

Recommendations

1. Reduce excessive paperwork

Statement

Findings from the Report conducted by ACECEQUA on the NQF and Regulatory Burden (2013) found that documenting educational programs and assessing children's learning are the costliest ongoing administrative activities. Centres have to allocate more time each week to have educators covered off the floor to complete their programming.

The amount of paperwork that educators and Directors have to complete is resulting in them having less and less time with the children. One can have an abundance of impressive paperwork with amazing records and ideas for programming but if there is not enough time to implement these ideas and physically engage children in learning then all the paperwork is futile.

Comments

Need to reduce the burden of excessive paperwork by streamlining:

- Some of the paperwork currently required for programming and documenting children's learning, and,
- Re-assessing whether the 'extent' of paperwork is necessary for all elements in the NQF, thus reducing the amount of time the educators are away from the children's. For example; having educators to sign in and out when working directly with children; having to complete notifications of complaints

Proposed Solutions

- Form a working group compiled of educators currently working in Early Childhood centres to brainstorm possible solutions to reducing the amount of paperwork required for documentation and assessment.
- Survey families to get an idea of what documentation they would like to receive regarding their children.
- Explore more concise ways that we can cross check that children are being programmed for (proof of this could involve evidence of parent feedback that they are happy with the amount of documentation gathered on their child's development, along with bi-annual summaries reporting on each child's development (in regards to the learning outcomes and their overall progress)).

2 – Educating families (and our society) on the importance of Early Childhood Education and the optimal way in which children learn.

Statement

More and more parents still have the mindset that the most important things children need to learn in their Early Childhood years is their ABC's and 123's. Compacting this is the general belief that the best way that children can learn this is through traditional structured classroom based learning whereby the teacher rote teaches the Alphabet and Numbers to the children through flashcards and stencils.

The government has introduced a very well balanced National Quality Framework that encompasses the whole child's development and strongly advocates children learning through play, however, there has not been enough resources allocated to educating families (and society) that this is in fact the optimal way in which children grow and learn.

Comments

The government needs to invest money into educating families (and our society) on:

- the fundamental importance of social and emotional development of children, given that these areas are underlying foundations of the EYLF
- the fundamental importance of children learning through play as opposed to traditional structural and teacher-based learning.
- the fact that Long Day Care services are offering the same quality educational programs as Pre-school services as they are governed by the same National Quality Framework and Regulations.

Proposed Solutions

- *Develop a standard informative and educational workshop for families that is designed to be implemented within all services by experienced educators. These workshops need to cover:*
 - *The importance of social and emotional development of children*
 - *The importance of children learning through play*
 - *What developmental milestones to expect their children to achieve for the up and coming year, and how educators are going to promote and foster this development at the centre.*

N.B If this was something that was standardized then the principles of the EYLF would also be reinforced for educators as I believe that many educators still need further guidance and reinforcement in their role and responsibility in educating children

3. Clearer guidance and training for educators and Nominated Supervisors on administrative requirements

Statement

There is still a lot of subjectivity surrounding the expectations of the administrative requirements of the NQF.

Comments

Findings from the Report conducted by ACECEQUA on the NQF and Regulatory Burden (2013) found that the lack of specific guidance in the Regulations about what level of detail is required to comply with some administrative activities, such as policies and procedures, meant providers reported widely divergent costs to meet these requirements (Appendix D: Standard Cost Model (SCM) Report) thus meaning there are a number of inconsistencies and unclear expectations regarding many administrative requirements.

Proposed Solutions

Where possible (particularly for administrative requirements) it would be best if standardized templates were formulated for specific administrative tasks. For example the Serious Incident form required is a specific form that everybody has to use (surely more standardized forms can be developed for other administrative tasks so that everybody is recording these things in a uniformed and consistent manner.

4 Allocate government funding for the private sector to offset some of the financial burden of having to employ more staff and more qualified staff to meet the new Education and Care Services National Regulations

Statement

The COAG have introduced a number of good initiatives to improve the quality of care and education for children but have not given enough consideration and forethought into the financial burden this has now placed on services.

Comments

- Since 2011 many private Early Childhood services have had to impose annual (and sometimes bi-annual) fee increases to their families in order to simply cover the additional on-costs of employing more staff and more qualified staff to comply with the regulations.
- There is also the additional financial burden faced by the private sector who have to pay more payroll tax for employing more staff.
- Since fees have started to rise more and more families are reducing the number of days they are putting their children into care. Many families are relying on extended family and grandparents to care for their children as they simply can't afford the fees to send their children.
- Many families have opted to not have the second parent return to work as they had minimal (if any) financial gain in doing so.
- From 2009 one of the primary goals of the COAG was to provide Pre-school access to all children, however, if the childcare fees associated with this access are to great then this objective will never be met and on the contrary the other

main COAG objective of 'Providing better childcare and education' will be irrelevant if families are unable to afford to send their children to pre-school.

Proposed solutions

Have a consistent and scaled National Payroll Tax system (as currently Queensland and Victoria both have lower payroll tax than that of NSW). Consider categorizing small businesses. For example, Corporate, Community Sector etc. If the Community Sector had to pay less payroll tax than they could potentially employ more people thus reducing the unemployment rate further in Australia.

Explore more effective ways to reduce the financial burden on private services to help reduce the fee rises being passed onto families.

Explore options of subsidizing part of the wages of ECT's in childcare services so that higher wages can be offered therefore making Childcare Services more attractive for ECT's to want to work in (as opposed to working in primary schools where they receive a higher incremental wage and more holidays each year).

5. Simplifying terminology in Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)

Statement

Many educators get confused and overwhelmed with some of the terminology used within the EYLF. Terms such as 'Sense of Agency' can be simplified to 'giving children choices'. If educators had a clearer understanding of what each of the elements within the EYLF were referring to then they could collectively spend more time ensuring they were meeting the criteria within each of the elements...

Comments

Up to date we have spent at least three years discussing what particular EYLF terminology actually means. This has led to a lot of frustration within the industry as it has meant that many educators are coming up with their own interpretation of what they think certain things mean only to find out that they are incorrect.

Technical jargon used throughout the EYLF is making it more and more difficult to recruit and retain employees as many do not have the knowledge and skills required (often despite having qualification). When interviewed often candidates respond to questions about the NQS and EYLF by stating they do not have a very good understanding of it.

Families (who we are meant to collaboratively work with) do not understand a lot of the terminology used in the EYLF thus feel inadequate when asked to contribute to their children's programs and respond to educator comments and opinions regarding their child's development within the EYLF's five Learning Outcome areas.

The EYLF's concept of educators knowing multi-theoretical perspective is unrealistic and whilst I recognize the importance of having this basic understanding at a university

level qualification I do not think it is realistic for lesser qualified staff to be expected to have an in-depth understanding of theorists, nor to have to reflect on these as a compulsory requirement within the NQF. What is this really achieving? I understand that the government wants to set a pedagogical benchmark in relation to how children in their Early Years are taught and learn, however, we have many educators who are amazing with children and who have a natural ability to extend on children's learning without having this in-depth theoretical knowledge behind them. These are the educators who are making the difference in children's lives, the ones that are extending on individual children's learning because they are taking the time to meaningfully engage with children rather than reading books on how and why children learn a particular way.

Proposed solutions

- Have terminology used in the EYLF revised by a cross section of representative educators and parents within the industry.
- Revise the requirements in regards to who is expected to have knowledge of the theoretical perspectives of children's development, thus allowing educators to have more authentic interactions and experiences with the children without this added pressure hanging over their heads.

6. Eliminate the 'Overall Rating' given to services

Statement

Working in childcare is hard! Those who choose to work in the industry do so because they are passionate about working with children. Educators are becoming less and less passionate about working with children as they are not only overwhelmed with the endless requirements but are also becoming more and more demotivated and disheartened when they work so hard only to find they are assessed and rated as 'Working Towards' or 'Meeting' in regards to the level of quality they are providing for the children in their care.

Comments

The current rating system for measuring quality in childcare services is extremely subjective and inconsistent. This is a fact. A vast number of centre's are reporting feelings of confusion and unjust in relation to their final assessment rating.

It is not feasible to assess a centre based on a 1-2 day visit. The assessment becomes extremely subjective and ratings are often based on how articulate the person is talking to the assessor at the time.

Each quality area should be acknowledged and recognized individually for the level it is operating at. It also helps to highlight the 7 specific areas within the NQF which will inevitably mean that families will recognize the seven specific areas that make up the NQF as opposed to simply looking at an overall rating that has little meaning and value.

And gives the assumption that the centre is poorly run because it has received 'Working towards' despite possibly receiving exceeding in several other areas.

Proposed solutions

Remove 'overall' rating for centres and have ratings reported individually for each of the quality areas.

Remove the rating of 'Working towards' and have 'Improvement required' or if deemed to be a really poor quality centre have a procedure in place whereby an action plan is put in place with timeframes.