



Notes

SJIEC meeting with John Tansey

Thursday 19 June 2008

Marianne Fenech, Anthony Semann and Kathryn Bown met with John Tansey (Executive Director, Children's Services Directorate, Department of Community Services) and John Mason (Policy Manager). Our meeting started at 10am and finished by about 11.40am. The questions we asked are in **bold** and John Tansey's answers follow each question.

Teacher Qualifications and Ratios

Has DoCS reached a position on the ratios for birth-2 year olds? When will this be publicly released?

DoCS has commissioned a report from a consultancy which will go back to the 1:4 external reference group. The consultants are in the process of finalising their report. DoCS will make a recommendation to Cabinet on the ratio for birth-2 year olds. The Cabinet submission will remain confidential until the Minister chooses to release it publicly.

When will the new draft Regulation be made public? What consultation process with the sector will ensue?

The Children's Services Directorate is days away from announcing the official commencement of the Regulatory Review period. It is anticipated that this Review will take up to two years. Consultation with parents will be part of this process. The consultation period will involve the establishment of a Reference Group with representation from key peak organisations. John commented that the make up of the reference group is based on funding from DoCS as well as having similar people at the table as has occurred "over 30 years or so".

No academics will be represented on the Reference Group. John Tansey said this was because he wanted people who deal directly with the implementation of the Regulation to be represented.

Even though John stated he wanted practical solutions, he also said that before the draft regs are released, he would like the sector to have a policy debate/discussion on a conceptual and visionary level rather than a 'clause by clause review'.

We asked whether SJIEC would be invited to part of the Industry Reference Group and John said that we were not on the list. After questioning, John suggested SJIEC write a letter to the Director General and request SJIEC be included on the Industry Reference Group. We should note that we were openly disappointed that SJIEC had not been considered, and expressed our equal disappointment that we had to write to the Director General about it when other groups did not need to do so.

How is DoCS addressing the challenge of interim approvals for lack of qualified staff given that approximately 200 interim approvals have been granted to services who do not have qualified teachers in teacher positions?



John suggested that this could only be addressed by a workforce strategy and agreed that a worthy strategy would involve improvements to working conditions and pay in order to retain teachers in the early childhood field, particularly long day care.

Is COAG discussing pay parity? What stage is this debate up to? What can we expect to see in the next budget?

The budget will not just allocate a slush fund – there needs to be a strategy designed in order for the funds to be allocated. “Developmental work” is in progress. A key issue is ‘who will pay?’

Children’s Services Advisors and Compliance

We’ve been made aware of changes to the role and title of Children’s Services Advisors (CSAs). Will the number of CSAs be reduced and will their title change to ‘Compliance Officers’?

No – there is no such title as Compliance Officer. CSA’s roles are being redefined so that they are no longer responsible for program funding issues (this will be dealt with by separate employees). CSAs will become Children’s Service Officers, and the burden of Licensing paper work will now be completed by 14 full-time employees at Head Office. The breakdown:

New position: Children’s Services Team Leaders (Effectively regional managers)	8 positions (5 already filled)	These team leaders will have an early childhood teaching degree and CSOs will report directly to them
Children’s Services Officers (previously CSAs)	47.5 full-time positions	Will deal with Regulatory compliance issues only
Children’s Services Program Funding employees	16 full-time positions	Will deal with all funding issues rather than CSAs
Enforcement and Prosecutions Unit	3 full-time positions	Will assist CSOs with more difficult cases of non-compliance

All this information can be found in the Spring DoCS newsletter *Building Blocks*. This breakdown represents no decrease in the number of CSAs.

Discussion was had about the relationship with group size, ratios and family grouping. It was acknowledged that there was confusion in the sector about this and the moving of CSAs in to the Directorate would help overcome the confusion about the regulations interpretation.



What is the relationship between the licensing process becoming more focused on quality measures and the changes to CSA positions?

John said that for many years now CSAs have not had a clear framework for working with in their role. DoCS is now reviewing the role of the CSA in order to provide greater clarity for CSAs in defining roles and responsibilities. John's hope is that removing the funding aspect away from CSAs will give them more time to provide support to services. CSAs are NOT told that they cannot attend area early childhood meetings. These meetings, however, need to be worth the CSA's time investment. Attendance by the CSA may be dependent on other work priorities.

National Issues

Is there a chance that the proposed National Standards could replace state regulations?

Yes, however the NSW law states that there must be a regulatory review, so DoCS will do that while paying close attention to the National Standards debate. The National Standards issue is being pushed ahead at great speed. However, the Commonwealth government has a policy agenda that they are determined to roll out quickly. John believed that the presence of teachers in LDC and preschools, in the National Standards, was being considered as "non-negotiable".

SJIEC has clearly opposed an Integrated QA system. Is an Integrated System still negotiable? What is your position on an integrated system?

It seems like an integrated system is here to stay – the system may be different to how the Howard government imagined but this can not be promised. For example, there may be some core principles applicable to all service types, supplemented by "module" specific ones.

What do you see will be the relationship (if any) between the NSW Curriculum Framework and the National Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)?

John expressed scepticism about the purpose of the Curriculum Framework. It was not made clear what the relationship between these two frameworks will be, however the EYLF will become part of the National Standards.

When will details of EYLF be publicly released? What is your position on the secrecy maintained around this document and process?

The secrecy is mainly due to the fact that they want to get things done quickly so they are having the least amount of input as possible.

