

Overhaul the Assessment and Rating Process

Background :

- The current Assessment and Rating (A&R) system was introduced in 2012 as part of the National Quality Framework (NQF)
- All regulated long day care, family day care and Out of school hours care services undergo this A&R process, where an assessor comes in and checks all aspects of their service.
- The results are posted online on the ACECQA (the governing body) website.
- The A&R is actually conducted by each state's Department of Education staff
- There are 5 possible ratings:
 - Significant Improvement required
 - Working towards
 - Meeting National Quality Standards
 - Exceeding National Quality Standards
 - Excellent

The Problems:

- There is **no standardised system** for assessing services. It seems to be very much subjective and dependent on the whim of the assessor of the day. Owners with multiple services have provided feedback on how each assessor focussed a different aspect of the service, so it is impossible to anticipate what the requirements would be. Often assessors would use their own interpretations of the law to rate services. It is inappropriate to publish such subjective ratings.
- According to guidelines released in 2012, each service was to be re-rated frequently. If you were rated "Working Towards" you would be rated within 12 months, "Exceeding" services would be rated every 3 years. Some services that were rated "Working towards" in 2012 are still waiting to be reassessed. In other words, they are **5 years overdue** for the next A&R visit. Families are receiving incorrect or outdated information about the standard of many services.
- This was a time when the system was new to the educators and the assessors and many A&R processes have changed since then. It is unfair for the government to advertise ratings from many years ago when the services have changed and/or improved and could be an "Exceeding" service now, but for the **sluggishness of the A&R process**.
- Providers are **reluctant to challenge the outcome** of an assessment as the same department is responsible for spot checks for compliance. It is a common perception that if you complain about the assessment process or your rating, then you are likely to get a spot check in the following weeks and are likely to receive a breach notice for minor issues.
- **How can the government rate the quality of a business?** Governments should be able to rate compliance with the law, but not quality of the service. This would be dependent on a number of external factors and personal preference. For example, a service in an affluent suburb with high socio-economic families may have a wonderful sustainability program and be rated highly on this aspect, but a service in a low socio-economic area may need to focus their funds and efforts on providing integrated and external services to families and may not have an extensive sustainability program. It is unfair to penalise them for this.

- In NSW in particular, services report a very **confrontational**, negative approach from assessors. Most educators and providers want to do the right thing and would be happy to work collaboratively with the department to implement any suggested improvements.

Suggested Improvements:

- Use a measurable, objective document to conduct assessment of services. A **checklist** that identifies compliance or non-compliance with the law would be suitable.
- **Do not publish** service ratings until the government catches up to its own timetable. It is unfair to advertise outdated or incorrect assessments.
- Let the governing body (ACECQA) conduct the assessment process. This separates powers and allows for **independence and standardisation** across the country. Families need to be assured that all services across the country meet minimum requirements, regardless of which state or region they are in.
- Ensure that department staff have **ongoing relationships** with the services under their purview and act as advisors to ensure that the service addresses children's education and care needs and the needs of the families they service. Ensure that all staff have adequate training and qualifications in Early Childhood Education and Care as well as working in an advisory role.

About the Australian Childcare Alliance (ACA) NSW:

- ACA NSW is the peak body for privately owned early childhood education and care services in NSW.
- ACA NSW is registered as an industrial relations organisation with the NSW Industrial Relations Commission.
- ACA NSW members collectively represent approximately 1,600 Education and Care services and support over 125,000 families.
- ACA NSW provides advocacy, policy and regulatory support and advice, member services and professional development for members across the state.
- ACA NSW is a member of the Australian Childcare Alliance alongside sister-state-bodies in Victoria, Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia.

How to contact ACA NSW:

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- For any further information, please visit www.nsw.childcarealliance.org.au.

References:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/regulation/Pages/faqnqfassess.aspx#link100>

<http://www.cscentral.org.au/national-quality-framework/pdfs/assessment-ratings-process-2012.pdf>

<http://www.acecqa.gov.au/national-quality-framework/assessments-and-ratings>

<http://acecqa.gov.au/national-registers>