

Advocating for the right of Australia's children to access quality, community owned services.

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ACCS IN ACTION! December 2015

NATIONAL CONVENOR'S UPDATE

Prue Warrilow, National Convenor

As ever, lots going on! Some of the highlights follow:

Early Childhood Ministerial Advisory Council - 18 November 2015

The first meeting of the ECMAC with the new Minister for Education Simon Birmingham was promising. The Minister's office is keen to meet with ACCS.

ACCS took the following issues to the meeting:

- Implications of a wider GST application that could include ECEC services
- 2 days activity test requirements and match with service viability and practical operating models
- Existing priority of access guidelines, and potential removal of this considering how current approach supports wider whole of Govt strategies around child and family COAG frameworks, eg National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children
- What strategies has Govt considered for how underperforming ECEC services will be supported post removal of PSCs 1/7/16
- Linking future ECEC affordability and access strategies to cuts to Family Tax Benefits – these seem to work against each other

Excellence in Research in Early Years Education – Collaborative Research Network (CRN) - 11 November 2015

I attended this meeting on behalf of ACCS. The CRN currently comprises Charles Sturt University, Queensland University of Technology and Monash University. This group applies for funding to conduct collaborative research in early years education. It meets on an ad hoc basis with ECEC stakeholders, including ACCS, to discuss and consider

challenges facing ECEC services in the future and what a research agenda might look around these challenges.

A key focus of the day was considering opportunities for children aged from birth to 3 years and what education looks like for this age group. It is a great opportunity to help influence ECEC research agenda in Australia.

Attendees included large not-for-profit children's services providers, state and Commonwealth government representatives, state and National advocacy in lobby groups, relevant unions and related research centres.

Regular Stakeholder meeting with ACECQA – 14 September 2015

Kim Bertino (NSW branch) and I attended this meeting. ACECQA meets with ECEC stakeholders individually about every six months and this was one of our regular catch ups. On the agenda were the following items will stop

- ACECQA update / issues for discussion - RIS/COAG review; update from completed workshops and upcoming second round
- ACCS update / issues for discussion - Assessment and rating visits in each state and territory; Differences in quality ratings by sector – NFP and profit; Practicums for undergraduate early childhood teacher degrees
- Other business - Assessment and data reporting developments; Update on NQA ITS release; Update on communications for ratios changes on 1 January

This was a fruitful meeting with discussion around the agenda items. Thanks to ACCS members who provided feedback for our agenda for ACECQA.

Coalition of Children's Services Peaks - 23 November 2015

This Coalition comprises the national peak bodies that used to meet as a National Children's Services Forum (NCSF). NCSF members felt it was beneficial to continue meeting to discuss important ECEC issues. The Coalition builds on the collaborative relationship and goodwill that was developed previously and focuses on all children getting the best start in life through ECEC from birth to 12 years; and ECEC services provide the best interests and rights of children in a responsive, inclusive, quality and affordable way.

This recent meeting focused on the current Childcare Package including a briefing from the Department of Education, and update on where the nanny trial was up to, and is in discussions regarding the Federation White Paper.

Early Learning - Everyone Benefits

It is anticipated there will be a meeting of the campaign reference group sometime before the end of December. ACCS is part of this group.

EARLY YEARS RESEARCH

ACCS has published the national report on the third wave of the Trends In Community Children's Services Survey, 2014. It is now available [here](#). The key findings are summarised below.

The national executive is now seeking sponsorship for the next wave of the TICCSS research, to monitor how the community children's services sector is responding to the next phase of quality improvement in 2016, the requirement for educator to child ratios of 1:11 for children aged 3-5 years.

As reported above, ACCS participated in a collaborative research network with a number of universities, early childhood peak bodies and others in the sector, to help shape the academic research agenda. ACCS also contributed to national research by ANU on the influence of national peak bodies.

Key findings in the 2014 TICCSS

- No decline in utilisation or waiting times
- Services are meeting the higher ratio of educators to children and many are exceeding the ratio for children under 2
- The workforce continues to be stable and there are fewer staff vacancies
- There is a stronger culture of study to improve qualifications, a reduction in the proportion of educators with no early childhood qualifications and an increase in the proportion with Diploma qualifications
- Services are finding it easier to recruit for all qualification levels
- Fee increases are within normal operating limits
- The number of waivers exempting services from meeting quality standards has not increased
- More services are reporting a reduced workload from National Quality Framework

However there has been some deterioration since the 2012 waves of Trends in Community Children's Services Survey:

- The number of vulnerable children is increasing as is the range of vulnerabilities
- Inadequate wages for educators has become more problematic for services
- More services are experiencing negative responses from families to fee increases, despite the increases being modest

ACCS PREPARES FOR THE NEXT FEDERAL ELECTION

ACCS held a highly productive face-to-face meeting of the National Council in Sydney in early November, to develop our campaign for next year's federal election. Brian Babbington of Families Australia provided a provocative address, which challenged how ACCS has conducted its political campaigns in the past and gave valuable food for

thought.

As a result, ACCS is developing a fresh approach to the next election, focussing on headline issues that are under consideration by the major parties, including taxation (no GST on fees for children's services), investment in a skilled professional workforce and no children in detention.

State and Territory Branches Gearing Up for the ACCS Campaign to influence the next Federal Election

ACCS is getting ready to once again bring the voice of the not-for-profit community children's services sector into the policy mix for the federal election due in 2016.

At the National Council meeting in Sydney in early November, branch delegates shared information about local and state advocacy activities. The main activities were building the engagement of the sector so that ACCS is seen as a vital forum to advocate for children and families, and collaboration with Early Childhood Australia state branches. Here is snapshot of activities of the ACCS branches in the last few months:

NSW:

- actively informing members about national government policy debates and consultations; consulting with members to inform ACCS input to these debates
- roundtable with members to refocus the role of ACCS by developing a platform to advocate for NFP services, on state and national issues
- establishing 'issues nights' to bring members together to hear from experts on key policy issues and support younger members to become confident in discussing the issues and expressing their views; this is part of succession planning to ensure a new generation of advocates to lead ACCS into the future

Tasmania:

- regular reporting to ECA state executive on ACCS issues to influence ECA policy positions

Victoria:

- participation in Victorian Education State consultation – engaging members through surveys and small group discussions – the CCC submission, which includes many quotes from members can be read [here](#).
- joint media release *The Ten Principles for an Early Childhood Education State* with other Victorian early childhood and family support agencies – with a focus on the Rights of the Child
- attendance and presentation by State Minister for Families and Children at CCC AGM

- ongoing advocacy on state and federal issues through meetings with state and federal government departments
- work with the state Department of Education and Training to develop resources for schools to support delivery of Outside School Hours Care services on school sites
- engaging members through presenting CCC and ACCS reports to a quarterly coordinators' forum

WA:

- informal collaboration with ECA WA branch
- actively promoting member participation in ACCS national activities

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION UPDATE

ACCS is actively supporting the application of the new organization, SkillsIQ, to operate as a skills service organisation to replace the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council.

Brian Newman of the Victorian branch has been formally appointed as the ACCS representative on the Industry Skills Council Advisory Committee. He provided the following update:

Report to ACCS on Community Services and Health Industries Skills Council activities

Brian Newman, ACCS Rep (b.newman@unimelb.edu.au)

On 7th October I attended a briefing by the new Australian Industry and Skills Committee (AISC) at Melbourne airport, as ACCS representative on the Industry Reference Group (IRG) of CSHISC. The event was presented by the chair of the new AISC John Pollaers, and was attended by people from a diverse range of IRCs, from right across industry sectors, from abattoirs to massage therapists.

The purpose of the day was to explain how the new system will work as the current Industry Skills Councils will cease to exist at the end of the year. They are to be replaced by Industry Reference Committees (IRCs), but they're not even sure how many of them there actually are! Community Services and Health Industries Skills Council (CSHISC) has a number of IRGs because it covers such a diverse range of employment areas. Their IRGs are the equivalent to IRCs! Supporting the IRCs will be Skills Service Organisations (SSOs), who will be the people doing the actual work of developing training packages etc. One problem that emerged is that many IRCs are not formally constituted so would not be able to contract the SSO to undertake work. The other key issue that seemed to emerge was a consensus that employee (ie union) representation was a key to the success of IRCs and Skills Councils, even though new structure

apparently only really refers to industry representation, and not employee and employer representation.

Another issue raised was how to ensure that there is the right spread of IRCs to meet the needs of the various employment sectors, and again there seemed to be no plan for this. They kept pushing the idea the IRCs were to be 'the bosses' and the SSOs are intended to be 'the workers', who will do as they are told. It seemed that in some sectors the bureaucrats have more power than the industry and employee reps, but this wasn't explicitly discussed.

CSHISC is at the round two interview stage for becoming one of the new SSOs, so everything is in waiting. My impression is that there is a huge amount of work to be done before the end of the year to ensure that structures are in place to maintain the importance of skills training for 'industry'.

On 15 October I participated by phone in the final meeting of CSHISC's Training Package Advisory Committee (TPAC). The primary purpose of the meeting was to sign off on a number of revised health training packages, however there was also some discussion of other relevant matters.

One issue discussed was concern about the ASQA report on Early Childhood Workforce Training. The report covered both the old and the new training packages, so was unable to identify whether the new training package addressed concerns about the old package. In particular, the new package prescribes hours in the workplace for particular competencies, and also the number of times and circumstances that particular tasks need to be demonstrated. However, the report doesn't assess whether this has worked, and rather conflates all its criticisms into general statements. Dorothy Rao from CSHISC has raised this with ASQA but they do not appear to be interested in doing any **further work to see if the new package has addressed the concerns. She expressed interest in working with ACCS to pursue this matter, and I think it would be useful.**

One particular issue that struck me in the ASQA report is that according to the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) a Certificate III level qualification is supposed to take from one to two years to complete, but the Certificate III in ECEC is typically delivered in around 6 months, and often in a much shorter time. But no one will fund a two year Certificate III even though that's what it is supposed to be.

This aligns with my belief that the skills requirements for ECEC qualifications are far higher than where they currently sit. For example critical reflection only gets mentioned at a Masters level in the AQF even though it is a requirement of the NQF, presumably expected from all educators, including those with Certificate III level qualifications.

It was also useful to have ASQA confirm in a letter to ACCS that all the RTOs that were ultimately non-compliant from their audit were for-profit providers, although this was not mentioned in their report. Given the extensive government funding for ECEC training, **perhaps we should be asking that such funding only go to not for profit bodies.**

One other issue raised is the discussion is that a number of countries require **on-the-job**

assessment to be conducted by independent assessors, and not RTOs themselves. This could help ensure more consistency in expected standards. **Perhaps this is an idea ACCS should be promoting.**

ACCS BRANCH REPORTS

WA

- Mostly business as usual with Care West continuing to carry the WA ACCS banner
- There is a noticeable gap being identified between those services that are working very well with the NQF and implementing the quality improvement plan as part of their day-to-day practice and those that do not. This gap is widening with those that aren't focusing on the quality improvement plan falling further and further behind in quality outcomes the children
- The divide between education and care continues with long day care centres not being able to access Universal Access funds to deliver a preschool program

VIC

- Coming to the first year of a new Labor state governments and drawing to the conclusion of state education consultations
- The state branch continues to focus on increased advocacy about kindergarten programs being delivered in long day care centres and the success of this is reflected in Victorian government funding initiatives to help preschool programs to be delivered in long day care. There is also state funding to supplement the cost of employing an early childhood teacher in long day care centres to deliver the kindergarten program
- The Victorian government continues to be interested in outcomes for vulnerable children and has established a Ministerial Advisory Council. Congratulations to Anne Kennedy, Chair of the Victorian branch who has been appointed to this Council and brings a strong focus on ECEC including children aged from birth to less than three years
- As part of the state's vulnerable children strategy the Department of Education has identified preferred ECEC providers where the Department will prepay for places at specific centres to be made available for emergency places for families in need.

TAS

- The State review of the Education Act should be publicly available in March 2016
- Almost 80% of ECEC services have received an assessment and rating visit, Tassie is leading the nation in A&R completion
- Increased pressure for not-for-profit children's services to be paying commercial rents in properties that they do not own, including tendering services to the

marketplace with some services shifting to the for-profit sector

NSW

- Preschool affordability continues to be a major state issue with NSW preschool still being the most expensive in Australia, and becoming increasingly unaffordable for families. There is great concern about sustainability of some preschools into the short and medium term future
- The State Department of Education has been reviewing and consulting on its processes around A&R visits. This has resulted in the development of a template that provides a more timely turnaround time from visit to feedback to the service and rating, including an online interactive tool. Initial indications from services are that this is a helpful document and provide them with opportunities to inform future continuous improvement. There is some interest from other states and territories in using this template.



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