3. Flexibility in children's services is necessary but innovation must be consistent with the NQF and always in the best interests of children

4. Current investment in children's services to be maintained with future growth; a review of CCR would be appropriate
5. Sustainable funding is required for community based approaches to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families
6. There must be an end to children in detention which is a breach of Australia's commitments to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

These advocacy priorities match well with ACCS priorities. There was a mixed reception to them by the politicians ranging from very interested and supportive to outright rejection. Several politicians raised the issue of affordability and had examples from their electorate to support the claim that fee rises have meant a number of families in their electorate could no longer afford childcare. Clearly the issues of an ongoing commitment to improving quality and maintaining accessibility and affordability are complex and will require complex solutions.

For the first time the NCSF hosted a breakfast meeting with politicians to informally discuss their advocacy priorities as part of the lobbying process. NCSF members were impressed that the most senior representatives from three parties along with other ministers, senators and MPs were able to attend. The Minister for Early Childhood and Childcare, Kate Ellis, the opposition spokesperson, Sussan Ley and Green's spokesperson, Senator Hansen-Young addressed the participants and each of them affirmed their party's commitment to the National Quality Framework. As this was the NCSF's key advocacy priority it was pleasing to hear this commitment. Several of the other NCSF advocacy priorities were also mentioned which indicated they had listened to the groups they had met with on the previous day.

Over the two days, the NCSF members spent up to 30 minutes talking with MPs and or their advisors. Nearly 30 politicians or advisors accepted the NCSF invitation to meet with a small group of NCSF members. The majority of the MPs we talked with were from the Liberal-National Coalition. At the meetings, each of the groups spoke on the agreed NCSF advocacy priorities and answered questions from a NCSF perspective rather than on behalf of their respective peak organisations. Some suggested actions and requests for action or further information were taken back to the whole NCSF group for further discussion and actioning.

The NCSF members also met with David De Silva from DEEWR who informed the Forum members that the 2014 review of the NQF will begin in the next few months. He also stated that DEEWR data indicates that nearly 70% of services have employed a degree qualified kindergarten teacher. Some members commented that recruitment of a teacher doesn't always mean they are retained. ACCS representatives were able to raise their concerns with the CSHISC Review of the National Training package, processes and outcomes to date as well as their concerns with ensuring high quality standards for the RTOs delivering the training.

One of the most interesting and helpful advocacy ideas for ACCS and all our members came from a briefing for NCSF members with Sue Lines from the United Voice Union. She noted that politicians, especially in marginal seats, get more

interested in early childhood education and care issues when the Union tells them about the total number of ECEC services in their electorate and that every family using these services is likely to be voting in the next election. ACCS members or branches might like to consider using this strategy with their local member.

THE NATIONAL QUALITY FRAMEWORK: A CASE STUDY - CHURCHES OF CHRIST CARE FAMILY DAY CARE CHINCHILLA

ACCS Queensland Branch

Churches of Christ Care Family Day Care Chinchilla received a positive report card, after stepping forward to be in the first round of assessments under the new National Quality Framework (NQF).

Three family day care educators of the five coordinated by Family Day Care Chinchilla, including two home-based educators at Jandowae, were visited as part of the assessment and ratings process. Service Manager Mellanie Budden said that the three educators were nervous but well prepared for their assessment visits. The educators found the assessors to be open and friendly. The assessment and ratings report commented favourably on each educator .

It was very detailed and noted that

- The educators at Family Day Care Chinchilla were knowledgeable about the Early Years Learning Framework and supported child-led and initiated activities.
- In all the homes, the environment reflected the lives of children, their local communities and families, with photos of family members and special family moments as well as paintings of recent events, displayed around the service.
- Embedding of sustainable practices, such as recycling, occurred at each of the homes, with children encouraged to bring recycled materials, such as paper and cardboard, to family day care for activities, including gardening and creative works.
- Reflective practice was also observed, for example, one educator, who, after noticing that a child often said "mine" about the toys she was playing with, began placing the child in pair activities requiring sharing, and initiated discussions about the words "my" and "mine"
- Children have a lot of choice and input, such as input into the toys being purchased."

Ms Budden said that while the assessment and ratings report was positive, there was always room to improve.

"One thing we learnt from the assessment report was about sustainability inside and outside the home. Learning experiences are not limited to indoors and since the assessment visit we have talked about having learning conversations outside the home."

Ms Budden commented that Churches of Christ Care and Family Day Care Chinchilla support the NQF "It is a really positive thing for family day care. It helps the educators to know they are working within the Early Years Learning Framework."

NEW TRAINING PACKAGE FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES – SOME GAINS, BUT AN OPPORTUNITY NOT FULLY REALISED

Brian Newman, ACCS Victoria Branch

Certificate III in Children's Services is the biggest VET course in Australia, with over 44,000 students in 2011, and 22,500 enrolled in the Diploma of Children's Services (ECEC).

Over the past year, the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council has reviewed the content and form of approved training courses for educators in early childhood and out of school hours. ACCS was represented on the Industry Reference Group and the Subject Matter Expert Group in reviewing the package. The new Training Package is now complete and it is due to be submitted for approval mid year so that it can be rolled out in 2014. Two significant factors informed the review process – the introduction of the National Quality Framework (NQF) for Education and Care is transforming expectations and standards for services; and well publicised concerns about the quality of training being provided by some Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) documented in a Productivity Commission report in 2012. A third factor was new rules about streamlined training packages that brought new requirements into how competencies and courses are worded.

Against this backdrop, the timelines for the project were ridiculously short and the two consultation periods coincided with the busiest time of year for both services and training organisations. In addition, the NQF significantly redefined our expectation of educators – now expected to develop and deliver curriculum and engage in reflective practice and intentional teaching. The focus has strongly moved to focus on children's learning, which meant that 'technical' competency descriptors were no longer adequate. The first draft of the new package failed to capture the changes, but, following significant input from some members of the Subject Matter Expert Group, including ACCS the second draft better reflected what is expected of educators, using the language of the NQF. Assessment criteria were also rewritten to include minimum hours to demonstrate skills in the workplace. Certificate III students will now need to spend 120 hours in one or more registered children's services to demonstrate their knowledge and skills on the job, and Diploma students 240 hours.

Other major changes are that Certificate III will no longer be a pre-requisite for entering the Diploma course, and the Advanced Diploma will no longer be offered, with other Advanced Diplomas in the package providing similar skills. Under the new format, implementation guides will accompany the package providing guidance on content, but these will be guides only.

Whilst the new courses reflect the expectations and reality of children's services work, they could have been far better. Consultation was really rushed, particularly in fine tuning the second draft, but government funding was time limited. For example, the Industry Reference Group has less than a week to go through the revised second draft before having to approve it, whereas the body that finally endorses the package has to have it for a month.

In representing the community children's services sector

in the review I hope that the new package will lead to improvements in the quality of graduates from both Early Childhood and Out of School Hours courses. However, in examining the expectations of workers in our sector, it seems to me that the technician competency based training provided through the VET sector may no longer be the most appropriate way to provide our workforce with the skills they need to provide children with the education and care they need and deserve. Perhaps it is time to move all our pre and in service training into the higher education sector?

ACCS IN 2013

How your peak body has been advocating for the right of Australia's children to access quality not for profit, community children's services:

- o Participated in the National Children's Services Forum Lobby Days. Prue Warrilow National Convenor and Anne Kennedy National Secretary spent two days lobbying federal politicians on key priorities including maintaining the implementation of the National Quality Framework.
- o Distributed a Media Release in response to the announcement of the Early Years Quality Fund.
- o Written to Ministers Ellis and Garrett about the Early Years Quality Fund –highlighting concerns about equity for services in accessing this fund.
- o Written to ACECQA expressing concern about the way ownership of services is defined in ACECQA forms and records. At present, the term "private" is used in relation to all not-for-profit services as well as for-profit services. ACCS has requested that the term private is not used for not-for-profit organisations.
- o Welcomed the appointment of Megan Mitchell as Australia's first National Children's Commissioner
- o Participated in the Community Services & Health Industry Skills Council review of the Children's Services Training Package. Brian Newman from Community Child Care Victoria, the Victorian Branch of ACCS represented ACCS on the Children's and Youth Services Industry Reference Group and provided detailed written feedback on Draft 1 and 2 of the qualifications
- o Accepted an invitation to join the Hunter Institute of Mental Health's *National Reference Group - Early Childhood Mental Health Resource*. Amanda Holt from ACCS NSW will be participating in this project, an initiative of the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). The project aims to build the capacity of the ECEC workforce to support children's mental health and wellbeing.

QLD BRANCH UPDATE

At its first meeting for the year Qld ACCS Branch took the opportunity to input into the current review of the Children's Services Training Package by the Community Services & Health Industry Skills. The information gathered was sent through to the National ACCS body with an ACCS Qld response also being submitted on-line, together with individual member responses. Issues we raised included

- The draft Diploma does not fully reflect terminology of the NQF - with some reference to the out-dated QIAS – It is imperative there be strong links & consistent terminology with the NQF

- Core units in the draft Diploma have no staff management & therefore do not support Directors in developing knowledge/skill in Human Resource Management. In Qld many young Directors flounder due to lack of ability in this area.
- The focus is on compliance not how NQF relates to practice in terms of quality outcomes for children – it's about passing the assessment 'test' (this is not the message we want to send). This quality aspect may be covered in other units but needs a clear link.

At our meeting we also discussed

- Gaps in current qualifications (Diploma & University) specifically with service managers business skills and particularly aspects of human resource management/ staff supervision. Some centres employing external mentors to support inexperienced directors in this area as there is no mentoring through PSCQ.
- Support to member re threat to TAFE based children's services due to extensive Qld state government cut backs.
- Plans to meet with State OECEC representative to discuss the 'TICCS' survey results at both the National & State level.
- Initial discussions re AGM planning including guest speaker to attract greater attendance
- Review of Membership materials to attract new members.

NEWS FROM TASMANIAN BRANCH

In March Lipscombe Child Care Services a member of ACCS Tasmanian Branch "employed" Andrew Wilkie MP for a morning. This was part of the United Voice "Walk in My Shoes Challenge".

Andrew spent the morning working for Lipscombe Child Care Services in the infants and toddlers room. He was able to join in all aspects of the program including preparing morning tea, rocking a child to sleep, and reading stories. Andrew then sat in on a program planning session.

Kelly Ashton the Director of the centre said they chose to make this part of his day so that he could get an understanding of the "complexity of what is behind the work we do every day". Educators had an opportunity to show him how the programming and planning works and discuss the challenges with him.

At the end of the morning he was handed a Big Steps mock cheque for \$54.36, the amount an educator with a Certificate III would be paid for working the same hours under the award. Kelly said she felt that it was important to emphasise how little educators are earning for the demanding and skilful work they do.

More information about the United Voice Big Steps Campaign can be found at <http://bigsteps.org.au/educator>



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