New approaches and innovative models in standard setting and curriculum development

Australia’s experience with the Early Years Learning Framework

Margaret Pearce
Minister-Counsellor (Education and Employment)
Australia
On behalf of
Michael Manthorpe
Deputy Secretary
Office Early Childhood Education and Child Care
The National Quality Agenda

The case for reform:

• The evidence – the importance of staff to child ratios and staff qualifications

• The current Australian experience – different standards across the country, regulatory overlap and different approaches across the sector

• Part of a broader reform agenda – development of the Early Childhood Development Strategy, the Early Years Learning Framework, the introduction of universal access to preschool, increasing child care rebate and rolling out Child and Family Centres.
The National Quality Framework

The National Quality Framework was agreed by the Council of Australian Governments on 7 December 2009. It comprises:

- a National Quality Standard (seven quality areas)
- a new ratings system to complement the NQS
- streamlined regulatory system
- a new national body
- national legislation

The framework will be implemented progressively from July 2010 through to a fully operational system commencing on 1 January 2012.
Belonging, Being and Becoming – The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia

The Framework was developed as:
• a key element of the national reform agenda and Australia’s first national early childhood learning framework

The process for developing the Framework
• A consortium led by Charles Sturt University developed the Framework, which draws on conclusive international evidence on early learning.
• The Framework was trialled in 29 sites across Australia.
• Information from national feedback processes was incorporated into the document.
The Early Years Learning Framework – Learning Outcomes

- The Early Years Learning Framework has five overarching outcomes:
  1. Children have a strong sense of identity.
  2. Children are connected with and contribute to their world.
  3. Children have a strong sense of wellbeing.
  4. Children are confident and involved learners.
  5. Children are effective communicators.

- The Framework describes the broad parameters, principles and outcomes required to support and enhance young children’s learning from birth to five years of age, as well as their transition to school.
The Early Years Learning Framework –
Principles, Practice and Pedagogy

• The Framework describes an underpinning approach to early childhood learning.

• It is not a prescriptive school-like curriculum and will not result in early childhood centres becoming schools.

• There is a specific emphasis on relationships and play-based learning.

• It recognises the importance of communication and language, including early literacy and numeracy, and social and emotional development.
The Challenges

- This is Australia’s first national learning framework for childcare and preschool with agreement required from all states and territories and the early childhood sector.
- Effective links are needed to the new National Curriculum for schools.
- The needs of Australia’s multicultural community and the Indigenous community must be met.
- The Framework is incorporated into the National Quality Standard.
- The Framework covers a wide variety of early childhood settings and services in metropolitan, regional and remote settings.
Strategies – The Political Process, Consultation and Communication

- An effective political structure and process was required to develop national agreement and implementation.
- Three phases of consultation were conducted.
- Website information and an online forum for feedback were available.
- Peak bodies were contracted to communicate with the sector and provide training.
- Professional Support Units in each state and territory are providing implementation support to the sector.
The EYLF and the new National Quality Standard

• The key strategy for implementing the EYLF will be through the new National Quality Standard.

• The National Quality Standard will be implemented on 1 January 2012 as part of the new national quality system.

• The EYLF will be mandated for Long Day Care, Preschools and Family Day Care services working with children birth to five years old.
National Quality Standard for Early Childhood Education and Care and School Age Care

- The NQS comprises quality areas, standards and elements.

- The seven quality areas are:
  1. Educational program and practice
  2. Children’s health and safety
  3. Physical environment
  4. Staffing arrangements
  5. Relationships with children
  6. Collaborative partnerships with families & communities
  7. Leadership and service management.
Assessing and rating against the National Quality Standard

• The NQS is linked to a quality ratings system which has five levels:
  Unsatisfactory
  Foundation
  National Quality Standard
  Advanced
  Excellent

• The approach to assessment and rating system is under development and we are currently assessing and rating over 200 services with our draft approach.
Assessing and rating against the National Quality Standard

- Process incorporates service self assessment and development of a draft quality improvement plan followed by a site visit by assessors.

- The assessment approach involves assessors observing, discussing issues with staff and sighting programming and policy documentation during the site visit.

- A key challenge is developing consistency amongst assessors as the approach relies on a high level of professional judgement.

- Assessment documentation is currently available online at www.deewr.gov.au/earlychildhood.