

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

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ACCS IN ACTION! March 2016

NATIONAL CONVENOR'S UPDATE

Prue Warrilow

ACCS representatives continue to bring the voice of the community children's services sector directly to government, as well as to key government agencies, community sector peak bodies and the media. In the last quarter your representatives have advised the federal Minister through his Advisory Committee, the early childhood quality authority ACECQA, vocational training quality authorities ASQA and the Australian Industry Skills Committee, the federal education department, the coalition of peak bodies conducting the Early Learning Everyone Benefits campaign and the Families Australia Board. The key issues that ACCS has brought to these national policy forums include:

- Loss of access to ECEC for vulnerable children with proposed new activity test for families reducing minimum hours of subsidised ECEC
- the potential impact of the National Disability Insurance Scheme on the ECEC sector
- concern at the absence of good governance at ACECQA with the government's failure to ensure appointment of a Board.

ACCS is pleased to report that, after vigorous lobbying, the latest ACECQA Snapshot includes a comparison between different ownership models and shows clear evidence of better average quality across the community sector. ACCS had been asking for this type of analysis and it is pleasing to see advocacy pays off – even if it takes a bit of time.

Our first meeting with the advisor to the new federal Education Minister was very positive, with a good discussion of the key issues that ACCS anticipates will be influential in the upcoming election campaign. We participated in an Education Department meeting to explore ways to improve access to ECEC for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families; ACCS was invited to provide the summary of discussion. My summary noted the strong resonance with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture when you consider "Belonging, Being and Becoming" and "My Time, Our Place"; and the critical importance of acknowledging, affirming and incorporating aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture into service delivery and programming just as part of good, daily practice as we do with many other cultures. For example, how many of you in services have Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander words of welcome (I bet many of you have other languages)? Do you know who your local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander points of contact are? What art work/s do you have displayed on the wall and what types of equipment do you buy that might reflect aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture?

At the Ministerial Advisory Committee meeting I was able to get two agenda items up for discussion – the delays in ACECQA board appointments and updates on National Partnership Agreements.

We are also pleased to have finalised our agreement with Educational Experience to ensure our members' access to discounts on quality learning materials. This formal agreement will assist ACCS branches to build their membership and will provide much needed support to our national advocacy work.

ACCS MEDIA RELEASE 11 February 2016

NOT FOR PROFIT CHILDREN'S SERVICES LEAD THE WAY WITH QUALITY

Tomorrow for the first time ever the national quality authority will reveal how not-for-profit child care stacks up against its commercial competitors.

As the national peak body for the community not-for-profit sector, Australian Community Children's Services (ACCS) is not surprised that this report shows substantially better quality in the community sector.

Prue Warrilow, National Convenor of ACCS said today 'We have always known that on average, not-for-profit services provide higher quality early learning and care for Australia's children.'

'Our members have no competing interests about where the money goes. It is directed towards the best care and learning experiences for children.'

The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority *NQF Snapshot for Q4 2015* is the first to provide quality rating results by provider management types, such as private for profit, private not for profit, schools and government managed. It will show that:

- Three-quarters of not-for-profit children's services are meeting or exceeding the national quality standard – compared with 60% of commercial services ('private for profit')

- Nearly forty percent of not-for-profit children's services are operating at quality standards higher than the minimum required – while only 4% of commercial services meet this higher standard

'The quality standards set by ACECQA are based on strong evidence of what is good for children's learning and development.' Ms Warrilow said. 'Families must have the choice of good quality not-for-profit services Governments can support this by investing in capital for new buildings so every community can have a not-for-profit option.'

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION UPDATE

Update on Australian Industry and Skills Committee (AISC)

Brian Newman, ACCS Representative and Interim Chair, Children's and Youth Services Industry Reference Committee

The way the Federal Government organises around the Vocational Education and Training (VET) system is undergoing significant change with the aim of making training more responsive to the needs of industry. Industry Skills Councils, which oversaw the development of Training Packages across all work areas were abolished at the end of 2015 and have been replaced with a new structure.

The Australian Industry and Skills Committee has been established and under it sit a large number of Industry Reference Committees (IRC). Looking after each IRC is one of a number of organisations who successfully tendered to services various sectors.

Early Childhood sits within the Children's and Youth Services IRC. SkillsIQ is the organisation looking after most of the community services and health sector. In the past, the Industry and Skills Committees advised on the development of the new Early Childhood Education and Care Training Package, the new Industry Reference Committee hasn't had much activity since it was formed. This is because the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Committee had a Training Package Advisory Group (TPAG) that dealt with the more detailed issues around training development. This layer no longer exists, and now the IRC will be expected to do all the work of overseeing consultation with industry and development of review of training.

As I was part of the IRC and the TPAG I ended up being made interim Chair of the new Children's and Youth IRC. The IRC has people on it from government, industry, unions, sector organisations etc, and one of the initial tasks will be to ensure that the group is broadly representative of all those with an interest in the sector. The group is meeting for the first time later this month. At this meeting a permanent Chair will be elected and a work plan will be presented that sets out what work SkillsIQ will do for the IRC over the coming year.

The critical issues around industry training continue to be the quality of training and the requirements for on-the-job experience causing the greatest concern. At a recent meeting of the AISC, the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) again strongly criticised the quality of some VET training, particularly around length and quality of courses. But there didn't seem to be any way to address these concerns as it seems that government sets parameters around competency based training and setting a minimum length of a course doesn't 'fit' within that framework.

Much uncertainty still surrounds how the new structures will work – in my view, this is another example of government wanting change without really thinking out how it will work. There are important questions around legal liability and representation that have not been resolved yet, and how the IRC will consult and review training is still unclear. Organisations like ACCS are expected to make their staff available as representatives, with travel costs paid but no sitting fees, which makes it hard for small organisations to maintain representation. It is much easier for larger organisations to build this work into their structures. I think it is critically important for the not-for-profit sector to be strongly represented, as we are the drivers of quality. NOSHSA is also represented on the Committee so we have a strong ally. ACCS' voice in the development of the Training Package did have an influence and we must ensure that our sector's interests are dominated by quality and not profit, and that the quality of training is improved.

ASQA and ACECQA Industry Engagement with Providers of Early Childhood Education and Care

Kim Bertino, ACCS National Secretary

The Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) and Australia Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) invited representatives from peak organisations and direct service providers to

meet and discuss several key issues related to the recent ASQA report on the strategic review of ECEC.

The main issues discussed were:

- how to better support the ECEC sector to report poor quality training
- how to increase engagement between ASQA, ACECQA and the sector
- challenges in the system of work placements for students

ASQA referred to the importance of understanding the concerns of the sector about the quality of training and assessment provided by registered training authorities (RTOs) and of how to monitor and track those RTOs who are not meeting the auditing standards.

ASQA discussed mechanisms for providing feedback directly to ASQA that would provide an alert system. Discussion ensued and it was agreed that there needed to be additional information disseminated to the sector regarding the process and that engagement between ASQA, ACECQA and the sector was important to facilitate this process.

Sector representatives alerted ASQA to a number of other factors affecting the quality of training, including the provision of work placement opportunities in the ECEC sector, the limitations on services to host students, the length and quality of placements which impinge on the quality of the experience for students and ECEC staff.

ASQA will develop a set of questions that they would like disseminated through the ECEC networks in order to better understand these sector concerns. ACCS will circulate the questions to members as soon as they are available.

ASQA will continue to monitor RTOs through the existing auditing process.

ASQA provided contact details for the ASQA Industry Engagement team - for further information contact Ms Sheree Price, Industry Engagement Officer at industryengagement@asqa.gov.au or (07) 3223 1026.

SPONSORSHIP FROM EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE

ACCS is pleased to re-establish our relationship with Educational Experience. As in years past, financial members of ACCS can now get a 20% discount on all purchases by quoting the 2016 access code that was emailed to branches in early March.

If you are a financial member and you haven't received the code, please contact your branch convenor or email secretariat@ausccs.org.au for assistance.

In addition to the discount, ACCS receives additional support from Education Experience for our work as the national voice of the community children's services sector.

Please let your colleagues know that by joining ACCS they receive this discount while supporting ACCS to advocate for the right of Australia's child to access high quality, not for profit, community children's services.

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WHAT IS HAPPENING IN ACCS BRANCHES

Tasmania

Zoe Manning

The top three issues and challenges facing community children's services in Tasmania are:

- Draft of the Education Act review has been announced which will see a reduction in the school starting age to 4 y 6 m on 1st January. This will mean that children will be accessing preschool – known in Tasmania as Kindergarten at 3 y 6 m. UA money goes to schools and all kindergartens programs are run in schools. At present the majority of Kindergartens and preps do not have early childhood qualified teachers.
- Potential over supply with numerous new (mostly private for profit) services opening, especially if the reduction in the school starting age
- Recruiting and retaining qualified and experienced educators. Also the demise of the unqualified mature age educator willing to do short shifts/ lunch covers since the introduction of the minimum cert 3 qualification. Key successes for community children's services in Tasmania:

Key successes for community children's services in Tasmania are that generally community children's services have an overall better than average NQS rating and low turnover of staff. And we are still here! Unfortunately the state government is doing very little about children's services policy. All focus and funding going to the Early Years sector in the Education Department.

Western Australia

Sally and Josique

The top three issues & challenges facing community children's services in WA are:

- the rate of assessment; only half the services across WA have been assessed. The original intentions of ensuring services who failed or performed poorly under 'accreditation' appear not to have been followed. There are concerns as to the availability of access to quality for children and families with the 'quality' gap increasing between NFP and private services.
- access to and the retention of ECT's and the opportunities for diploma and ad diploma to affordably further their education.
- the declining number of members to Carewest/ACCS, sustainability of our peak body.

Key successes for community children's services in WA are:

- slowly increasing in quality since the implementation of the NQF, in particular community based/ NQF sector
- higher ratios of diploma qualified educators.
- organisation of a sub-committee, dedicated to investigate and improve membership numbers.

The WA government is doing about children's services policy nothing that we are aware of.

VICTORIA

Linda Davison & Lynn Turner

The top three issues & challenges facing community children's services in Victoria are:

- Child Safe Standards – this year the sector needs to look at incorporating these new standards into practices, policies and procedures. The aim is to drive cultural change in organisations so that protecting children from abuse is embedded in everyday thinking and practice.
- 1:11 ratio which has been introduced at start of this year for 36 months to preschool age – some services (mainly sessional kindergartens) have been given waivers for this year.
- Catholic Archdiocese advising parish priests to get out of operating OSHC services at Catholic schools and to outsource them instead.
- Community owned children's centres on TAFE land and that land being sold

The key successes for community children's services in Victoria:

- Peak bodies, parents & early childhood professionals from community children's services contributed ideas and opinions about opportunities to improve Victoria's early childhood system via the Education State Early Childhood consultation in late 2015.
- Community owned sector is doing better with Assessment and Rating than the private sector

What the Victorian government is doing about children's services policy:

Child Safe Standards - To create and maintain a child safe environment, organisations that provide services for children must have:

- strategies to embed an organisational culture of child safety, including through effective leadership arrangements
- a child safe policy or statement of commitment to child safety
- a code of conduct that establishes clear expectations for appropriate behaviour with children
- screening, supervision, training and other human resources practices that reduce the risk of child abuse by new and existing personnel
- processes for responding to and reporting suspected child abuse
- strategies to identify and reduce or remove risks of child abuse
- strategies to promote the participation and empowerment of children.

Education State Early Childhood Community Engagement key findings report has been released. The Government is currently considering the consultation findings, to inform the Education State Early Childhood Reform Plan - to be released later in 2016.

No Jab No Play legislation requires all children enrolling in early childhood education and care services to be up to date with their vaccinations or to have an approved exemption. This includes long day care, kindergarten, occasional care and family day care.

NSW

Kim Bertino/Prue Warrilow

The top three issues & challenges facing community children's services in NSW are:

- Affordability and accessibility to preschool, lack of funding by NSW Government, NSW the most underfunded in Australia by State Government
- Secure of tenure in Council operated buildings; many Council re-tendering of community based services and/or charging commercial rent which is making these services unviable.
- Expansion of for profit sector in urban areas, strong marketing around premium product offerings.

The key successes for community children's services in NSW are:

- NQS ratings higher in not for profit sector than for profit
- Continued advocacy to Government regarding inequities in NSW Funding, raising awareness across State and Federal Government through meetings with Minister's Advisory and Government bodies
- Introduction of teacher accreditation by Board of Studies Teaching and Education Studies NSW

What the NSW government is doing about children's services policy:

- Opposition policy has indicated further spending in ECE, not yet tested, released recently at a not for profit based service.
- NSW Government introduced one-off funding to support university qualified teacher led programs for 4 year old children in ECE services

ACCS NATIONAL SECRETARIAT - Supporting The National Council to Represent Community Children's Services

By the ACCS National Executive

ACCS is the voice of community children's services in national policy debates. In order to do this, it relies on the voluntary efforts of its National Executive, supported by the National Council, all of whom are drawn from your ranks as our members.

This work is supported by a modest budget made up primarily of fees paid by your branch to be part of the ACCS national advocacy work. So the Executive is keen to explain to you the value you receive from that part of your membership fees that go to fund the national advocacy work.

In addition to travel expenses for representatives to attend national meetings, the major expenditure is on a secretariat, which ensures that the National Council and the Executive can meet regularly,

communicate with members, with government and the media and other national peak bodies and contribute to policy debates.

The role of the Secretariat

A formal Memorandum of Understanding sets out the scope of work of the Secretariat. In summary, this is to provide secretariat support for ACCS for an average of 2 hours per week through:

- Provision of infrastructure including electronic filing and storage of ACCS documentation and records
- Communications – emails, correspondence, production of ACCS e bulletins
- Coordination of ACCS representation on external reference groups and consultative forums
- Coordination of submission preparation with ACCS Branches
- Advising the National Executive of any sponsorship and funding opportunities
- Coordination of campaigns as possible within agreed resources and as agreed

The Executive reviews the work of the Secretariat quarterly. In the last year the Secretariat has achieved:

- Fortnightly Executive meetings via Skype (except in periods where Exec members were not available such as over the summer break)
- Publication of three editions of *ACCS In Action* newsletter
- Administration of ACCS National Council meetings via Skype and one face-to-face meeting
- Re-establishment of the sponsorship agreement with Educational Experience
- Coordination of submissions to the Regulatory Impact Statement on the proposed Child Care Package and the subsequent Senate Inquiry
- Correspondence with the federal Minister
- Coordination of a media release on the ACECQA report highlighting the success of the community children's services sector in achieving quality
- Support to ACCS representatives in the VET training sector
- Co-ordinated ACCS research including finalisation of the report on the third wave of the Trends In Community Children's Services Survey (TICCS)

There is more work to do - now we are working on re-establishing a national web site for ACCS to enhance our public profile and gearing up for a campaign to influence the children's policies of the major parties in the up-coming federal election. We are also seeking sponsorship for the next TICCS Survey.

ACCS MEMBERS IN ACTION

ACCS National Council Meeting

The ACCS National Council meets by Skype twice a year and face-to-face once a year. The first meeting for 2016 was held on 23 March with representatives from most states.

The major item of discussion was the ACCS policy platform for the up-coming federal election. We also started a discussion about the disturbing trend of what appears to be a widening gap in quality between services which are embracing the new Quality Framework and those who are not.

The next meeting will be the AGM in May and we are working towards holding a face-to-face meeting at the ECA Conference in Darwin in October.

Branch Delegates

For information about how to join ACCS, contact the delegates in your state/territory.

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