

Caring for, teaching and nurturing children is serious work, and ...collectively we must do all we can to guarantee the present and future wellbeing of our children. There are around 1.1 million children in approved care in this country. That's a lot of lives and a lot of responsibility. For their sake, and for the sake of those who will follow them, it's critical that we get this right, and that we do it now while we have the opportunity.
(Maxine McKew, 19th August, 2008)

So What Might a New Quality Framework Look Like?

Centres that respond to the needs of their communities and deliver quality programs and experiences that meet the needs of every child in their care. Because of the nature of the **social interactions between a child carers are the key drivers of quality** early childhood development. There is growing recognition of the **critical role of highly qualified professionals in the early childhood education and care sector.**

What will a set of national standards look like?

This is where our work begins. Our expertise, our ideas and our input will be incredibly valuable in the development process.

The framework will have **three key elements:**

- rigorous quality standards for early childhood education and care;
- a ratings system; and
- streamlined or integrated licensing and accreditation arrangements.

It will guide early childhood educators as they develop early childhood programs.

In addition, the **Early Years Learning Framework** will provide a common language and approach that assists families, and the broader community, increase their knowledge about young children's learning and development.

Qualifications are a matter of concern for the government...

There must also be **alignment on qualifications.** It goes without saying that enhanced professional qualifications are critical to the success of the new framework. When it comes to **qualifications, there is no nationally consistent minimum qualification** for child care workers. NSW is the only state where there's a requirement for centres with more than 29 places to employ a trained teacher, but since 2002 has allowed services to temporarily fill teaching positions with Diploma qualified workers. By 2003, 8% of all licensed services, and more than a quarter in some regional areas, were operating under this exemption.

Only seven per cent of early childhood workers in long day care centres across the country hold a bachelor degree or higher qualification in early childhood, and 39% of the early childhood workforce in long day care centres had no formal child care qualifications at all. This is occurring even though the evidence tells us that a well-qualified workforce is critical to quality outcomes.

The government's emphasis is on four-year trained teachers because they believe that they are a prerequisite to achieving their policy goals. This is not because they have a qualification per se, but because international studies have found that it is not the qualification itself that affects outcomes, but the staff member's ability to create a better pedagogic environment that makes the difference.

(Maxine McKew, 19th August, 2008)

