

SJIEC 5TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

SATURDAY 12 APRIL 2008

NOTES, REFLECTIONS AND ACTIONS



This document is a record of SJIEC notes and reflections on speakers at the SJIEC 5th Annual Conference during the State Issues section. Following the notes on each presentation is a record of the discussion that took place amongst Conference Delegates and the panel members.

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1. **John Tansey**
2. **Bernadette Dunn**
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John Tansey

Executive Director, Children's Services Directorate, NSW Department of Community Services

Review of 2004 Regulation

- Regulation 2004 reviewed by September 2009;
 - Started background review, project planning already;
 - Next couple of months it will surface as an issue;
- National environment much more dynamic
 - Is a help and also a distraction to state issues
 - Surge ahead with national developments too
- Make the most of the opportunities and not get too distracted by national issues
- New policies of fed government:
 - Focus on quality is greater than ever – centrality of quality issues is more prominent than ever
- More on quality and less time in the DoCS role – bigger game for DoCS (what is central to quality rather than being obsessed by everything you can measure);
- Challenges within DoCS to make a better process for Regulatory Review.

Ratios – 1:5 and 1:4

- Independent economic analysis underway to provide robust evidence for government consideration of policy change – different implementations possible
- Benefits for child development of improved ratios not under debate – taken as given, and not contested by stakeholders
- Survey – representative, stratified sample of 500 services
- Modelling of current costs and proportions, implementation options
- Report mid-2008: Provide to government
- Resolve issues before review of regulation

Qualifications

- Qualified positions
 - Teaching staff member
 - AS
 - Primary contact under 2's
- NSW Institute of Teachers
- COAG
 - Focus on qualifications (ALP 'potty' about it)
 - Emphasis on ECTs (3 year/4 year)
 - NSW has comparative strengths and weaknesses (strengths in being required to have teachers; but NSW doesn't require teachers until 30 or more children)

Discussion

If the issue is to be settled before review, does that mean there won't be consultation on it afterwards?

John Tansey: We want to have it settled with the government position, but the debate will still continue

What about the preschools going under. When is DoCS going to release results from preschool reform?

John Tansey: Soon. There is a working group working with DoCS, DET and Treasury. We're meeting fortnightly to bed down the approach of the new model. We know people are hanging out for money. Within the next couple of months, we'll have principles settled and will be able to talk about it. \$30m per year extra funding.

You mentioned in relation to the Regs the idea of flexibility – please explain.

John Tansey: Regs are very prescriptive, some welcome, but some isn't. Ratios and qualifications should be prescriptive. But other aspects about sinks for example, might not be necessary. More realistic expectations about what people can achieve.

Will these be up to individual CSAs?

John Tansey: If we make it less prescriptive, we need to do a lot of work to help CSAs be more consistent.

Weren't CSAs downgraded in their ranking in the public service?

John Tansey: No

Employed at a lower level without early childhood qualifications?

John Tansey: No – still level 8; they still have to have an early childhood degree. Now CSAs working in the department John Tansey heads so they are in the same team (from July 08). Rearranging so out of planning teams and creating specific CSA teams, with a promotional position so CSAs will have an Early childhood specialist supervisor. So for first time they are accountable to someone with a early childhood qual.

Bernadette Dunn

Chairperson, 1:4 Action Group

- April 2007 the 1:4 Group Convened - discussion with DoCS and parliamentarians
- October 2007 successful campaign launch: 1:4 Make It Law on Sunrise & Baby Action Group
- International Ambassador Ron Lalley – “ridiculous ratios...a ratio of neglect”
- Margaret Sims (National Ambassador) – research around stress in children; better conditions for children and staff
- 1:4 Staff child Ratio Economic Impact Project
- Broad Reference Group – Oct 2007
- Booz Allen Hamilton Consultants – Dec 2007
- Survey – economic focus – March 2008
 - Distributed 517 surveys across the state
 - Response 188 – 37% as of 1st April
 - Concern: Not a true picture of the sector
- The community sector high level of response
- The Campaign continues:
 - 1:4 group meets regularly
 - Margaret Sims Public Lecture – Jan 2008 Maxine McKew
- Into the future:
 - Margaret Sims May 13 2008
 - Colloquium
 - Public Lecture – ECEC community
 - Survey Outcome June 08
 - Maintain a state focus
 - Elevate to a national level – other states joining interstate counterparts who are also looking to have better ratios for under twos
- We must be careful not to diminish what we’ve got to get what we want; Maintain what we’ve got by talking about quality – talking about children’s experiences in the here and now.

Discussion

Fran Press: Campaign has been great. Part of the nature of the problem is not bureaucracy, but the government. The government has an appalling reputation for making decisions for public good. There is going to be a slippage between bur, and what ministers decide. How do we engage with those bureaucratic processes, but also target the actual decision makers in government. The notion of targeting key people in govt is very important.

If you are successful, please come back for 1:3 campaign!

Gowrie conference involved with many organisations, particularly Siraj-Blatchford.

Do we need to refocus the campaign more on bureaucrats?

Fran Press: Yes – maybe a dual focus. We must acknowledge bureaucracy but there is slippage between bureaucracy and govt – the govt doesn’t necessarily take on the advice of bureaucracy.

The costs are higher costs of 1:5 ratio (staff burnout = higher costs)

Bernadette Dunn: Yes, we’ve promoted that argument. But we must focus on the best outcomes of the child.

Professor Jennifer Sumsion

Charles Sturt University

- Feels optimistic – entering into a time of breakthroughs
- National provision for 4 year olds – use it to stretch the space in which activists negotiate
- Uncontested: need for teacher qualifications in ECEC and need for lower ratios
- LHMU discussions with various constituencies -
 - Really entering into a period of breaking down fragmentation between state and federal.
 - In ten years from 1995 to 2004 – steady decline in LDC centres of staff with qualifications.
 - By 2012, there would be no teachers left in LDC
 - NZ Comparison – hoping to have all staff in children’s centres with a qualification by 2010.
 - Pride in ECEC about the national Accreditation system (innovatory step of tying funding to quality)
 - 2006/2007 Starting Strong Report – Comparative study of OECD Nations: Clear that Australia has slipped badly. Important policy opportunity. So we need to radically
 - Buy-in to the economic debate: Not sinking to the depths about debates on Accreditation and ratios.
- What can we do?
 - Be proactive with the states: activists to push hard for coherent, robust data.
 - How many ECTs employed across Australia?
 - How many ECTs employed in Schools?
 - NSW Actions: need for dual focus to target bur and politicians; just as NZ has become an ECEC leader, doesn’t mean NSW can’t.
 - Need for pedagogical leadership (avoid sinking into the trap of no teacher then just care)
 - Bringing ECEC under and education bureaucracy rather than health and welfare. But if only in NSW, we need to ensure an appropriate cultural shift.
 - Outmoded, outdated version of preschool provision in DET
 - Salary parity for ECTs and teachers elsewhere
 - Slide on 2007 data: NSW teacher awards (Preschool teachers, LDC teachers, DET teachers)
 - More expensive to not have pay parity.
 - Retaining ECTs
 - Pressure on a liberal granting of exemptions for staff without regulated minimum standards for teachers

Discussion

Are approvals for exemptions increasing?

Jennifer Sumsion: No data currently. Need to pressure as a group, the bureaucracy.

John Tansey: 200 approvals in 2 years. Not an avalanche really.

Fran Press: we are graduating more and more ECTs every year. Is there really a teacher shortage, or are we seeing an exodus of teachers leaving the field? Shortages occur in pockets. We must acknowledge the lack of adequate pay and conditions.

Many decisions made on myth, not data. DoCS needs to contact people like Jennifer Sumsion so that the data can be looked at to break down myths.