

REVIEW of the NSW BOARD of STUDIES, TEACHING and EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS

This is a submission based on the perspective of an early childhood professional. Given the rationale for the Review it is extremely disappointing that in undertaking a review with an intent to modernise " the educational architecture of NSW" that the importance of early childhood education is virtually ignored in the Issues Paper and the paper setting out the Terms of Reference. This is despite the fact that BOSTES has made and continues to make decisions which impact significantly on the quality of early childhood education and the prior to school experiences of children. Given the research on the importance of the early years for later learning and life chances, surely this should significantly inform NSW education policies, standards for teaching, curriculum and assessment and registration of schools decisions made by BOSTES.

1) Have the opportunities of the amalgamation been fully realised?

Whilst it is recognised that amalgamation is sensible and that early childhood teachers will soon be accredited which is a positive professional step for teachers working in prior too school settings, it is all happening within the context of previous decisions when early childhood was not included. As a result the full opportunities of amalgamation are not being fully realised. This includes needing to adopt the standards for primary teachers and work the evidence guide around these rather than looking at early childhood teaching and curriculum in its own right.

BOSTES is undertaking wide sector involvement in extending accreditation to teachers in early childhood settings and has been proactive in providing information for peak organisations, employers and others to distribute to the sector. This has been a positive process but many issues have arisen at meetings of the BOSTES Working Party which arise in part due to the major differences in the education systems which mean that early childhood will require some different infrastructure and extra resources. Early childhood settings are rarely part of large systems like schools. Most providers in NSW own or manage one or two services and many services employ only one or two early childhood teachers so that systems that work within Departmental schools for example with TAA's will not be the same in early childhood. It seems that often the differences are not really understood and the implications not resourced.

2) Are roles and responsibilities clear and appropriate?

The roles and responsibilities of ACECQA do not appear to be fully understood and there is a lack of understanding of early childhood education at all levels

involved in setting of standards and accrediting of teacher education courses and teachers including ATSIL, BOSTES and the Quality Teaching Council.

It is essential the national context of the role of ACECQA is fully understood and supported as it is not in the interests of young children to go back to a situation where early childhood had quite different standards across jurisdictions with no commonly agreed curriculum or staffing standards.

BOSTES made a decision some years ago to require teachers in primary schools to be qualified to teach across the full primary school grades resulting in university teacher education courses in NSW becoming birth to twelve degrees. As a result the course components on the youngest children in prior to school settings has been seriously undermined. Other jurisdictions have retained birth to 8 qualifications which is the preferred degree set down by ACECQA. Why should the quality of teachers in settings prior to school be significantly reduced by BOSTES ? Where was the consultation with other educators, employers and course providers impacted on by this decision? Who was involved with early childhood experience in this decision in BOSTES? This needs to be relooked at as a priority so NSW has birth to 8 courses for initial teacher education as in other jurisdictions. This work should take place in consultation with ACECQA who are responsible for accreditation of courses and individuals nationally for early childhood. This is an example where policy decisions are made without taking into account early childhood teaching and learning as part of education. Decisions should be based on the best interests of children across their total education experience and not just that in schools.

3) Are processes and practices as effective and efficient as possible?

Processes are not effective when based on a history which does not take full account of new responsibilities and knowledge such as the accreditation of early childhood teachers. Examples have been given above where the standards for early childhood teachers are those for primary school teachers. There was no opportunity allowed to start these afresh from an early childhood perspective. Whilst an expert group has been convened to inform the evidence guide this is not the same as working from the ground up so the profession is involved in all aspects of determining the standards against which they will be assessed. The leadership of this work also needs early childhood education expertise.

The implementation of TAA's is also not well understood as the model comes from the schooling sector with a few key providers and not early childhood where the majority are small single services with very limited funding and who cannot afford costs to cover a TAA. Teachers in prior to school settings are paid significantly less than teachers in schools and often have far less favourable working conditions. Families are faced with very high costs to have

their child attend an early childhood education service in NSW. This is largely due to the underfunding of education for the early years and is a particular issue in NSW.

4) Are effective governance arrangements in place?

It is clear there is a lack of high level early childhood expertise and representation on key Boards, committees and amongst senior staff of BOSTES. Without this the credibility of BOSTES will be compromised as policies, standards, assessment etc is not informed by those it impacts on.

The membership of all key committees should be reviewed so early childhood professionals and parents are represented. Senior staff appointments should include early childhood education expertise.

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