



Broadside BRIEFING

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EARLY CHILDHOOD REFORMS

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) signed off on major early childhood reforms at its meeting last week. These include a *National Early Childhood Development Strategy: Investing in the Early Years*. The main elements of the strategy which will affect children's services are the Early Years Learning Framework and the national approach to quality and regulation.

What is this all about?

This is the first step to implementing the national quality framework measures canvassed last year.

■ **The *Belonging, Being and Becoming—The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* has been finalised and released:**

The Commonwealth Government describes the Framework as 'the principles, practice and outcomes essential to support and enhance young children's learning from birth to five years of age, as well as their transition to school'.

■ **An *Early Childhood Education and Care Quality Reforms Consultation Regulation Impact Statement* has been released:**

This paper canvasses the National Quality Agenda reform options. It proposes a National Quality Standard and Ratings Framework **and** options for improving staff to child ratios and staff qualifications.

How do services get their say?

Services are being consulted about the National Quality Agenda. A Consultation Regulation Impact Statement has been released outlining proposed changes. Services can:

'The Early Childhood Reforms announced by COAG will have a large impact on how long day care services and preschools in NSW are regulated, assessed for quality and how we implement early education and care within children's services.'

– **Renate Gebhart-Jones, Acting CEO, Community Child Care Co-operative NSW**

- attend consultation meetings in **Newcastle**, 1.30–4pm, Mon, 27 July; **Orange**, 9.30am–12pm, Wed, 29 July; **Sydney**, 6–8.30pm, Wed, 29 July; **Parramatta**, 10am–12.30pm, Thur, 30 July. For venue details see <http://tiny.cc/qualityvenues>

- participate in an online survey;
- make a written submission.

I need more detail!

- See the final version of the Early Years Learning Framework at: <http://tiny.cc/EYLF>
- See the Consultation Regulation Impact Statement relating to the National Quality Agenda at: <http://tiny.cc/Quality642>

When do we have to do this by?

The quality consultation meetings are in late July and written submissions must be in by Monday 31 August. The new quality framework will be implemented by July 2010 and the new regulatory arrangements will be implemented over the next few years.

The implementation of the Early Years Learning Framework can begin now. An 'Educators' Guide' to the EYLF should be released in October and training on its implementation should also be available then.

WELCOME

This *Broadside Briefing*, the second in a series by Community Child Care, summarises the main issues around the Early Childhood Reforms and shows Community Child Care's draft analysis on the possible effects of these issues on services. We need you, our members, to tell us: **What do you think the impact of the proposed changes will be on the sector?** Please email responses to: info@cccnsw.org.au

THE EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK

Belonging, Being and Becoming—The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia, which the Commonwealth Government say describes 'the principles, practice and outcomes essential to support and enhance young children's learning from birth to five years of age, as well as their transition to school', has now been released.

It is the intention of the Commonwealth Government that the Framework will 'underpin universal access to early childhood education and be incorporated in the National Quality Standard in order to ensure delivery of nationally consistent and quality early childhood education'.

Last week the Council of Australian Governments endorsed the Framework. Implementation of the Framework will now commence.

In their fact sheet about the Framework, the Commonwealth Government states that: 'it is expected that early childhood settings will need to provide evidence of their use of the Early Years Learning Framework in designing and delivering their early learning programs'.

So what happens now?

The Commonwealth Government has commissioned an *Educator's Guide to the Framework*, which is expected to be released in October. They are working together with state and territory governments to develop a range of support strategies for children's services to implement the Framework. Organisations like Children's Services Central are also developing professional development supports to help services' implementation.

- Community Child Care Co-operative suggests that services familiarise themselves with the Framework. It can be downloaded from: <http://tiny.cc/EYLFPDF>
- A parents' guide to the Framework can be downloaded from: <http://tiny.cc/EYLPARENTS>

DID YOU KNOW?

- There are 254,000 children using approved care in NSW and 63,000 attending preschools
- There are 2,200 Long Day Care Centres and 852 preschools in NSW

QUALITY REFORMS

The Australian Government and state and territory governments are seeking views on reforms to improve the quality of early childhood education and care in Australia.

A Consultation Regulation Impact Statement (RIS) has been released which looks at:

- a National Quality Standard;
- integrating quality matters currently addressed by regulation and aspects of quality currently addressed through accreditation;
- a quality rating system.

The Consultation RIS assesses the costs and benefits of each of these options. Services are being asked for their opinions on the reforms.

Hasn't this already been done?

In December 2007, COAG started consultation processes. In the middle of 2008, they released a discussion paper and held public consultations about the national quality agenda and the Early Years Learning Framework. Many organisations (including Community Child Care) made submissions at this time and attended consultation meetings. This is the next step of those consultations – now that the state and Commonwealth governments have made some of those decisions.

Why is it being done?

Essentially, COAG wants to ensure that:

- we have quality ECEC services with a 'culture of continuous improvement';
- families have adequate information regarding the quality of ECEC services;
- there is a simplified regulatory framework for ECEC services.

What will the new system look like?

COAG has decided that:

- there will be one national system to replace current state licensing/regulation and accreditation processes;
- there will be a single set of improved national standards for LDC services, preschools, FDC and OOSH services; (NSW standards that are stronger than the agreed national standards will be maintained);
- the states and the Commonwealth will manage this together;

■ services will only need to deal with one organisation for regulation against the standards rather than the current system of NSW Department of Community Services for licensing and National Childcare Accreditation Council for accreditation.

Quality Standard and Ratings Framework

The Consultation RIS seeks views on a draft National Quality Standard and Ratings Framework that integrates the regulatory processes undertaken by the states and territories and the national accreditation system undertaken by NCAC. The standard comprises seven quality areas:

- Educational program and practice;
- Children's wellbeing, health and safety;
- Physical environment;
- Staffing arrangements, including staff to child ratios and qualifications;
- Relationships;
- Collaborative partnerships with families and communities; and
- Leadership and service management.

It is proposed that services will get an overall rating and one of five possible ratings for each of the seven quality areas, which would give them their quality profile. The five level system would include the following ratings :

- Unsatisfactory;
- Operating Requirements;
- National Quality Standard;
- High Quality; and
- Excellent.

For more detail about the standards and the rating system see Appendix B (page 64) of the Consultation RIS at: <http://tiny.cc/QUALITYRIS>

Ratios and qualifications

The Consultation RIS includes four options for staff to child ratios and staff qualifications for Long Day Care, preschool and Family Day Care – see Section 5.3.1 (page 26) of the Consultation RIS at <http://tiny.cc/QUALITYRIS> Most of these options include improvements to ratios and increased qualification requirements.

When will it happen?

This depends on what measures COAG decides to implement after the consultation process is over. Assessments against the new standard and streamlining of existing processes are proposed to commence in July 2010. New ratio and qualification requirements and regulatory arrangements would be implemented progressively in order to allow the sector time to adjust to any new requirements, with the intention to fully implement this by January 2012.

SO WHAT ARE THE KEY REFORMS? WHAT DOES COMMUNITY CHILD CARE THINK?

The draft National Quality Standard

The proposal: That there be a draft national quality standard of seven key quality areas: 1–educational program and practice; 2–children's well being, health and safety; 3–physical environment; 4–staffing arrangements including ratios and qualifications; 5–relationships; 6–collaborative partnerships with families and communities; and 7–leadership and service management.

Community Child Care's view: These are reasonable standards. It is a big step forward that the indicators we know are most important in determining service quality – ratios and staff qualifications – will now be assessed in determining a service's quality. The governments (states, territories and Commonwealth) have agreed that improving ratios and qualifications should be part of the changes and are now asking your opinions about how it could happen, before making a final decision.



Proposed changes to Ratios

The proposal: As part of the proposed quality standards, the Consultation RIS proposes four possible options to improve ratios and qualifications for LDCs and preschools. These options are:

- Option 1:** no universal change – each state determines ratios and quals;
- Option 2:** ratios – 1:4 for babies and 1:5 for toddlers by end of 2015 and 1:11 for preschoolers by end of 2016;
- Option 3:** ratios – 1:4 babies by 2011 and 1:5 toddlers by 2014, 1:11 preschoolers by 2015,
- Option 4:** 1:4 for babies by 2010 and 1:3 by 2020, 1:5 for toddlers by 2015 and 1:10 for preschoolers by 2013.

Community Child Care's view: Current NSW ratios are 1:5 for babies, with a 1:4 due to be implemented next year, a 1:8 for toddlers and 1:10 for preschoolers. As it is proposed that any existing standards better than those proposed would be retained, only **Option 4** would improve ratios for babies in NSW, **Option 2, 3 or 4** would improve ratios for toddlers and no option would improve ratios for preschoolers. As one of the components of having a national system is that no state would be able to improve upon the quality agreed upon by all government's nationally, **Option 4** would ensure a time frame for moving to a 1:3 Ratio for babies.



Option 1



Options 3, 4

Building 21, 142 Addison Rd,
Marrickville NSW 2204
Tel: (02) 8922 6444
Fax: (02) 8922 6445 Email: info@cccnsw.org.au
Web: www.cccnsw.org.au

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CEO Carol Lymbery

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Proposed changes to qualifications

The proposal: As part of the proposed quality standards, The Consultation RIS proposes two possible options to qualifications for LDCs and preschools. These options are: **Option 1:** no universal change – each state determines qualifications; **Option 2:** All staff to have minimum Certificate III and 50 per cent of staff to have diploma by 2013. By 2013 services with under 25 children to have a proportion of a teacher, services with 25–59 children to have a whole teacher and services over 80 to have a whole teacher plus one other uni graduate. If the service is only for babies, 'an appropriate alternate qualification could fulfil this requirement'. Services who cannot recruit qualified staff because of remoteness, etc. would be exempt.

Community Child Care's view: Ensuring that all staff working with children have the highest qualification possible is a good move which will improve quality in ECEC services. Exempting babies from the requirement to have a qualified teacher is not acceptable. All services should also have a teacher present at all times regardless of size.

The draft Ratings Framework

The proposal: The Consultation RIS canvasses two options – **Option 1** involves no policy change and **Option 2** proposes implementing a new system of ratings from Unsatisfactory to Excellent. Each level would be defined by set criteria including quantitative and qualitative criteria and would be judged by an external assessor.

Community Child Care's view: Despite the descriptions of what an excellent, high quality etc service would look like against each of the rating areas, without a detailed understanding of the requirements of proof against them, it is hard to know exactly what this will mean in practice. Most services would agree with the description of an 'excellent service' but more detail still needs to be known. Also, how will this be judged? With validator visits and other requirements according to the current NCAC system, or with a more comprehensive system of quality assessment?

Combining Licensing and Accreditation

The proposal: The Consultation RIS canvasses two changes – **Option 1:** retaining separate accreditation and regulation systems by the states and Commonwealth bodies. **Option 2:** is to have a unified national system to replace current licensing and QA processes, jointly governed by the states, territories and Commonwealth government with a national body or bodies managing the system.

Community Child Care's view: Children across Australia need access to quality education and care regardless of where they live. Combining licensing and accreditation into one system will reduce burdens on services and ensure quality is more accurately and consistently being judged.

READ THE CONSULTATION RIS DISCUSSION PAPER!

The Consultation Regulatory Impact Statement is 74 pages long but it is what the consultations will be based on and contains the full proposals of the changes summarised here. If you don't have time to read it all concentrate on pages 23–30.

Go to <http://tiny.cc/QUALITYRIS> or see the DEEWR website at www.deewr.gov.au

DO YOU AGREE?

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK!

Email Community Child Care on: info@cccnsw.org.au or call (02) 8922 6444