



Children's Services
Since 1895

KU Children's Services Submission

Review of the NSW Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards

April 2016



Artwork by Max, aged 4 years, KU Bradfield Park Children's Centre

About KU Children's Services (KU)

Established in 1895 as the Kindergarten Union of NSW, KU was the first provider of early education in Australia and has continued to operate continuously for over 120 years.

The aim of the first kindergarten was to provide education to the community's most disadvantaged children. Today KU is one of Australia's largest and leading not for profit providers of early childhood education with a portfolio of 140 services, including preschool, long day care, vacation care, out of school hours care, occasional care, family programs and specialist programs designed to promote and facilitate the inclusion of children with additional needs.

Widely recognised as a leader within the early education sector, KU has been involved in facilitating a number changes to service types and early education operations over the past 120 years, including:

- ▶ Opening Australia's first 'free kindergarten' in 1895
- ▶ Recognising the importance of specialist early childhood qualified teachers
- ▶ Opening Australia's first kindergarten teachers training college in 1902
- ▶ Achieving pay parity between primary and kindergarten teachers in the 1970s
- ▶ Establishing the first 'Special Education Advisory' team to support the inclusion of children with additional needs within mainstream early education services in the 1980s
- ▶ Opening Australia's first work-based childcare centre in the 1980s
- ▶ Expanding operations into Victoria in the 1990s
- ▶ Employing Australia's first dedicated Child Wellbeing Manager, Indigenous Consultant and Sustainability Manager within an early education organisation in the early 2000s
- ▶ Becoming the first National Inclusion Support Subsidy Provider (NISSP) responsible for brokering Commonwealth Government funding to support the inclusion of children with additional needs into long day care services nationwide in 2010

(Further information about KU's history can be found at www.ku120.com.au)

Our vision is that:

***"Every child can experience high quality early childhood education,
where they can play, discover and learn."***

KU values ongoing professional learning as an opportunity to contribute to a strong professional identity, and supports engagement by individuals and teams in regular professional learning to help foster continuous improvement and maintain contemporary understandings of early education practice across the organisation.

As an organisation committed to high quality educational programs for young children and our commitment to university qualified early childhood teachers as our pedagogical leaders, KU has long advocated for the accreditation of early childhood qualified teachers in the prior to school sector.

We are delighted that early childhood teachers in the prior to school sector and will be brought under the *Teacher Accreditation Act* in 2016 and will be accredited by BOSTES as are their peers in school based settings. We see this as an important step in the promotion of the importance of the early years along the educational spectrum as well as lifting the professional status and standing of early childhood teachers. Within this framework, our response to the review of BOSTES is focussed on the infrastructure needed in the prior to school sector to ensure the accreditation process is successful for all early childhood teachers working in NSW in a variety of settings and approved service providers.

Issues

1. Governance Arrangements

We believe that with the inclusion of early childhood teachers from the prior to school sector, the governance structure of the BOSTES Board and The Quality Teaching Council needs to be amended or expanded to include a wider representation of the early childhood education sector.

Currently, whilst the system focuses on quality teacher standards, there is limited knowledge on the Board and the Council about the national *Early Years Learning Framework* and the theoretical basis for a play based approach to curriculum implementation for young children.

KU recommends that either:

- ***Representation on the BOSTES Board and The Quality Teaching Council (QTC) be expanded to include greater representation of the early childhood sector: and***
- ***BOSTES formally establish an early childhood committee to provide ongoing advice to the Board and the QTC***

2. Infrastructure needed for the Accreditation of Early Childhood Teachers in prior to school settings.

Unlike school settings, early childhood services are diverse. Some are operated by large approved not for profit providers such as KU, Uniting, Goodstart, SDN Children's Services and Local Government. Others may be operated by large for profit providers such as Only About Children, G8, Guardian and Affinity. Many services are operated by single private owners or single community based parent management committees.

Currently in school settings the Principal is able to accredit their own teaching staff; however, in the prior to school settings, this will not be achievable for single stand alone services which may only have one teacher on staff. Parent committees will not be equipped to assess the teacher against the teaching standards, and the teacher is not able to self assess. The small stand alone services will need to outsource a TAA of some kind. There will be added costs to the service to pay the TAA. This will inevitably result in increases to the operation of the service which can only be recovered by an increase in fees for families.

For large organisations such as KU which have the knowledge and expertise to become a TAA, it will still be a challenge as this may necessitate the employment of additional staff to undertake the assessment process of early childhood teachers as there are very few non teaching Directors in our services and our educational support teams already have full workloads. This will increase the costs for families if there is no additional funding available for these positions.

If large early childhood organisations became TAAs, they would not be able to provide accreditation services to other stand alone services without needing to recover their costs. Once again, this would have a direct impact on fees for families.

KU recommends that:

- ***Serious consideration be given to the infrastructure needed for the successful implementation of the accreditation process for early childhood teachers in prior to school settings and how this will be funded.***

3. Workforce issues and approval of early childhood teaching courses

Currently university courses in early childhood education are approved by ACECQA and do not come under the umbrella of BOSTES.

Historically, early childhood education teacher courses covered the birth to eight years and focussed on child development, play based curriculum and the importance of interactions and relationships with young children in the context of the family and the community.

Over the last several years, early childhood university courses have been expanded to cover a wider age range (from birth to twelve years) to accommodate the needs of schools. This has resulted in many graduating students choosing to work in the school sector for a variety of reasons:

- Career opportunities
- Higher salary and better conditions of employment
- More status and greater recognition as a 'real teacher'

As a large employer of early childhood teachers, we do not have a staffing shortage; however, we have seen a decline in the number of applications for our positions and a decline in the quality of the applicants. We believe this is due to the pressure on universities to cover a wider range of units in their course content for an expanded age range, rather than focussing on the complexity of young children's learning and development.

The importance of high quality teachers is paramount as often early childhood services are a soft entry point for families and a place where skilled early childhood teachers can identify children with additional needs and provide additional support before the child commences formal schooling.

KU recommends that:

- ***Consideration needs to be given to the reintroduction of early childhood teacher birth to eight courses in universities and that BOSTES liaise closely with ACECQA to ensure early childhood teachers in prior to school settings are better equipped to begin their work with young children and their families.***

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