Moving forward with the Early Years Learning Framework

Publication of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) will be remembered as a turning point in early childhood education. The EYLF is a key plank in the Government and the profession’s quest to raise standards across the early childhood sector. It brings together 18 months of thinking, planning and consultation.

The Early Years Learning Framework and other quality reforms in the development phases are the result of purposeful, sustained thinking and planning and a coming together of the early childhood profession in a way we haven’t seen before. They build on a strong foundation and a proud history.

Creating the Framework and operationalising a nationally consistent quality system across all early childhood services is no easy task. A system that caters for the complex structures and logistics of the early childhood sector and is yet straightforward and equitable for all services, children and families requires careful planning. Boosting quality and providing universal ‘preschool’ education for children in the year before school, both of which are a part of the Government’s commitment to strengthening opportunity for all young children, will require additional facilities and early childhood teachers.

Processes to deliver increased early childhood teacher education are in place, but we also need people to want to be early childhood teachers and then to want to work in areas that are traditionally hard-to-staff, such as remote communities. Importantly, we need learning pathways that build on existing vocational qualifications (from TAFE and other VET providers) and allow people to study from home. If we want a strong, capable and responsive early childhood workforce, we must acknowledge the realities of students’ lives and honour, respect and accommodate students’ work and family obligations. We need all staff working in early learning programs to have an appropriate qualification and to be remunerated fairly.

The new early childhood quality system will ensure better education programs for young children and bring clearer specifications and structure around the qualifications and competence required by those who provide early education. Like school education with its professional registration systems, the early childhood sector needs a regulatory framework to guarantee the quality of courses, both VET and Higher Education, and the qualifications, competence and character of those who care for and educate children in the years before school.

The EYLF is the first on-the-ground component of this new quality assurance emphasis for early childhood education, and Every Child congratulates all those who participated in the thinking and consultations that informed its development. We agree, as the Minister for Early Childhood Education Kate Ellis highlights in her Guest Statement, that ‘all children [should] start school as happy and confident learners’ and ‘raising the quality of early childhood education and care is at the heart of this,

This issue of Every Child profiles the EYLF. It has a series of articles on key aspects of the Framework, and a ‘how to’ emphasis where relevant. Early Childhood Australia President Margaret Young stresses the need to go forward with the EYLF and to support practitioners working with it. Catherine Hydon, Pam Linke and Margaret Sims focus on new ways of centering and connecting learning around children and families in their articles on supporting children’s development within the spirit and guidelines of the specific Outcomes in the EYLF. Other articles focus on effective communication (Outcome 5), providing individualised support (Outcome 2) and explaining the new framework to parents and caregivers.

We all acknowledge the challenges in preparing a national document of this significance. We look forward to detail around the phases and stages of implementation and ways of linking to other dimensions of quality assurance. It’s important to note that a curriculum is not usually set in concrete. Curricula are living documents that evolve over time, are modified in the light of changing contexts and experiences, and must be customised to reach outcomes while also building on children’s strengths. The Early Years Learning Framework is no exception.

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