



Health and Community Services Workforce Council Submission

**Productivity Commission Issues Paper:
Childcare and Early Childhood Learning**

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About the Health and Community Services Workforce Council

The Workforce Council is a peak body for Queensland's health and community services workforce. We work collaboratively with government, industry organisations, workplaces, individuals, education and training providers and other stakeholders to ensure the future viability of our industry's workforce.

Our expertise is in delivering workforce planning, workforce development and skills development strategies, support and advice. We undertake workforce research, design and deliver workforce plans, and coordinate over 1,000 skilling and professional development activities each year, reaching more than 20,000 workers.

The Workforce Council provides a suite of strategies to assist the early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector to undertake effective workforce planning and development at an individual, team, organisational and systemic level. The Workforce Council achieves this by:

- offering a wide variety of professional learning and support opportunities
- assisting leaders, educators and other staff to meet the requirements of the National Quality Framework
- assisting to develop services' workforces so they can meet the changing needs of high quality service delivery
- providing opportunities to reflect on practice and incorporate different perspectives
- assisting educators to build professional knowledge and develop learning communities
- engaging participants in ongoing learning experiences
- supporting the development of a learning culture in ECEC services
- facilitating local leaders to have input into what is offered locally

The ECEC support available through the Workforce Council is made possible through funding provided by the National Inclusion and Professional Support Program (IPSP) and the Queensland Government.

The Health and Community Services Workforce Council welcomes the Productivity Commission's focus on the ECEC sector and more specifically on exploring service delivery to ensure affordable and flexible service delivery while maintaining quality outcomes for children and families.

Executive Summary

The Health and Community Services Workforce Council (Workforce Council) welcomes the Productivity Commission's focus on Childcare and Early Childhood Learning and commend the emphasis on ensuring families expectations in relation to cost, flexibility, availability and quality outcomes are met.

This submission outlines both the growing demand for early childhood education and care (ECEC) services and increasing expectation by families that services provide high quality learning and development outcomes for children. Therefore over the next decade, the early childhood education and care (ECEC) system will be required to meet the dual purposes of increasing productivity through supporting employment and our future workforce while ensuring a child's right to access quality early learning and development is maintained. This will require services to deliver high quality programs which support children's learning and development while being responsive to the needs of families and communities.

The Workforce Council believes that to achieve this level of quality,

1. Regulation is required as, like many other health and community services sectors, it ensures a level of consistency in the quality of service delivery which in turn, allows all children to reach their full potential
2. Investment of public funds in the ECEC system is required to ensure universally accessible services and
3. The sustained implementation of Australia's evidence based National Quality Framework will continue to raise quality and drive continuous improvement and consistency in Australian education and care services, and should be retained.

The Workforce Council, as a peak body for health and community services workforce, has focussed on the workforce implications of the National Quality Framework and will leave the analysis of other aspects to the ECEC and school aged care peak bodies and providers. The Workforce Council has primarily concentrated on exploring the workforce implications of availability, flexibility and quality of ECEC services and recommends that:

- Ensuring appropriate numbers of staff who are skilled and qualified in the delivery of ECEC programs must remain a legislated requirement as these factors underpin the delivery of quality outcomes for children and families accessing early childhood education and care.
- Workforce planning in the ECEC sector is essential and will be supported by the development of improved workforce data collection tools, reporting systems, increased access and robust analysis.
- There is continued availability of quality and affordable professional development and support for the ECEC workforce to ensure services remain flexible and responsive to the needs of families and children, including those with additional needs.
- The links between professional learning, development and support and a professional workforce and the delivery of high quality ECEC and the implementation of ECEC policy, are evidenced based and clearly understood.

- The provision of intentional, targeted, coordinated, consistent and ongoing professional development and support is an efficient and effective way to support providers and the workforce to deliver quality outcomes.

Demand for and Expectations of Early Learning Services

Demand for child care has been steadily increasing in Australia, a trend which is expected to continue. The use of formal care increased from 17 per cent to 22 per cent in the period from 1999 to 2008 (Baker, 2013), and in the September quarter, 2012 there were more than 1 million children using approved care services, attending more than 15,100 services (Australian Government, 2013). Numerous factors influence demand for child care in Australia, including the workforce participation rate of women with dependent children, economy-wide employment levels and the population of children less than 14 years old. Female labour force participation rates have continued to rise over the past few decades, increasing from 52.1 per cent in 1980-81 to 70.4 per cent in 2010-11 (Richardson, 2013). The increase in female labour force may also be attributed to the growth in the health and community services industry, with 78 per cent of the workforce in this industry being women (ABS, 2012). The health and community services industry is one of the largest growing industries and largest employer in Queensland (ABS, 2012). It is possible that the expected growth in the health and community services industry may continue to impact on the employment of women, with one in four new jobs predicted to be in the industry in the next five years (DEEWR Projections, 2013).

A recent study points out that there has been “much more use of formal child care for children of employed mothers (especially long day care for younger children and outside school hours care for school aged children) over the period from the early 1980’s to 2011” (Baxter, 2013). This is reflected in a study conducted in Brisbane, which included representation of 200 families using various care types (long day care, family day care, outside school hours care and in-home care), which found that most families identified work as the primary reason they used care (Irvine, 2012).

Currently, high economy-wide employment levels reflect the availability of paid work, and hence affect demand for work-related childcare (Richardson, 2013). Further adding to demand for child care is the expected increase in the population of children under 14 years, this population is expected to grow over the next five years at compound annual growth rate of 1.9 per cent, significantly higher than the 1.3 per cent over the five years through to 2012-13 (Richardson, 2013). The increase in the number of children, coupled with an increasing preference for a two-income household, will boost demand for child care (Richardson, 2013) and the availability of accessible and affordable child care will support productivity through enabling women to return to the workforce.

Today, “childcare is seen both as a means to support labour force participation and a key form of early learning and development” (Richardson, 2013). In 2012, a study of 200 families in Brisbane found that families have expectations of quality learning and development, with families indicating that the second main reason (after work) they used care being to promote quality learning. In this study, families also stated that they would like to receive more information about children’s learning from the services (Irvine, 2012). The community expectation for quality learning / care was also noted by the Australian Policy Institute in a policy brief, highlighting that “more highly educated

people [as] potentially having expectations of high standards of quality” (Baker, 2013). This shift in the expectations of early childhood education and care services was also noted in the Child Care Services in Australia Industry Report (Richardson, 2013) which remarked that “a number of childcare providers (both private and community-based) have recently changed the names of their facilities re-labelling them as early learning centres”.

The Workforce Council highlights the transformative impact that quality early childhood education and care makes to children’s lives in the short term and society as a whole in the longer term.

Extensive research demonstrates that secure relationship development in the first three years of a child’s life is critical in laying the foundation for healthy development and resilience (Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry, 2013). It is therefore unsurprising that families are increasingly expecting ECEC services and educators to have the necessary skills and time to build secure and meaningful relationships with children and families, through the provision of opportunities for learning and development. However, Baker (2013) notes that “with more highly educated people potentially having expectations of high standards of quality... [there is] need for greater regulation of childcare quality standards to ensure that households with potentially lower expectations or perceptions are not provided with a correspondingly lower quality of care”. Investment in quality early childhood education and care can be seen as preventative spending which, when provided in the form of proportionately universal, integrated and quality services, increases productivity and sees reductions of government spending on services such as special education, juvenile justice, welfare and dependency costs, criminal justice costs and results in increases in tax contributions.

Outcomes of Early Childhood Education and Care Services

The Workforce Council recommends that over the next decade, the necessary parameters to ensure the ECEC system meets the dual purposes of increasing productivity through supporting employment and our future workforce, while also ensuring a child’s right to access quality early learning and development, include:

- **Universally accessible, quality provision of Early Childhood Education and Care services.**
- **A funding model which supports the provision of quality outcomes for children, as identified in the National Quality Frameworks.**
- **Simplified access to funding for families.**
- **Public investment in the delivery of services regulated through the National Quality Framework.**
- **Increased focus on and delivery of integrated early childhood services which are regionally responsive to the needs of families and children.**
- **The required numbers of skilled and qualified educators and leaders that are recognised and recompensed appropriately for the level of responsibility, skill and knowledge their role requires.**

In relation to a child’s right to quality care, the desirable outcomes of early childhood education and care are well documented in the Early Years Learning Framework and the My Time, Our Place, Framework for School Aged Care. These include

- Children have a strong sense of identity,
- Children are connected with and contribute to their world,
- Children have a strong sense of wellbeing ,
- Children are confident and involved learners and
- Children are effective communicators.

Key elements to achieving these outcomes for children, families and society include:

- Retaining all elements of the evidenced based National Quality Framework including
 - current minimum ratio's of children to staff for all regulated and funded early childhood education and care settings
 - current minimum qualifications levels across all services for all regulated and funded early childhood education and care settings
 - National Quality Standards.
- Continued revision and refinement of National Quality Framework responding to evidence based research into the provision of quality early childhood education and care and school aged care services.
- Continued refinement and simplification of reporting requirements that ensure quality outcomes and minimise duplication of work for service providers
- Increased effective support for existing services to work in more integrated ways across the local community.
- Targeted workforce planning and workforce investment across early childhood education and care and school aged care sectors.
- Provision of simple and accessible information about the quality of service providers for parents and families.

Cost and Availability of Childcare and Early Learning Services

The Workforce Council commends the commission's focus on ensuring ECEC is physically and financially accessible to families, however adds that families also have expectations of high quality outcomes and service delivery. Government/s have a responsibility to support the ongoing availability of quality early childhood education and care which remains financially accessible and ensure families are educated to make informed choices.

Strengthening the quality of early childhood education and care through mandated minimum qualifications and ratio's of children to adults does not necessarily result in a rise in child care cost. For ten years up to and including the implementation of the National Quality Framework, Queensland long day care services were required to meet minimum qualifications; rooms in services were required to have a diploma qualified staff member present at all times, while other staff were required to have a minimum qualification of a Certificate III in Children's Services. Despite minimum qualifications and minimum ratio regulations similar to those in the National Quality Framework (e.g. one adult: four children in the 0-15 months age group), Queensland child care fee's remain below the national average (Productivity Commission, 2013). In talking to directors and operators who were working in the industry when these minimum qualifications and minimum ratio regulations were introduced in 2002-2003, they report that it did not require massive transformation in the industry. Rather, strong leadership and encouragement of staff to use study opportunities and

recognised prior learning processes to gain qualifications, this is discussed in the case study from Queensland in Appendix A. **The Workforce Council recommends no changes are made to minimum qualification and ratio requirements in the National Quality Framework.**

The availability of services outside of traditional spread of working hours is essential, especially for many women working in the health and community services industry. The Workforce Council acknowledges the flexibility already provided by Family Day Care services and Outside School Hours Care services. The Workforce Council supports increased flexibility of children's services through the continued operational funding of Family Day Care services and the further development and refinement of in-home care and occasional care to ensure their inclusion under the National Quality Framework. **The Workforce Council recommends the National Quality Framework be extended to include all services providing formal early childhood and middle childhood education and care to children and their families.**

Meeting the needs of Communities

The Workforce Council believes a universally accessible, transparent, quality, integrated early childhood education and care system (as discussed in the previous section) will ensure outcomes which support children, families, society and the economy. To achieve this, the skills, knowledge and ability of the ECEC workforce is a key factor in guaranteeing a service is able to meet the needs of communities and families, including in low socio economic areas or those with specific demographic requirements. One of the core barriers to building capacity for inclusion in the ECEC workforce is the idea that cultural awareness and skills that support inclusion for all children are specialised areas. Any and all members of the ECEC workforce have a role to play in the inclusion of all children and building capacity for inclusion across the whole ECEC workforce, and is a high priority. Where services fail to meet the needs of communities, workforce shortages and/or skills gaps must be addressed and should not be used as reason to lower quality standards. To improve the delivery of services to families and children with additional needs, a flexible and regionally targeted approach to workforce planning and development is required. The following section presents challenges and opportunities in relation to minimising the impact of workforce shortages and skills and knowledge gaps, which are key factors in the delivery of quality outcomes for children and families, and especially those with additional needs.

Rural and remote

As noted in the Childcare and Early Childhood Learning Issues Paper (Productivity Commission, 2013), there are challenges in the provision of appropriate ECEC in regional and remote areas, with many providers facing greater difficulties in attracting and retaining suitably qualified staff. In 2011, 57 per cent of the 99 family day care schemes in Queensland were located in regional and remote areas, with only 32 per cent of long day care services being located in regional and remote areas of Queensland (Queensland Government, 2013). **Ensuring family day care services can meet National Quality Framework minimum qualifications is therefore an essential part of providing flexible and accessible child care options in remote and regional areas.** Strong leadership and programs which focus on robust recognised prior learning programs and flexible training models are required. Some examples of these are listed below:

Family Day Care Mentor Scheme

The Family Day Care Mentor scheme, funded by the Workforce Council through the IPSP Professional Support Coordinator Queensland project, is an example of a flexible program that recognised family day care educator's skills and knowledge while building their understanding of the National Quality Framework. The model had a number of distinct components, pedagogical leadership in unpacking the EYLF, mapping the journey of the educators and the special content focus; and the development of mentoring skills for educators. This final component enabled the scheme to build capacity across the home based educators to support others. This model could be utilised to improve access to qualifications for family day care educators.

The Productivity Places Program - industry brokerage and enterprise/industry RTO delivery model

Through the Productivity Places program the Workforce Council brokered funding to the QLD Family Day Care Association to deliver Certificate III to existing educators across QLD. Through this program 197 educators achieved their Certificate III. Reflecting on the success of this model, Michelle Howlett, the program coordinator wrote *'Educators studied their Certificate III externally through Family Day Care Training Australia, with the support of their Coordination Units. Many of the graduates had not studied since leaving school, which meant there was a certain amount of apprehension about how they would go. This was alleviated by the fact that their vast experience in working with children was acknowledged through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), enabling them to fast track their Certificates.'*

Elizabeth Pascoe, a graduate, stated "I had been providing Family Day Care for almost 10 years when I was given the opportunity to gain my Certificate III in Childcare Services. Thanks to this course and the support I received from my Coordinators I have now gained more knowledge and practical skills to use in my service. I would recommend furthering your skills to all Child Care Educators as it helps build your confidence in providing quality childcare" (Howlett, 2013).

North West Action Research Project

In 2014, services in the North West of Queensland will have the opportunity to participate in an action research project, delivered by the Workforce Council with the aim of supporting sustainability for these regional and remote services. Through this professional development initiative, all staff in the services which sign-up will collaborate for 18 months with a facilitator and mentor on a topic of the service's choice, using applied research and inquiry based learning approach. Research has shown that this approach supports the greatest transformative change in participant's knowledge, attitudes and practice which maximises long term benefits for the service and outcomes for children and families.

Remote Support Teacher and Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Childcare Programs

The Remote Support Teacher and the Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Childcare Programs, offered through the Key Account Manager (Children's Services) for TAFE Queensland, have also been a huge support for educators in remote locations gaining their qualifications. This

allowed TAFE teachers to visit ECEC services regularly to provide tutorials, support and mentoring to students studying their Certificate III or Diploma.

Inclusive Service Delivery

In an integrated service delivery system, universal and quality ECEC services act as a non stigmatising basis from which families can access various other supports according to need (Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry, 2013). **The Workforce Council supports collaboration between levels of government which leads to the funding of enhanced and targeted services through integrated service delivery models.** “Integrated services provide access to multiple services to children and families in a cohesive and holistic way. They recognise the impact of family and community contexts on children’s development and learning and focus on improving outcomes for children, families and communities. Through respectful, collaborative relationships, they actively seek to maximise the impact of different disciplinary expertise in a shared intent to respond to family and community contexts” (Press, Sumsion and Wong, 2009). Through the delivery of integrated services, including support for the existing service system to develop stronger community ties and opportunities for integration, the needs of children and families can be specifically met in the most efficient, targeted and cost effective ways, ensuring that families and children get the support required. It is anticipated that the National Disability Insurance Scheme will effect how inclusion support services are provided in the early years, and **the Workforce Council recommends that particular attention needs to be paid to professional development which supports the development of governance and leadership skills and the skills of both ECEC educators and those supporting inclusion within ECEC contexts.**

In Queensland the current Inclusion Support Subsidy funding system has led to children losing access to specialised support in the class room due to a lack of cooperation between state and federal governments. Prior to the Queensland Government funded kindergarten program for long day care centres, all children attending long day care who had additional needs had access to inclusion support subsidy. Since the kindergarten program has been implemented, children who could access the subsidy when they first enter care for up to 2 or 3 years are not able to receive the subsidy when they move to the funded kindergarten room, during the funded kindergarten hours. **The Workforce Council urges governments to work together to rectify this service gap for children attending kindergarten in long day care in Queensland, as a matter of urgency.**

The Workforce Council acknowledges and supports increased emphasis on delivering quality and appropriate services to children and families from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds. To this end, the Workforce Council reiterates the perspectives of the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) in their Good Practices in Early Childhood Education and Care Services document (SNAICC, 2013). In relation to funding and service delivery models, the Workforce Council draws the commission’s attention to SNAICC’S Early Years Pathways, Positive outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, which proposes transferring the budget based funding to fund Integrated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children’s Services (SNAICC, 2013).

In relation to workforce, it is **imperative that the emphasis of both policy and resources are dedicated to increasing the number of educators from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds and ensuring that all educators have access to effective contemporary approaches to developing culturally inclusive practices.** These approaches should be linked to the competency standards set out in the National Quality Standard and mapped to competencies in children's services qualifications. For example, the Workforce Council, through the IPSP Professional Support Coordinator Queensland Project, has been delivering a professional development program of six yarning circles (mapped to a Certificate III competency in the Community Services Training Package, CHC08) aimed at improving educator's culturally inclusive practices in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives. The effectiveness of these including outcomes for children and families can be seen in the case study in Appendix C.

Also a priority is increasing the children's services sector's capacity to work with children and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Programs which aim to both increase numbers of educators from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and support such educators to attain appropriate qualifications, must be prioritised. Some effective models involving partnerships between individual RTOs and community organisations have been developed and should be further explored to identify how models could be adapted across the country and according to local conditions. The Workforce Council is currently piloting such an approach with a JSA (ACCESS Community Services) to both develop the job readiness of migrant and refugee job seekers and prepare the employers to ensure they have a culturally inclusive and supportive environment for work placements and trainees. The vision is for these job seekers to attain positions within ECEC services and ultimately ensure services are more responsive to and reflect the community demographics and needs.

Role of Government in Early Childhood Education and Care Provision

Government/s has a responsibility to invest in the provision of formal quality Early Childhood Education and Care services which are universally accessible. Research shows that limited public investment in Early Childhood Education and Care may lead to provision shortages, low quality programs (generally for children from lower socio economic backgrounds), unequal access and the segregation of children according to income (OECD, 2006). Where public money is invested, the Workforce Council supports Government's role as a regulator of ECEC services to ensure safe and secure environments, universal access, high quality and efficient and effective spending of government funds. In addition, governments have a key role in conveying accurate and timely information to parents, families and the broader community to ensure families can make decisions which support their circumstances and the highest quality outcomes. Government, the economy and society benefit from the delivery of high quality ECEC services, with families more inclined to enter the workforce; employees more productive due to their trust in the care arrangement, and children receiving solid foundations for future prosperity. For this reason, **the Workforce Council contends that no area currently regulated under the national quality standard would be better left to self-regulation, professional codes or accreditation processes.**

The Workforce Council believes all levels of Government have a role in ensuring families can seamlessly access required supports across jurisdictions and service areas. This can be achieved

through improved cross sector policy integration and policy focus on integrated service delivery. New policy initiatives such as the National Disability Insurance Scheme and the implementation of some recommendations from the Queensland Inquiry into Child Protection present an opportunity for governments to invest in service delivery models which improve efficiency and effectiveness for families, with ECEC services acting as a universal launch site for other targeted services.

National Quality Framework

The Workforce Council strongly supports the continued implementation of the evidence based National Quality Framework including the qualification and ratio's requirements and believes the current framework ensures the delivery of high quality ECEC services which are vital for the future prosperity of Australia.

The National Quality Standards set the benchmark for both safety and quality of service delivery. In Australia, various health and community services sectors have national or state standards, including disability care, aged care, mental health care, human services and health care. Quality assurance processes in comparable sectors also require assessment and audit processes across a similar range of benchmarks. For example the National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards comprise 10 standards with 113 criterion and the Queensland Disability Service Standards are comprised of 10 standards and 49 indicators. Also of note is that the previous NCAC accreditation system was based on 33 standards and involved a validator marking 701 indicators as occurring or not occurring. In contrast the new assessment and ratings system is more streamlined, based around 18 standards and requires services to be meeting only 58 elements.

The introduction of the National Quality Framework has mostly been viewed positively by services, with benefits including those demonstrated in **Appendix D**, and summarised below:

- Encourages increased data collection and evaluation strategies which ensure efficient and targeted service improvement strategies.
- Increased focus on ensuring services are meeting families' needs and reflecting family and community values through greater inclusion of families in service delivery and quality outcomes.
- National Quality Standards support services to focus on less visible but equally important areas of their program to ensure quality service delivery.
- A commitment to and focus on continuous improvement of service delivery and quality.

Other benefits outlined by service operators include:

- Increased participation of families and children in the development of early childhood education and care programs.
- Increased focus on continuous improvement.

The move to any new and transformative system can be expected to take time and, at times, present some challenges during the transition process. This has been the experience of services during the transition to the National Quality Framework. However, as demonstrated in the case studies linked in **Appendix E**, on the whole, transition has occurred or is well on the way to occurring within the time frame and the benefits of participating in the National Quality Framework far outweigh the

temporary discomfort associated with change. It is predicted that any further change to the quality system may result in extended and unnecessary fatigue and confusion for providers and a workforce focussed on transition, rather than outcomes for children and families.

In relation to subjective aspects of National Quality Standards, it is worth noting that the previous system had an equivalent amount of subjective aspects, and, as this system has been in place since the early 1990's services are familiar with negotiating such elements. Where guidance is required, **Appendix F** demonstrates how effective leadership which is linked to minimum qualifications and investment in leadership, plays a crucial role through supporting ECEC Educators in "prioritising, exploring new learning and creating new meanings collaboratively with educators" (Inglis, 2013). During this study, participants "felt that the consolidation of their professional understandings was largely due to the positive responses they saw in the children after changes had been made to their practice" highlighting the benefits for children in the implementation of the National Quality Standards (Inglis, 2013). **The Workforce Council strongly recommends continuing the implementation of the National Quality Framework at the current pace as many in the sector have embraced the policy change and are showing the leadership necessary to successfully implement the changes.**

The Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce

The Workforce Council wishes to draw the commission's attention to the Early Years Workforce Strategy, a strategy designed in 2012 to address five key areas relevant to early childhood education and care.

The key elements included:

- Providing a professional early childhood education and care workforce
- Ensuring a growing workforce to continue to meet community demand
- Aiding early childhood educators to gain the qualifications and skills the workforce needs to continue to provide high quality, care
- Fostering the creation of a responsive workforce, one which can address the needs of all children
- Facilitate collaboration amongst members of the broader early childhood development workforce.

The strategy is no longer available on the Australian Government website, and the Workforce Council recommends this national policy be reinstated and supported to ensure the continued delivery of accessible and flexible early childhood education and care services.

Targeted workforce and skill development strategies comprised of both formal qualifications and on the job professional development and support are urgently required. As at November Quarter 2013, there were 32,000 people employed in the ECEC sector in Queensland (ABS, 2013). The ECEC sector in Queensland is projected to increase by 5,370 (16.8 per cent) from 2013 to 2020-21 (Monash University Modelling, 2013). **The Workforce Council suggests workforce planning in the early childhood education and care sector is essential and will be supported by the development of**

improved workforce data collection tools, reporting systems, increased access and robust analysis.

This will ensure current and future government and enterprise initiatives including Queensland Early Childhood Education and Care Action Plan, RPL grants and HECS Help Benefit and other workforce strategies represent value for money and significant return on investment.

Research shows that **skilled and qualified ECEC staff underpins the delivery of quality outcomes for children and families accessing Early Childhood Education and Care.** The delivery of inclusive and flexible services requires that the ECEC workforce has continued access to professional development and ongoing reflective processes, which will enable flexibility within the workforce and the service. Transition to the NQF and the continued improvement of services under the framework requires support from all levels of government and services to implement a whole of workforce approach which includes:

- Strategies to support the continued development of leaders and managers for ECEC services.
- Targeted initiatives to address workforce shortages in specific areas and with specific groups.
- Continued revision and updating of training products and increased sector influence on training products and delivery.
- Workforce leadership and management strategy which includes the promotion of clear and thoughtful career paths and broader promotion of the profession.
- Ongoing learning opportunities that support the development of reflective practice skills.
- Coordination of local, state and national workforce strategies which respond to local needs while ensuring national consistency.

The case studies in **Appendix G** outline a number of successful enterprise level recruitment and retention strategies which could be adopted by other organisations. Interestingly, the strategies described refer to increased quality standards in early childhood education (including increased ratio's of staff to children) as successful recruitment and retention strategies and reflect on the vital role of on the job professional development and support. Strategies include:

- High ratio's of staff to children
- Foster positive team atmosphere
- Financial incentives for adhering to centre policy, attendance at staff meetings, attendance at centre functions and commitment to professional development
- Provision of family leave, cultural leave and gratia days
- Contemporary and considered leadership practices
- Participation in project work and professional development opportunities

The availability of quality and affordable professional development and support for the Early Childhood Education and Care workforce is necessary to ensure that services remain flexible and responsive to the needs of families and children, including those with additional needs.

(Waniganayake, Harrison, Cheeseman, Burgess, Gioia and Press, 2008). The Workforce Council maintains that supporting an ECEC sector requires individual, enterprise and government investment in professional development and support. **The Workforce Council reiterates the PSC Alliance submission which clearly articulates the links between professional learning development and**

support and a professional workforce, the delivery of high quality ECEC and policy implementation.

The provision of intentional, targeted, coordinated, consistent and ongoing professional development is an efficient and effective way to support providers to:

- Implement and meet the requirements of National Policy (Irvine and Price, 2011)
- Meet the ongoing and dynamic needs of children and families (Waniganayake, Harrison, Cheeseman, Burgess, Gioia and Press, 2008)
- Increase the number of qualified workers in the sector through providing a catalyst to further study (see Appendix H)
- Build networks and groups with other providers in the local area (see Appendix H)
- Retain and draw educators in to the sector (see Appendix H)
- Deliver competencies from training packages to up skill staff in areas of targeted need (See Appendix I).

There is a case for greater recognition and application of teaching approaches which build knowledge of ECEC theory and practice while supporting learners to build skills in reflection and analysis. Workplace based approaches which engage learners in applied research while using conversational tools to support reflection and analysis, present an opportunity to increase the skills and knowledge of the ECEC workforce and support the sector's flexibility in the face of changing environments and the implementation of the NQF. In relation to formal training through the vocational education and training sector, the Workforce Council stipulates that recognised prior learning processes currently provide an alternative pathway, in some cases, to formal training and qualifications. To ensure currency of this system, **the Workforce Council suggests an urgent review of RPL tools, processes and skills and recommends that industry is engaged to provide advice to Australian Skills Quality Authority in relation to RPL learning and assessment strategies linked to the National Quality Framework.** Increased integration of learning and assessment into the workplace and use of third party reports to support RTO evidence of assessment are also key strategies to increase the ability of the VET system to ensure students are able to meet the requirements of the NQF. For a comprehensive action plan, outlining priority areas for attention in relation to the vocational education and training sector refer to the Queensland Children's Services Industry Skills and Workforce Development report in Appendix K.

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Appendix A

In 2002-03 I was director of an inner city community based long day care service. The changes that the incoming Child Act and Regulation would bring in relation to educator qualification requirements was viewed with some concern and anxiety, by both myself and many of my team, as well as for many directors and managers within my networks.

Our primary concern was around the potential for the legislative change to impact on operations by causing unqualified staff to leave the service (and sector). As now, retention was a significant issue for us, and in my team I had at least two key educators who I was keen to retain, who were unqualified, not willing to undertake study, and had expressed their intention on leaving the sector.

In the event, the provisions for educators to be undertaking study towards qualifications proved flexible enough for these educators to remain in their roles and undertake study and the impact on my service in terms of staffing was virtually non-existent. This seemed to be the experience for many other services as well. In my role as director a commitment to ongoing open communication with staff around legislative changes, along with implementing strategies to retain valued staff, and providing support, scaffolding and encouragement to enrol in approved studies were key factors in retaining staff and minimising turnover.

Appendix B

First Published in 'In the Loop' Autumn 2010: 3-5

<http://www.workforce.org.au/media/56718/loopapril2010-web.pdf>

The Ripple Effect: Unpacking the Early Years Learning Framework

Kym Groth, Kathy Eisentrager and April Rutter

Early Childhood Services are currently investigating ways to ensure the education and care they provide for children is in line with the principles espoused in the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF). Family Day Care Services are committed to 'unpacking' the EYLF – understanding the concepts and ensuring they are part of the everyday provision of care and education.

Brisbane Family Day Care (BFDC) has taken a unique approach to this 'unpacking' with the commencement of a joint PSCQ and Scheme funded project in partnership with the Family Day Care Association of Queensland (FDCAQ). The 6 month project, conceptualised by Kathy Eisentrager, manager of Brisbane Family Day Care aims to introduce new skills while building on the existing knowledge base of family day care educators (carers) within this service.

Kathy advised that the project has several distinct components:

- pedagogical leadership in unpacking the EYLF
- mapping the journey of the educators and the special content focus; and
- the development of mentoring skills for educators thus enabling the scheme to build capacity across the home based educators across the FDC Service

The pedagogical leadership will be provided to 4 home based educators by a 4-year university qualified teacher, Tina Phillips. Tina brings a wealth of early childhood experience and knowledge, including early childhood curriculum development and evaluation, along with her recent involvement in Queensland's Kindergarten and Prep programs.

The primary role of the teacher is to visit each educator in their working environment for approximately 4 hours each fortnight. These visits will provide opportunities to discuss the EYLF, model practice and support the mentoring process. Other opportunities will be provided in informal and formal discussions and professional development to assist the educators to examine the language and terminology of the EYLF and then contextualise it into their family day care setting. This will include providing examples, developing tools in consultation with the educators and reflecting on and challenging existing practice.

Unpacking the EYLF involves taking apart and expanding on the various concepts to identify and explore the critical components important for understanding the big ideas within the EYLF and translating them into day to day practice.

By exploring and defining ideas such as 'intentional teaching' and 'children as active agents' and examining their practice, family day care educators will gain a greater depth of understanding around how their practices, biases and professional judgments enhance or impede the environments, experiences and learning outcomes for and with children.

The 4 selected educators will gain new skills in the process of mentoring other educators. This is a critical component of the project which encourages a skill-set able to complement capacity building throughout the service long after this project is completed. The Mentors (under the watchful eye of Tina) will begin with an assigned protégé and will have ongoing support in developing these skills.

The Mentors will share their newly acquired skills and knowledge of the EYLF by holding a play session at their homes once a fortnight. This is designed to allow the opportunity to demonstrate and reinforce their understanding and practice, build onto their developing mentoring skills and assist in communicating their knowledge of the EYLF with others.

Brisbane Family Day Care recognised that for this model of implementation to be successful they needed to ensure the educators, teacher and coordination unit staffs have opportunities to develop strong mentoring skills. In collaboration with Mark Lynch from Lighthouse Resource, the service is developing a strength-based mentoring program for this project.

Mark said, "Lighthouse Resources is very excited about this opportunity to engage in the innovative development of a mentoring programme with Brisbane Family Day Care and the Family Day Care Association. As a centre for the development of strengths based practice, delivering training to a wide variety of organisations, we see this as a significant step in service and organisational capacity building.

"From our extensive experiences in delivering strength based training, organisations that are serious about making a difference to their service's users invest in processes of development that make a difference to their workers. A mentoring programme, we believe, provides an ideal format for delivering strengths based organisation learning by engaging workers in acknowledging their own learning and teaching abilities."

One full day of professional development will occur in the early stages of the project, followed by face-to-face and phone contact from a specialist mentor coach to enhance and grow these skills. The outcomes of this aspect of the project will be closely documented to ensure all relevant data is collected to inform future professional development and focus decisions.

On asking one of the Educators involved in this project how she felt about the process after just one week, April Rutter said she is "...buoyed to learn that I am on the right track in my practices... learning the being, belonging and becoming concepts are a part of my daily practice was affirming... delighted to learn the official labels for all my actions and practice... keen to share my new found knowledge and skills with others and excited to finally be on the journey of unpacking the Early Years Learning Framework."

The Family Day Care Association of Queensland is thrilled to be part of this ground breaking early childhood project – it is not hard to feel excited about exploring the outcomes. FDCAQ recognises many of our colleagues in Family Day Care will be interested in what is learnt from this project and understands just how important it is to provide leadership in sharing the outcomes, resources, challenges and successes. We are exploring ways to document the journey of all educators – maybe written, digital and audio recordings. The detailed report on the project will include:

- information on the methods used in unpacking the EYLF
- the strategies developed to enhance the mentoring skills of educators
- a detailed description of resource development
- identification of tasks; and
- evidence that demonstrates the educator has connected with the EYLF and is able to generate the ripple effect we hoped when beginning this project.

Keep your eyes out for the Project Study Report later in 2010. We are sure the effect of this project will ripple out to many other educators and services.

Appendix C

Our Journey so far In Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture
Written by Melanie Clarke

At Childs World we are committed to embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture within our Services. Thanks to the Yarn Up project I was able to get a deeper understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture. Being part of the Yarn Up project was the most meaningful learning opportunity I have experienced, which will stay with me forever. It gave me the confidence and knowledge on embarking on a journey of reconciliation. It was clear from Yarn up our first step in this journey was to find out who the traditional custodians of the land are, on which our centres stand. I have learnt that our centre stands on Gimuy Walubara Yidinji country and have been blessed to connect with an elder whose name is Gudju Gudju. We are proud to say Gudju Gudju and his wife Jenny and their daughter Lily are a family in Centre 3.

The Director at Centre 3 Tahleah Littman and myself met with Gudju Gudju and his wife Jenny to discuss the opportunity in working together with Childs World. From that meeting we connected and showed our genuine acknowledgement to the traditional custodians of the land and were given the first opportunity to use the Gimuy Walubara Yidinji Crescent on our emails to show our respect and acknowledgement. We are also proud to have the opportunity to fly their flag and will be having a flag ceremony.

Our ultimate goal will be implementing a pilot program in 2014 for our educators, our children and our families in learning about the traditional culture of the Gimuy Walubara Yidinji. The program will run throughout the year. It will involve the following;

- Weekly visits by the traditional Gimuy people who will share the stories, songs, dance, language and art. For example for the first term the topic may be their totem which is the Cassowary. They will share the stories, songs, dance, language and art that are linked to their totem the Cassowary.
- Establishing a native bee hive to assist with the pollinating the native plants in the area.
- Establishing an Eco Fish Tank – This will support our commitment sustainability and philosophy of the Abiculture Project.
- Fly the Gimuy Walubara Yidinji Flag.
- Display a traditional Art piece to show our Acknowledgement to the traditional custodians of the land.
- Gudju Gudju will support us in also connecting with the Torres Strait Islander people and embedding their stories, song, dance, language and art.

Gudju Gudju and his Wife Jenny Lynch are founders of The Abiculture Project.

Jenny Lynch has explained to me that the Abiculture Project advances traditional ecology by valuing and honouring traditional ecologists and instilling pride in traditional owners and the resources their land provides. The Project finds ways to develop and research bush resources for the betterment of the traditional group the resources came from. The traditional ecologists drive the project, guide the project and decide what research is appropriate. With a Traditional Ecologist Network in place we raise awareness of the role traditional land manager's play on modern ecology, sustainability and global food security. Utilising practical activities of survival and bush knowhow we will find ways to engage younger generation in cultural activities. The Project rejuvenates cultural landscapes, connects up ecological networks whilst restoring strong community links.

We are aiming to access funding to support this amazing opportunity so that no one is out of pocket. The aim of the Gimuy Walubara Yidinji people is to be able to participate in all Early Childhood Services around Cairns in implementing the project.

If there is one bit of advice that I can share is this;

“Open your heart, mind and soul to connect with your local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. There may be a few stumbles on the way, but it is through the stumbles that you will learn the most” This is new territory that we are travelling and am so proud to be a part of this change in acknowledgement that has been a long time coming.

Appendix D

First Published in 'In the Loop' Spring 2013: 6

<http://www.workforce.org.au/media/336493/intheloop-spring2013-web.pdf>

Leanne Fuller
Isis Family Day Care

Background Information

'Isis Family Day Care is a small service in Childers, Queensland. I am the only staff member, so I am Manager, Coordinator, Administrator and Educational Leader. There were nine educators engaged with the service at the time of Assessment and Rating visit in June last year. Three of these were visited over a two-day period.'

Preparing for Assessment and Ratings

'Like everyone else we had been working hard on developing a good understanding of the Early Years Learning Framework. My educators and I really worked closely together to make sure everyone was confident with their process for documenting children's learning, or was at least on a forward-moving journey to that space.'

'When we got to January 2012, the year the Assessment and Ratings processes would begin, we were struck with the fact that we had concentrated so hard on Quality Area 1- Educational Program and Practice, but there were six other areas we needed to make sure we felt confident about. I had been doing a series of educator newsletters, each focusing on a different Quality Area, and all educators had the National Quality Standard document, but we hadn't really discussed it as a team up until then. So as a group, we decided the best way to tackle this was to have a series of meetings. We met every Monday for four weeks in a row. This was a big commitment by everyone, but educators were keen to make sure they were providing the best service to children and families. I kept reading about how important philosophy was to a service as it was the base from which everything else stemmed. Our service philosophy had been reviewed about 2 years before, but when I read it I felt unsatisfied that it truly captured our culture and beliefs. So we set about gathering families' feedback about our service. I tried several different strategies to gather the feedback and it took a lot of work and time, but in the end, the amount of responses we collected were amazing and insightful. The educators and I also added our responses to these questions. At a meeting we split into groups and broke down the responses into some statements we could use in our philosophy. We then divided the statements into groups like, "For children we will...", "For families we will..." and "For our community we will..."

'After all our meetings we were feeling fairly good about how we were meeting the standards. Through the process we discovered what we thought were a few gaps in service provision and put some things into place to fill them. Of course all this data we had collected helped enormously with our Quality Improvement Plan as well. It wasn't long after these meetings that we received the request for the service Quality Improvement Plan, meaning we had about six weeks until our visit would occur.'

'The step we took next, which I would recommend to every service to do, is we met and went through the Ratings and Assessment Instrument. This provided a really good opportunity to have a close look at where we thought we may be sitting according to the information in that document. Again we found a few things which we tweaked before our visit date arrived.'

The Ratings & Assessment Process

'When we learned that we were to be one of the first Family Day Care services in our region to participate in the Assessment and Ratings process, I couldn't decide if that was a good or a bad thing. Great to get it over and done with quickly, or bad as the authorised officers would be very on their toes about everything.

'Our authorised officer contacted me to discuss the visit. She needed to observe a whole range of practices and age groups, so we discussed which educators did after school care, which had babies, on which days and so on. As a result we knew who was being visited and at what time on each day. 'The assessment lasted 2 days. Our authorised officer spent about 4 hours with me in the office first, then visited an educator who does after school care in the afternoon for about 3 hours. The next morning was an early start to capture parent arrivals at one educator's home and then on to the next, who had babies (and was our newest educator) about 11am to see lunch and rest routines. She was back with me in the office about 3pm and left around 6pm.

'The process was really positive and actually I really enjoyed being able to show off our service, which we are very proud of. Although we did very well across the National Quality Areas we look forward to continuing to improve our practice into the future.

'As a last tip I recommend that services spend some time really exploring and perhaps gathering just a few bits of documentation around the things which are relatively new to our regulations and standards. Things like sustainability, the focus on risk assessment (particularly excursions) and the Educational Leader role.'

Appendix E

A number of case studies reflecting the experiences of Queensland service providers during their first assessment and rating visits under the National Quality Framework can be found via the following link: <http://www.qcsa.net.au/frameworks>

Appendix F

First Published in 'In the Loop' Summer 2013: 16-18

http://www.workforce.org.au/media/342098/intheloop-summer2013-14_web.pdf

Quality Improvement as Professionals....our own personal journey

By Sue Inglis

Pelican Waters Golden Beach Kindy

In 2012 I decided to purchase a long day care and early education centre. I had been a full time early learning consultant over the previous 6 years and had been lucky enough to meet many inspiring early childhood educators across QLD. This, alongside my years of experience as an early childhood educator, motivated me to return to working with children and their families and once again become an everyday part of a community of learners.

As director and educational leader of my recently acquired Pelican Waters Golden Beach Kindy I was well aware that the community of learners were not just the children. I strongly believed that if an educator was to nurture and give large amounts of energy to children, they needed to be in an equally nurturing community for their own learning. I was extremely committed to the notion of leading and supporting our team of educators and went about exploring how this could develop within our centre.

It is recognised that engagement in professional development and support (PD) by those adults employed in early childhood education and care services can improve skills, and in turn enhance learning and create positive experiences for young children (Practice Potentials 2008; Russell, 2009). A few years ago I conducted some research that examined how educators take on new knowledge and perspectives within their curriculum. With the introduction of the Early Years Learning Framework, there were many questions educators had about how to implement new ideas and theories about teaching and learning. Some educators shared with me their frustrations with the time taken to move away from old habits, ingrained truths that no longer served them and out dated practices.

The research allowed me to look closely at what happened after educators have been involved in professional development sessions that explored current approaches or frameworks for supporting the implementation of curriculum. I was interested to know if educators were easily able to take the new information they had acquired at a workshop and implement it into their everyday practice once they returned to their workplaces, or if there were other factors at play.

I conducted the research over 6 months and engaged in semi formal interviews with educators, who were all employed in separate long day care settings both as educators and as directors. They had all attended a PD prior to the research. I initially asked them:

1. What facilitates or provides a barrier to the uptake of information gained from the professional development and support session?
2. How is the professional development and support being realised in your context?

The research unearthed some interesting findings about what educators felt were the best ways to be supported to take on new practice over time. It was evident that leader support was essential in prioritising, exploring new learning and creating new meanings collaboratively with educators. During this phase expectations for change should be gradual and require continued conversation, including discussion of how change will meet high quality standards. Valuing and scheduling

adequate time for purposeful pedagogical discussion amongst educators is necessary to help consolidate understandings and allow for mentors, within the team, to emerge naturally.

The research also revealed the importance of actually implementing the new ideas and knowledge into everyday practice. The participants in the study felt that the consolidation of their professional understandings was largely due to the positive responses they saw in the children after changes had been made to their practice. Discussions that focussed on children's growth, due to changes implemented, supported them to cement beliefs and gain attitudes about their own professional selves. The existence of support materials and an openness to engage in additional professional development sessions were also revealed in the study as being important considerations.

In my role as Educational Leader at our service I was keen to take on what I had learnt from conducting the research. I felt it was important for me to support the educators in our team with a framework that allowed us time to meet and talk with one another. We established a weekly team meeting where educators from each room have the opportunity to reflect on the happenings within their room and consider ways to improve opportunities for the children and their families. I encouraged and listened to the perspectives of my team and supported the generation of new ideas and solutions and the recording of these in our collective reflection journals.

I felt that in addition to the weekly meeting we needed to meet every six weeks or so for professional conversations that allowed us to explore topics of interest, new theories and ideas about curriculum that would impact on our whole centre. We have been exploring, as part of these meetings, how our educators can be on their own individual professional journeys and bring that knowledge and motivation to share with others. Each educator in our team, including myself, is able to choose the focus they are most interested in exploring and developing within their own practice. The focus the educators choose to explore and share may have developed because of a professional development workshop that was attended or been initiated out of a need for new understandings, or perhaps a particular interest. This personal investment forges greater interest and engagement in professional improvement. At our meetings each educator has the opportunity to share with the team what they are exploring at that time and how it is developing for them, and the children and families, in our setting. This ongoing opportunity to share drives us to reflect on our own personal and professional growth and builds a culture of quality improvement. It allows us to become confident in articulating our practice and provides a platform for respectful sharing, deeper discussion and learning from one another.

In our centre we are committed to engaging in professional conversations as a valuable tool for learning. We are mindful to use our time together wisely and value the discussions that will build our knowledge and confidence with teaching and learning. Housekeeping issues, that may have been traditionally discussed in staff meetings, are now collated into an ongoing staff e-newsletter which we have named 'Connect and Reflect'.

Being an Educational Leader in an early childhood setting is indeed a privileged position to be in. Supporting the learning community of adults is as important in these times of change as supporting our young learners. Each service needs to create and develop their own set of ongoing opportunities and frameworks that resonate with the team. It is important to realise that change is not something that necessarily comes quickly or without adequate support. It is a journey for each of us to learn and grasp new ideas and techniques, just as it is for the young learners in our midst.

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Appendix G

First Published in 'In the Loop' Summer 2013: 18-20

http://www.workforce.org.au/media/342098/intheloop-summer2013-14_web.pdf

Angela Watson – Director, Kookaburra Child Care Centre

I have been an early childhood educator for over 11 years, and have spent every minute of that time as an employee of Kookaburra Child Care Centre. This is sadly a rare occurrence in our industry. Many factors contribute to the high staff turnover rates in the ECEC sector. I am going to share some of the success our service has had with long term staff retention.

We currently have five staff members at our service who have accrued long service leave. We have two assistants who have been at the centre for 10 years and 16 years respectively, our Assistant Director (10 years), myself (11 years) and our cook (15 years). This says a lot about our methods for retaining staff.

The first, and in my opinion the main, reason for the long term retention of our staff is that we have three educators per room. This reduces the stress levels of the staff considerably as they have more support from their fellow educators to provide the high quality of education and care associated with our centre. We also foster a positive team atmosphere, which in turn creates a positive culture within the service. Both current and potential staff are attracted to the culture we create. Basically, people want to work here because it's such a fun and positive place to be, with great support and solid working relationships.

The key to creating a positive workplace culture is two-way respect. I have been lucky enough to have worked in all positions throughout my time at Kookaburra CCC. This gives me the unique ability to be able to empathise with my staff and provide support and guidance from a place of understanding and mutual respect. Judging educators' actions without first having been in their position is a very quick way to lose the respect of your staff and the quality working relationship you have with them. I am the first to admit I don't always have the answers but I find through collaboration with my staff we can usually come up with a satisfactory outcome for all involved.

Another technique I find works really well is a very simple one that we also use with children – praise! Everyone likes to feel that they are valued and their efforts appreciated. A few short words of praise to a staff member can turn their day around. I know as a Director getting positive feedback from both parents and our management committee can drive me to push further and do more in my position, to ensure those high opinions continue.

An additional factor I think contributes to our centre's long term staff retention is the inclusion of a bonus in each staff members' weekly pay. Each staff member receives a bonus of 5% of their gross weekly wage on top of their weekly pay. This is contingent on several things including, adherence to the centre's policies and procedures, commitment to the NQF and continuous improvement, attendance at all centre functions such as discos, attendance at all staff meetings and a commitment to professional development. This gives them something to strive towards each week and creates a drive to achieve each and every week of the year.

Finally, to show our staff they are valued for the wonderful job they do, our management committee approves several staff socials throughout the year paid for by the centre (including an end of year party). They also get each staff member a small gift at the end of the year to show their appreciation for a hard year's work. This fosters a feeling of being valued for their hard work and dedication.

Whilst I know some of the things I have listed above are not a financially viable option for many services, the feeling they create in staff members can be achieved through other less costly means if you put your mind to it. I feel very fortunate to have been a part of the team at Kookaburra CCC for such a long time and I look forward to many more years of service at this centre.

Caitlin Deakes – Educational Leader/Manager, Tallowwood Child Care Centre & Boronia Child Care Centre, Griffith University

I have been an Early Childhood Educator and advocate for over 22 years. I am currently the Educational Leader/Manager for Griffith University, Tallowwood and Boronia Child Care Centres. Tallowwood was opened in 1987 and I am the second Director. I lead a group of 22 educators who have been employed at the centres from two years to 19 years. We have three staff due for long service leave in 2014.

Staff retention is a key issue for the ECEC industry with a high percentage of educators leaving centres every week due to wages and conditions. Our industry also has a high burn out rate – so what makes our centres different?

When looking at staff retention it is important to reflect on your own leadership skills and the way in which you manage and support your team. Reflecting on my own leadership characteristics using the work of Johnston & Nahmad-Williams (2009) I would say that I draw on situational, democratic, consultative, delegative, emotionally intelligent and humanistic models of leadership. For example, in thinking about how the industry is continually evolving, to be a successful leader you need to adapt your leadership style based on the group of staff that you are leading, their experiences and the shared goals you wish to achieve. You also need to consult with and democratically involve your team, giving them the opportunity to solve various issues. This empowers individuals and gives the team ownerships of daily operations. It is imperative to give your team feedback and recognition when tasks and goals have been achieved. As the leader I make the final decision, but my team needs to be involved in the decision-making process and given the opportunity to trial new things. The qualities I aim for are respectful relationships that value each staff member and their contributions to our organisation. Treating people with respect and compassion is what underpins our program and this is achieved for our children, families and staff.

The most important leadership skill that I demonstrate is emotional intelligence. An effective leader should have self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills (Johnston and Nahmad-Williams, 2009). It is important to remain calm in challenging situations, have complete trust in your staff, listen to the team, be an effective communicator, be approachable, available and have the ability to make informed decisions. Flexibility is also an important factor in retaining staff at our centres. It is important to be supportive of the staff's unique situations when considering leave options throughout the year.

Other factors that help staff retention in our two centres include the following:

- Our Indoor/Outdoor Program encourages our children to be children. We focus a lot on attachment relationships, building on children's self-esteem and image of self, independency and autonomy. We teach the children to become "critical thinkers" and children are given the opportunity to make simple choices within the environment.
- Project work: we have been involved in action research, sustainability and Kidsmatter projects. This keeps our team motivated, passionate and up-to-date with current practice.
- Staff are encouraged to take an RDO each month, which gives them the opportunity to recharge.
- Other conditions such as family/cultural leave, gratia days.

The combination of effective leadership skills and working conditions that support individual staff contribute to leading the way with staff retention in our service.

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Appendix H

Outcomes of PSCQ Action Research Project Report



Outcomes of the PSCQ Action Research Project

Report prepared by Dr Jennifer Summerville

December 2011

“We’ve often talked about our dreams and fulfilling our dreams but they’re not just our dreams... they can become other people’s as well and that’s exciting”

From 2009 – 2011, the Health and Community Services Workforce Council’s Professional Support Coordinator Queensland (PSCQ) project, a project funded by the Australian Government under the Inclusion and Professional Support Program, developed and implemented a large-scale Action Research Project. The project was designed to build the research capacity of early childhood educators and “set the foundations for practice improvement through continual learning and progressive problem solving” (PSCQ, 2009).

In keeping with the core rationale for the PSCQ Action Research Project, a participatory program evaluation of the project was undertaken to ensure that continual learning and reflective principles were adopted and applied throughout the course of the project’s development, implementation and future planning. The ‘action evaluation’ was supported by an evaluation framework that provided a basis for embedding, in structured yet flexible ways, the processes that facilitated understanding of the outcomes of the project for educators and to identify opportunities for its continuous improvement.

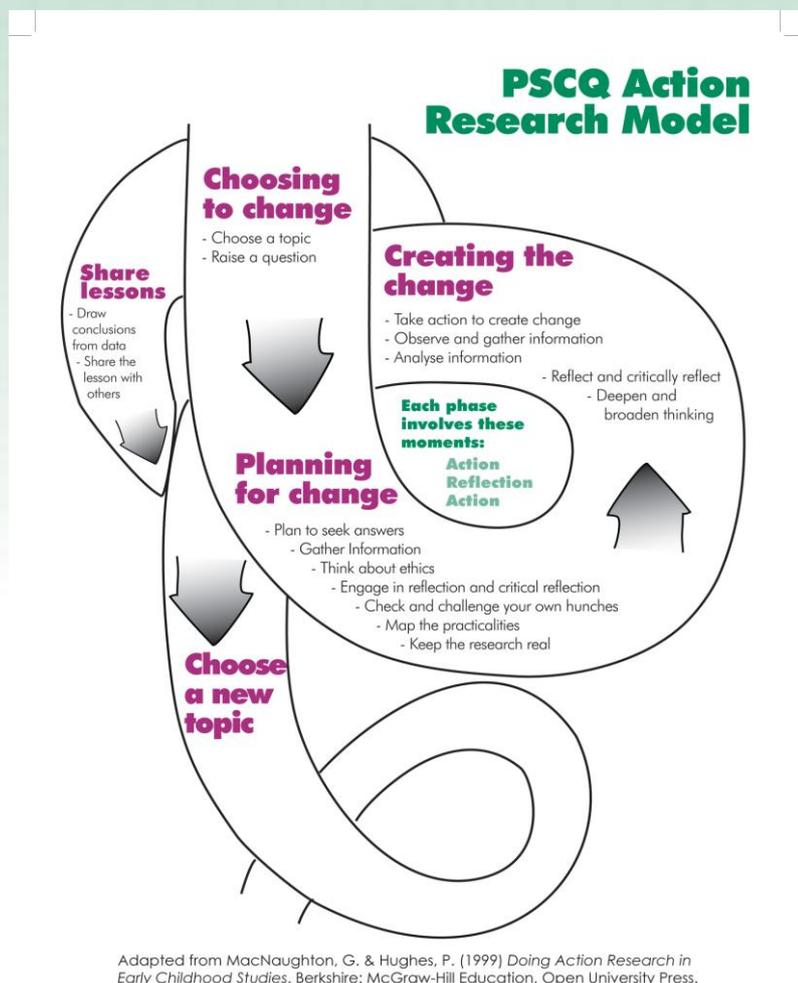
This report draws on the stories and perspectives of educators, facilitators and mentors that were gathered throughout the course of the project to provide an account of the *transformations* experienced by educators and the *outcomes* that have been achieved at personal, service and sector levels.

What is the PSCQ Action Research Project?

The PSCQ Action Research Project was carefully designed to support children’s services leaders and educators in making the transition from supported learning to self-directed learning via on-going engagement with action research. The project model was underpinned by a suite of complementary approaches to professional development including collaborative inquiry, facilitated learning, professional conversations, expert infusion, mentoring and peer-based learning. This dynamic combination of strategies supported leaders and educators to engage with a process that was initially perceived as ‘academic’ to create and manage change in ways that were relevant and responsive to their own service environments and the needs of the children and families they support.

During the course of the project, over 100 leaders and educators from children’s services in six regions across Queensland engaged in eight days of professional development over a 12 month period. With the support of a skilled facilitator, participants were introduced to the action research process outlined in the PSCQ Action Research Model (below) and engaged with the principles and strategies involved in action research in a collaborative cross-service environment. In between each professional development day, leaders and educators practiced and applied these principles through carrying out one or more Action Research

Projects in collaboration with other educators in their respective services and with the support of a mentor. At the 'conclusion' of the project, participants shared the lessons from their action research projects with their peers through "Sharing Day" forums held in their region.



The core participatory components of the project included:

- Participation in an initial Core Learning Day open to all educators in the region
- Participation in six facilitated Action Research Days where leaders and educators came together to learn, collaborate and share perspectives on their individual action research projects in relation to an 'umbrella' theme
- Participation in a second core learning day half way through the process to support learning in relation to a specific topic identified as relevant by the action research group
- Engagement with their mentor in between action research and core learning days
- Independent work associated with designing and implementing their action research projects in collaboration with other educators from their service

- Participation in a final “Sharing Day” where experiences, lessons and outcomes of action research projects were shared with leaders and educators from other services in the region (and beyond).
- Participation in the participatory action evaluation including participation in focus sessions facilitated during Action Research Days and an evaluation focus group on Sharing Day
- Voluntary participation in the PSCQ Action Research Project DVD

To support participation in the project, each service was eligible to receive a participation payment of no more than \$2000.00 to reduce the cost of backfill. Each participating service entered into a contract with the Workforce Council to establish mutual responsibility for participation in, and the delivery of, the project.

The PSCQ Action Research Project model was underpinned by a set of core principles and strategies intended to maximise the impact and sustainability of outcomes for leaders and educators who participated in the project, other educators in their service (through a flow-down learning cycle) and, ultimately children and families. These included:

- Participants from each service must include the leader and at least one other educator
- Participants must attend the eight professional development days and the final sharing day (with allowances made for up to two days of absences due to illness, family responsibilities or responsibilities affecting the viable operation of their service)
- Professional days should be held approximately 4 – 6 weeks apart to allow time to work on projects*
- Participants from each service (and other educators from the service if desired) must receive at least one mentoring session between each professional development day. Where possible, mentoring should be face-to-face.
- Regional action research groups should ideally comprise no more than 10 services (approximately 20 people)
- Projects should not run over the Christmas period*
- Facilitators and mentors are selected on the basis of their skills and knowledge in relation to action research and the content area (ie: the project theme for each region)
- Facilitators and mentors are provided with flexibility to organise their roles in ways that work best for them and participants. This could comprise sharing roles.*
- Where possible, facilitators and mentors should reside/work in the region where the project is taking place
- Mentors must attend professional development days
- Facilitators and mentors should be provided with professional development and support to assist them in carrying out their roles*

How did we evaluate?

A participatory action evaluation underpinned the delivery of the PSCQ Action Research Project from its inception. Given that this represented the first trial of the PSCQ Action Research Project as a model for building action research capacity amongst children's services leaders and educators, an initial evaluation framework was designed to embed, in a structured yet flexible way, the processes that facilitate understanding about if and how the project was making a difference, and to identify opportunities for its continuous improvement. In this respect, the participatory program evaluation framework was underpinned by two overarching objectives:

1. To support the continuous learning amongst the PSCQ project team, facilitators and mentors and drive quality improvement in the design and delivery of the project itself

2. To facilitate a deeper understanding of the emergent outcomes (and their interrelationships) for leaders, educators, services, children and families as they engaged with the action research process over time

What is participatory action evaluation?

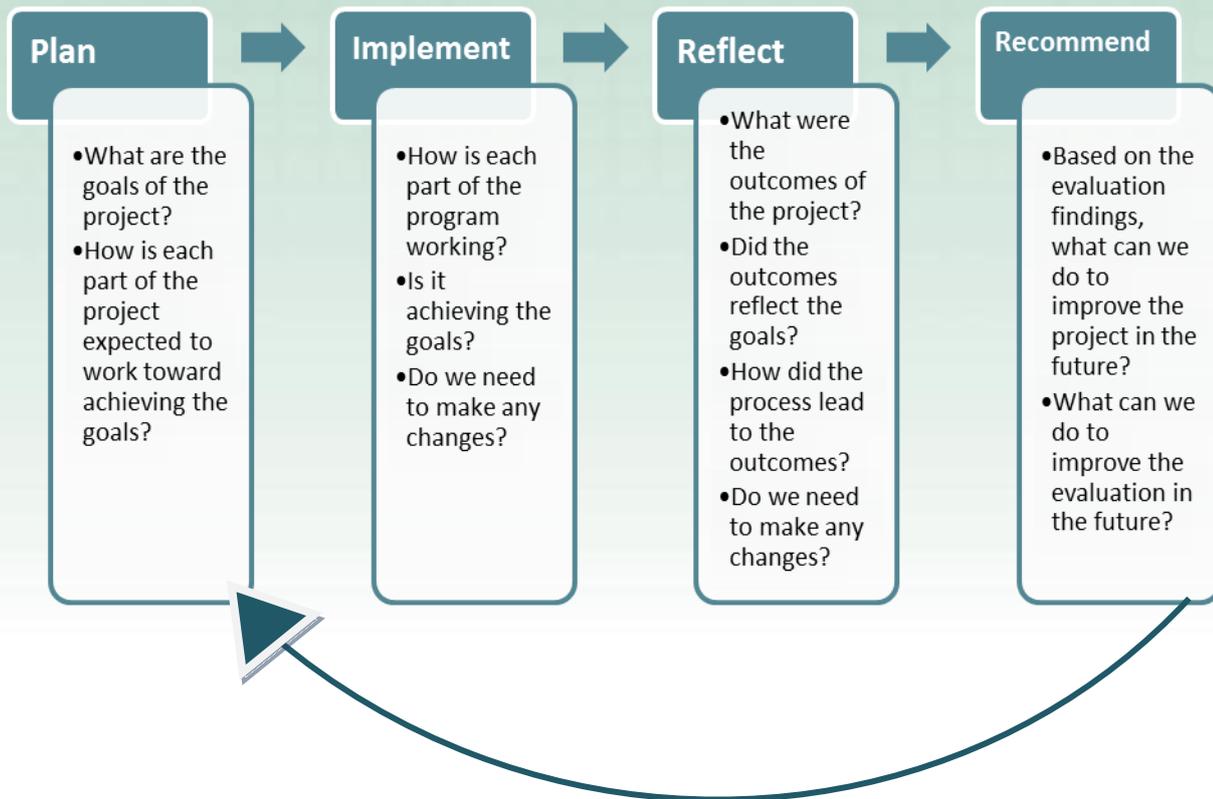
Participatory Action Evaluation is underpinned by the same 'think-do-think' processes and principles of action research. In fact, it is a form of action research, distinct only from other action research projects through its primary objective – to *evaluate*. A participatory approach to evaluation is different from traditional evaluation models in the same way that action research is different from traditional research models. Traditional approaches to research tend to seek 'objectivity' through distancing the role of the researcher from the people and practices they seek to study. The researcher's participation in the field of practice is limited to carrying out specific research functions in accordance with a set time-line. This results in a linear understanding of the research process - beginning with a question and ending with an answer or final conclusion (Wadsworth, 1998). In terms of program evaluation, Aibel (1999) describes this as the "blueprint approach". When using this approach, a program plan is developed at the beginning of a project and acts as a static 'blueprint'. Evaluation is conducted by an independent evaluator and focuses solely on the degree to which the project was carried out in accordance with the blueprint. In many instances, the truth-value or quality of the blueprint itself is not questioned and any deviation from the blueprint is considered an indicator of program 'failure'.

In comparison with traditional approaches to research and evaluation, 'learning process' approaches such as action research and participatory evaluation are better equipped to understand and respond to the complexities of everyday professional practice and program delivery. Rather than seeking objectivity through distancing the researcher from the context of interest, practitioners themselves become the researchers within a cyclic process of continual learning. According to Aibel (1999, p.9), when taking a learning process approach:

...monitoring and evaluation activities are concerned not only with the extent to which the planned activities are carried out but also with **how** they are carried out. In this approach, mechanisms are developed to help [project stakeholders]... learn from both the successes and problems encountered in implementing the activities in order to improve the program in the future.

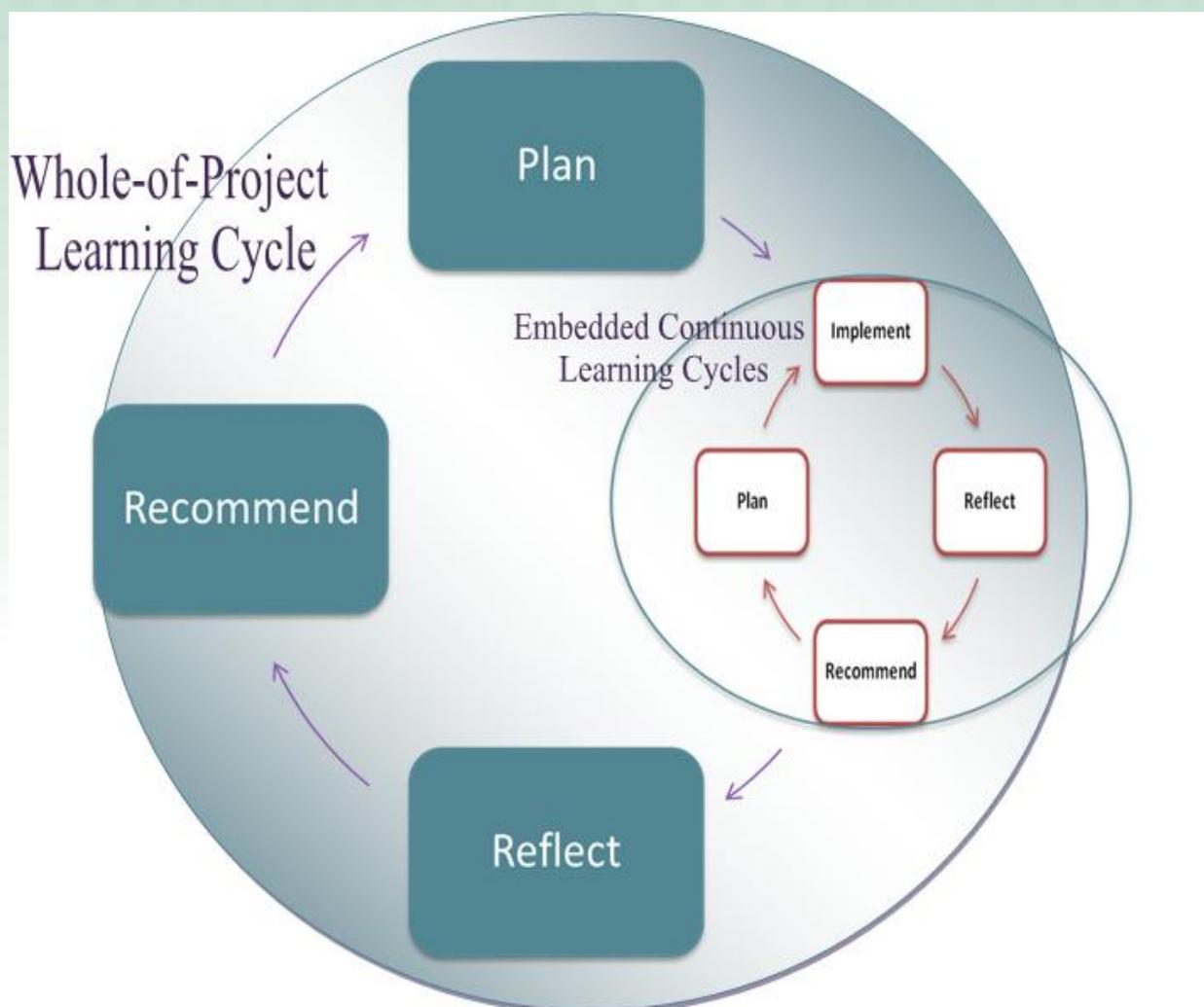
At a 'whole-of-project' level, a learning process approach to evaluation can be conceptualized in relation to core questions that emerge at different stages of the project's learning cycle. These are outlined in Figure 1.

Figure 1: 'Whole-of-Project' Evaluation Model



A key benefit of taking a learning process approach to evaluation is that there is no need to wait until the end of the project before modifications and improvements can be made. Furthermore, problems and difficulties are not seen as indicators of program 'failure' but rather as opportunities to learn. New or different strategies can be implemented on a continuous basis as the project team, facilitators, mentors and participants collaboratively identify 'lessons learned' based on their individual and collective experiences. Hence, a learning process approach to evaluation can be imagined as incorporating a series of learning cycles that are embedded within the implementation phase of the project. The relationship between the 'whole-of-project' learning cycle and 'embedded' learning cycles is depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Continuous Learning Evaluation Cycle



What principles underpinned the evaluation?

The participatory action evaluation of the PSCQ Action Research Project was underpinned by the following principles:

1. All stakeholders in the project will play a valued role in the learning process
2. While the evaluation will address key issues of accountability, it will be concerned primarily with evidence-based learning and the continuous improvement of the project
3. While some aspects of the evaluation framework cannot be modified for accountability, resourcing and/or practical purposes, the framework should be considered to be an evolving document subject to reflection and modification as the project itself evolves
4. All aspects of the evaluation will be underpinned by reflective and ethical practice.

Who was involved?

The participatory action evaluation was premised on the principle that all stakeholders in the project having an active role to play in the project evaluation. This included participation in decisions about how the information collected as part of the evaluation is to be used and what changes should be implemented for the purpose of improving the planning, implementation and outcomes of the project in the future. However, the nature of the PSCQ Action Research Project presented some obstacles to *all* participants being able to engage in *all* aspects of the evaluation – from planning through to decision-making. Some of these obstacles included:

- In addition to the project team, there were over 100 leaders and educators directly involved in the project and hundreds more who collaborated in the action research projects carried out in services.
- Participating services and educators were geographically dispersed across six regions in Queensland
- Regional Action Research Projects followed different time-lines, with some beginning in 2009 and others not beginning until mid-2010.

Given these obstacles, roles of different stakeholders in the participatory action evaluation were organized in different ways to support the active participation from all stakeholders while simultaneously ensuring that evaluation processes are well-planned, strategically managed and accountable at a 'whole-of-project' level. The roles of different stakeholders in the evaluation are described in Table 1.

Table 1: Roles in the Evaluation

ROLE	
Leaders and Educators	<p>Educators experienced the project from the 'front line' and, as such, were best equipped to assess if/how various aspects of the project worked to achieve outcomes for themselves, their services and children and families. Educator feedback provided the fundamental 'evidence' through which to learn the lessons that will shape regional action research projects and the project as a whole in the future.</p> <p>A limitation of the participatory action evaluation is that it relies primarily on the views of the educators who participated directly in the regional action research 'communities of practice'. There were many more educators who worked collaboratively within their</p>

	services to design and carry out the action research projects.
Facilitators	Facilitators played a primary role in facilitating reflective conversations throughout the course of the project and collating the views of participants in their regions. Facilitators will also played a valuable role in assisting the Evaluation Coordinator and Project Management Team through communicating lessons learned by educators and through their own experiences that assisted with the continuous improvement of the project and the identification of outcomes.
Mentors	Mentors for regional groups provided a valuable alternative perspective on how aspects of the project worked, particularly those related to educators' experiences of engaging independently with action research in the context of their own teams and services.
Project Management Team	The Project Management Team played a vital role in gathering information from project stakeholders throughout the course of the project, particularly information pertaining to the structure, organization, implementation and decision-making processes embedded in the project. The Project Management Team was also primarily responsible for supporting and implementing changes to the project based on 'lessons learned' throughout the course of the project.
Evaluation Coordinator	The primary role of the evaluation coordinator was to work in partnership with all project stakeholders to facilitate evaluation processes and advise/assist with understanding, analysing and drawing conclusions from evaluation data. During the 'reflection' phase of the evaluation, the evaluation coordinator was also be responsible for the collection and analysis of data, with the intent of protecting participant confidentiality and drawing together a 'Whole-of-Project' perspective.

What methods did we use?

A cross-section of qualitative 'data collection' methods were used to provide stakeholders with the opportunity to provide their perspectives and participate in the learning process. Formal data collection methods used included 'focus sessions' at the conclusion of each Action Research Day and, at the conclusion of each regional action research project, focus groups with educators and interviews with facilitators and mentors were conducted. A range of

informal and/or 'emergent' data collection methods were also used to identify and collate information and experiences 'as they occurred'. Table 2 outlines the types of data collection methods and processes that informed the participatory action evaluation over the course of the project.

Table 2: Data Collection Methods

	Purpose/Aim	Stakeholder Group	Process/Method
Planning	Identifying and understanding process and outcome expectations	Educators & ISFs	Focus Session – Expectations of the Project
		Facilitators	Program theory 'Mind-dump';
		Project Team	Program theory 'Mind-dump'
Implementation	Monitoring and reflection on emergent outcomes and how the project's processes facilitate or impede the realisation of outcomes	Educators & ISFs	Personal reflection
			Webs (or mind-maps) of research project activities and outcomes
			Action Research Day Focus Sessions
			Feedback to facilitator & mentor
			Feedback to Project Team
		Facilitators & Mentors	Personal reflection and reflective conversations
			Observations/recollections from Action Research and Core Learning days
			Sharing of resources, processes and outcomes
			Feedback to Project Team Members
			Feedback to Evaluation Coordinator
		Project Team	Personal reflection and reflective conversations
			Observations/recollections from Regional Network Meetings
Ad-hoc communications with facilitators,			

			mentors and educators
			Organisation and administration experiences
Reflection	Explore and identify project outcomes in relation to the project goals, the processes employed and modifications made during the course of the project	Educators	Focus Groups facilitated by Evaluation Coordinator
			Voluntary participation in DVD
			Insights shared with peers on Sharing Day
		Facilitators & Mentors	Interview facilitated by Evaluation Coordinator
		Project Team	Reflective Conversations

A further set of quantitative data was collected to support the evaluation. This included:

- Project Budgets and Expenditure
- Participant Attendance Records
- Time-sheets from Facilitators and Mentors
- Project/Regional time-lines and stage/project completion records

What did we find?

The PSCQ Action Research Project gave rise to a diverse range of outcomes for educators, children's services, children and families. Each *individual* action research project carried out by leaders and educators in each participating children's service had its own set of outcomes tied specifically to the nature of that project (eg: the particular research question chosen, methods used, etc). However, over and above outcomes linked to specific action research projects carried out within services, a common set of outcomes emerged for educators, services and regional 'communities of practice' spanning across the PSCQ Action Research Project as a whole. These outcomes can be linked to a process of transformation that occurred for leaders, educators and their teams through engagement with the action research *process*, enhanced by the support provided by educators in their regional 'community of practice' and their facilitator and mentor.

A summary of 'tangible' project outcomes

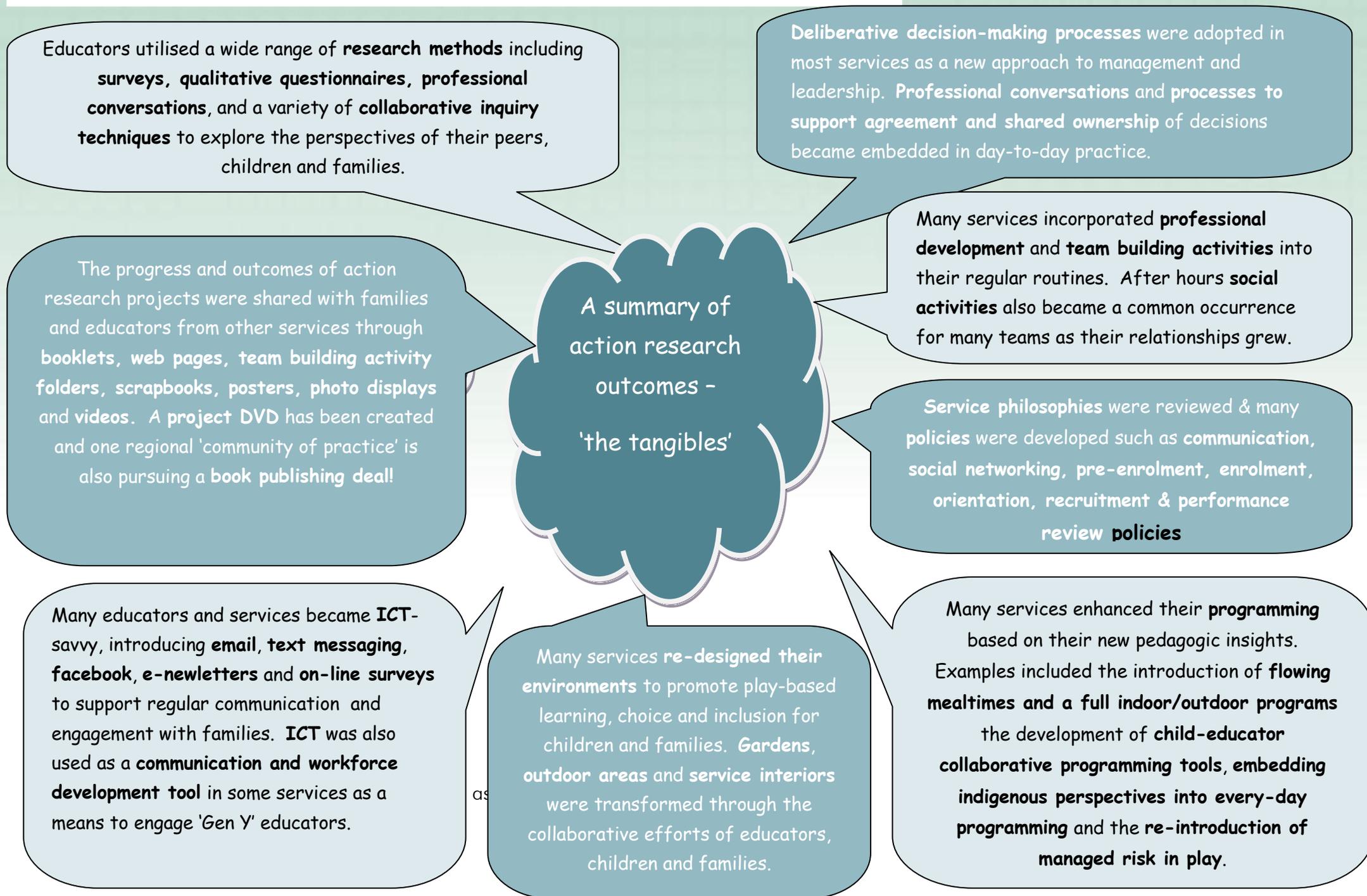
A diverse range of 'tangible' outcomes resulted from the action research projects carried out within each children's service. Here, 'tangible' outcomes refer to actual products produced, new strategies/methods utilized or deliberate changes made (eg: to programming or

environments) through the course of individual action research projects. The diversity of 'tangible' outcomes reflects the diversity of topics and questions that leaders and educators identified in relation to their specific service contexts, needs and interests. No attempt is made here to provide in-depth accounts of individual projects, due to the number of projects and the difficulties associated with maintaining the authenticity of stories through a third hand account. However, looking across the spectrum of action research projects carried out by leaders and educators from participating children's services, the 'tangible' outcomes from the project can be summarized in relation to eight prominent themes including:

- Research and engagement methods
- Deliberative decision-making processes
- Professional development and team building
- Service philosophy review and policy development
- Programming
- Designing environments
- Engagement with ICT
- Project publications and communication mediums

Figure 3, overleaf, provides a summary of the 'tangible' outcomes of action research projects in relation to each theme.

Figure 3: Summary of 'tangible' outcomes of the PSCQ Action Research Project

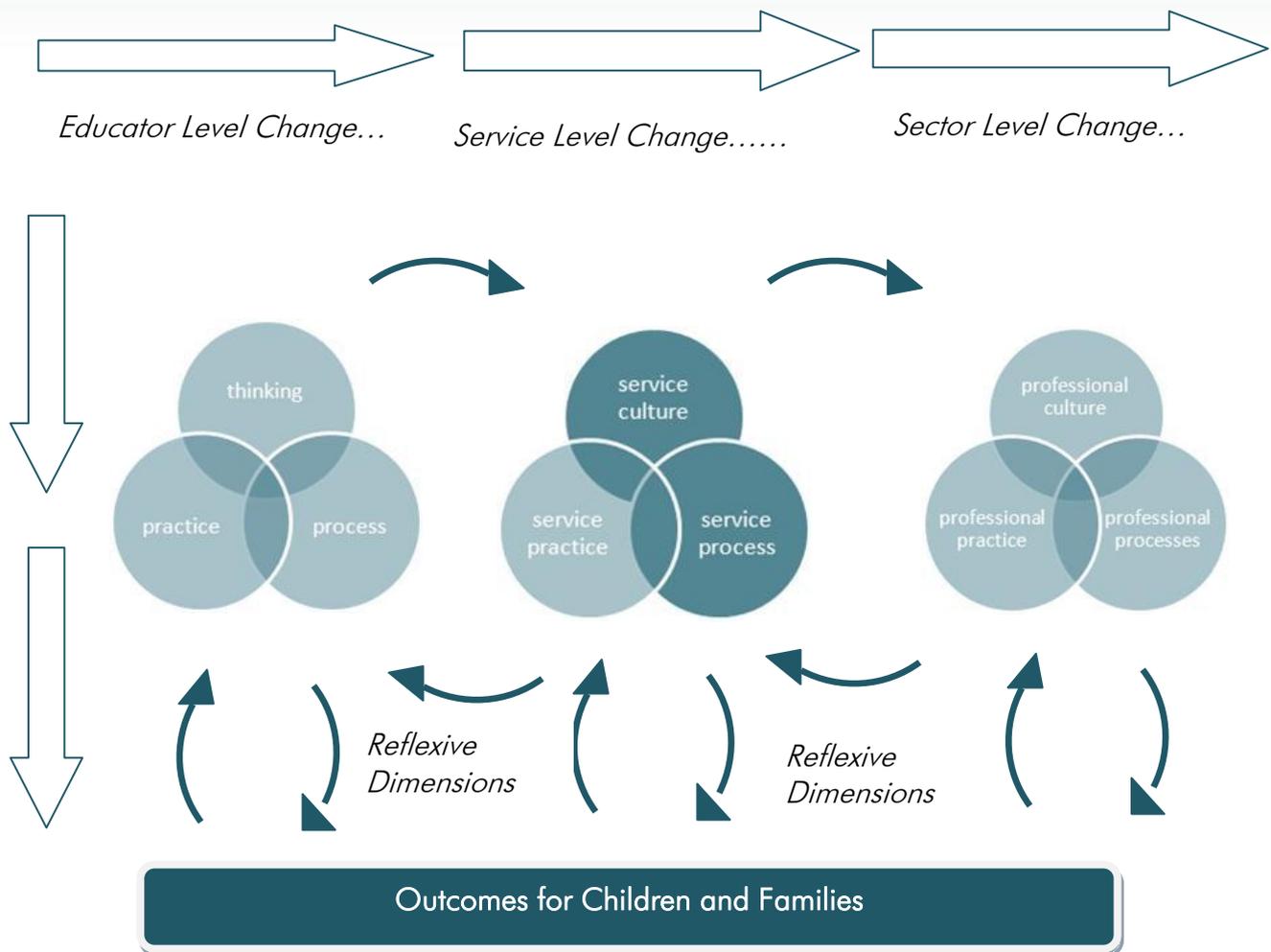


A Framework for Understanding Transitional Learning Outcomes

In addition to the 'tangible' outcomes described above, many outcomes of the PSCQ Action Research Project were complex and dynamic, resonating at personal, professional, service and sector levels. Focus groups with educators at the conclusion of the project, supported by their own documentation and facilitated conversations over the course of the project, enabled outcomes to be 'tracked' at different levels. This facilitated the development of a framework for understanding the outcomes of the project as they occurred as part of the transition from supported learning to self-directed learning through engagement with the action research process.

Framework for understanding the transitional 'outcomes' of the PSCQ Action Research Project

Temporal dimension



The *Transitional Outcomes Framework* outlines how project outcomes reflect systemic and interconnected 'layers' of change. The systemic qualities of change are threefold:

First, change can be imagined as occurring at different levels where:

- Individual educators experienced change representing outcomes for themselves in terms of how they think, the processes they use and their personal practice in relation to their peers, children and families.
- Changes occurred in children's services through engagement with the action research process resulting in outcomes relating to the culture within each service, service process, and service practice. Here, service process and practice can be distinguished where process refers to the more formal, routine or explicit aspects of the service, and practice refers to the collective application of tacit knowledge, skills and understanding in the provision of education and care.
- At the sector level, changes were observed representing outcomes for the children's services education and care profession in relation to its culture (including how it is experienced by leaders and educators and perceived by the broader community) as well as the processes and practices that 'link' educators and services with each other, other sectors and the broader community.
- Changes at educator, service and sector levels created outcomes for children and families. In many cases outcomes for children and families were explicit and tangible, although many educators also described the implicit benefits children and families derived from outcomes experienced at other levels.

Second, changes occur *over time*, highlighting how many outcomes of the PSCQ Action Research Project were temporally organised. That is, one outcome led to another and then another in a 'knock-on' or 'filtering' effect as leaders and educators engaged with different stages of the action research process. In this respect, some outcomes were dependent on the prior achievement of other kinds of outcomes. For example, a shift in thinking on the part of an individual educator (outcome 1) led to a change in her practice (outcome 2) which, in turn, led to a change in the quality of relationships with her peers and/or the children she worked with (outcome 3).

Third, change also has reflexive dimensions, with many outcomes experienced through the project illustrating the multi-directional cause and effect relationships inherent in the process of transition. In this respect, many outcomes achieved provided 'feedback loops' that reinforced or enhanced outcomes previously achieved and sometimes created challenges that forced re-engagement with a stage in the action research process and a 're-enforcement' of outcomes previously achieved in order to move forward.

What were the outcomes of the PSCQ action research project?

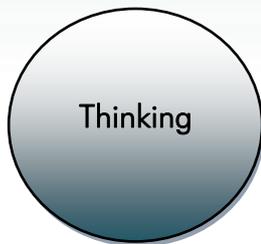
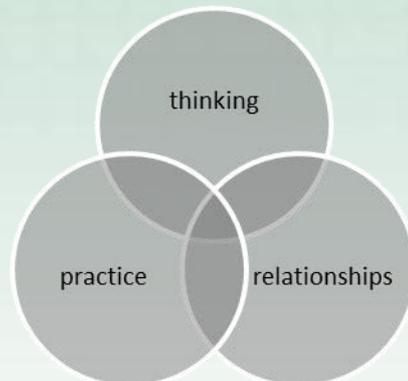
OUTCOMES FOR INDIVIDUAL EDUCATORS

Educators who participated in the Action Research Project reported a wide range of outcomes that related to their own personal and professional development.

It has probably been the most profound professional development experience that I've ever had.

I just did not realise the impact it would have on me professionally, personally.... It's really been amazing like that.

Educator Level Change...



In this context, educators described significant shifts in their thinking, their practice and their relationships. Initial shifts in thinking occurred early in the process as educators were exposed to the diversity of perspectives from their peers.

I suppose when I first started this project I was thinking "Oh my goodness, what have I got myself into? What am I going to have to do?" and it wasn't until we had our first meeting and we started to explore the question "What is professionalism? What is ownership?" and it really got me thinking. Everyone's point of view was so different so I got some inspiration from that.

...then we realised that we had just assumed... that people were feeling that way so we needed to find out a bit more about it. So then we asked questions about change.

For me, just knowing myself better. And from going through it, just putting all these things on others, just stopping and thinking, 'oh, hang on, I do that too'.

Over time, shifts in thinking continued to occur as educators engaged in the action research process and were impacted by the outcomes experienced at different levels. For many, the process culminated in a new or renewed sense of self-confidence, professionalism and an optimistic attitude to managing and creating change.

I think doing this research has been the starting point for me to go with change and say 'hey you can do this' and find a way to do it rather than thinking 'that's going to be too hard' because it's not too hard. It's about finding a starting point and working towards that.

It gave me, I guess, the motivation to go ahead and to do what I needed to do to want to stay in the industry but without action research I don't think I would have stayed in the industry.

I think the process, particularly for myself, learning to back myself basically. So this has given me an opportunity to – I felt really out of my depth when I came here and it's given me the confidence to know that what I do have to say and think and feel is very relevant.



Shifts in educators' thinking were closely tied to their engagement with action research as a process. Here, time played a critical role in the transition from 'outside-in' to 'inside-out' professional development (Sheridan et al, 2010). Initially, 'out-side-in' learning took place as educators were supported by facilitators and mentors to learn the tangible action research steps and methods. Over time, leaders and educators embraced 'inside-out' learning where action research became an embedded process that informed their approaches to work and life.

You know like it was a really scary thing and you thought 'this is too much' and you saw this as a great big process and eventually it just becomes what you're doing.

You can carry it into any area, your personal life, the children, your own children, any relationship that you have you can carry it into your interactions with the children in your room.

I think that doing that action research project has shown, taught us, that there's a flexible structural process that can be put in place to welcome in change and for that process of change to take place in a positive way but not missing steps.

... for some of us it's been about learning to have faith in the process... Some of us, in the beginning, were a bit unsure because we didn't have that end result of where we were headed but as we started and actually got involved it's just a process that keeps growing and growing and growing and making it relevant - like for you with your centre and mine with mine. Like taking ownership over that and having faith that you can do it.

I think it's been a fantastic tool for understanding the framework and also bringing in a sense of belonging. Because... we were interested in doing another centre, adding on, and I thought this would be really great to develop this deeper [understanding] but it's become a tool that you can use all the time.



Educators spoke of a wide variety of changes in their practice. Some of the changes related to the newly acquired research skills and the application of research methods and techniques such as surveys, qualitative questionnaires and a variety of collaborative inquiry techniques.

Learned survey monkey. I guess that was when my enthusiasm grew ... peaked I think. Like this is tangible. You can actually see results from this. We can take that information and we can use it in a whole range of things which is what we did.

But we've learnt so many processes and strategies that we can use in our daily work and do our own action research in the areas that we work.

And open spaces I think is such a time saving tool and I would never have had any idea of how to collect that much information in such a short amount of time from such a large group of people without having that session. And the world café...

Almost regardless of the topic of the action research projects undertaken, many leaders and educators also noted a change in their practice in relation to other leaders and educators in their teams. In many ways, these accounts illustrate how the reflexive dimensions of change facilitate *transitions* for individual educators as shifts in practice create flow-on outcomes for others, yet return to individuals in the form of affirmative feedback and growth in personal relationships.

I've seen a change in my behaviour, my staff's behaviour and the families as well.

....the biggest change was between me and Jemelia and I think the other half was seeing her personal growth has given me a chance to realise that some of the things was more shyness for her. And we have developed such a relationship now through all these activities we've been doing. She's going to be just like me when she grows up! Ha ha!

So you cannot change all this, you can only change yourself so we started to read a lot of theories about changing. You can be motivators but you cannot change people. And that was a big move from our perspectives as being 'the expert' but facilitating processes for people to use reflective practice about their own journeys during the process of change.

So we wanted to learn more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander culture and how that infiltrated the educators and their educational programs so that we could have some sort of educational value for the children and families using our services. So we started doing that thinking that we could just provide educators with resources but we ended up educating ourselves and it's been a very positive outcome for us so far and we're only just that far into it. We've still got a long way to go.

Educators also reported a wide range of changes in practice relating to their pedagogy, service environments and engagement with children and families. Interestingly, many of the 'tangible' changes were described in the context of changes in practice at a team or service level, highlighting the reflexive relationship between outcomes associated with service culture, process and practice that resonated back on individual leaders and educators in the form of reflective practice.

Because I think it's really not until you listen to people that you start understanding some things and when you're just up here all by yourself trying to make decisions and you don't listen to all those people that you work with or connect with everyday like families, you don't really understand.

And parents, when you chat to the parents about that they really appreciate to know that you are taking these issues on board and that you are thinking about them a lot. They're comforted to know that you feel that appreciation for them when you invite them into the project with you.

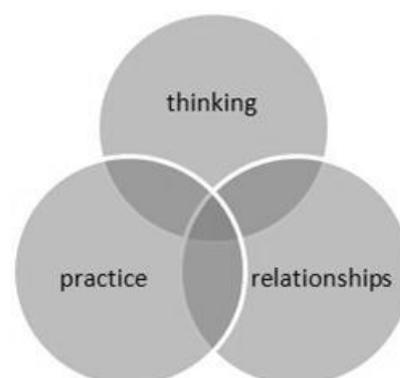
Instead of saying 'no' we're now looking at why we're saying 'no'. You know is it because we are afraid that they'll get hurt and if that's what we're afraid of it's about [how we can] educate the kids to think about it themselves rather than us telling them 'no'.

For me, just knowing myself better. And from going through it, just putting all these things on others, just stopping and thinking, 'oh, hang on, I do that too'. And also that I don't have to have all the answers and I'm one of these people who likes to have all the answers and wants to know all the ins and outs and be in total control. And it's exhausting. And it's not what everyone wants. It doesn't give everybody a chance to have their own say. So, taking a step back and realising that I don't have to solve it all, I don't have to control it all – it was really a big moment!

OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

One of the primary intents of the PSCQ Action Research Project was for leaders and educators participating in the project to lead their own self-determined action research project in their own service. Through this process significant outcomes were achieved at service levels – these outcomes related to changes in service culture, the processes underpinning service delivery and the practices employed by teams of educators in the delivery of education and care for children and families.

Service Level Change...





Service Culture

Educators described a wide range of shifts in relationships and attitudes that point to substantial changes in the culture of participating children's services.

I think for us, action research actually changes the culture of your place and that's a really, obviously that's been very positive for everyone so that's a good thing.

And I have asked people what they feel the changes have come in over the last year and they can't, they just say that it's a really intangible thing. They can't really say, they don't know what's changed, they just know that something has, and there's a lightness and a positiveness in the centre that just wasn't there before.

Many educators described changes in service culture in terms of the relationships between educators in their teams. For some services, this change reflected transformations in culture: *... with us it's made the bond stronger. When you're trying to make changes as a Director in a centre and it's you on your own against pretty much 18 staff it's hard. But when you've got another person who believes in what you're doing, it builds the bond between us and we've now got other group leaders and other assistants who are going 'Well, hey, I want to be a part of that!'. So they are now getting involved and it's making our team a lot stronger.*

And the girls actually want to spend time together now. More like a family at work than just working together. We actually want to be together and a couple of the girls have actually said that they come to work to feel better about what's going outside of work because the girls cheer each other up and [we] can talk to each other now.

This time of the year I would say normally my staff would be pretty agro because there's a lot of stress at this time of the year. And this year, although there's pressure, there's a certain amount of calmness and just an attitude of 'let's get on with it together'.

While some changes in culture were 'transformational' in nature, a few educators described culture change as slow and presenting continuing challenges.

We still have a long way to go with getting people to come forward with their issues. We've got a lot of work to do there. As you were saying people come forward in positive ways. They're not in our service and that's something that's been acknowledged through this action research. So we do have a lot of work to do to strengthen our relationships with the other people who work within our services and to accept that there's no one best way to do something.

For most girls in the centre they can see small changes in the centre... They feel positive about their work environment, feelings towards each other so yeah I think overall it's been slow. Just little things that are more important to them rather than the big thing.

Regardless of the extent of culture change that had been achieved in different children's services, a common thread in educator's descriptions inferred significant change in leadership and management culture. Even amongst directors and educators who felt they had not yet fully succeeded in shifting the culture of their teams, the importance of valuing different perspectives and involving others was frequently highlighted.

I've found being group leader in some situations those decisions would have been made for you and now it gives everyone in the centre a sense of ownership and it empowers them because we are actually valuing their opinions. Even sometimes when we can't, we talk to them and say 'well this is not really going to work because of [this] but we can steer it in a different direction.'

After that, the relationship we have built with these six educators that are in the core group has gone from strength to strength. They've really felt part of moving forward I guess because they have been involved. It's not just the office saying you're going to do this now.

I think when we first started off we knew that there was a problem but no one could step up and say let's do this, let's do that, because no one was really invited to. And I think when we started this we realised that we could invite everyone to be involved and people felt, 'hey, I'm allowed to be a part of something'.

For me personally, it's made my job as director at this centre much more enjoyable. It's taken a lot of the workload off me. I've been able to concentrate on what I need to do in the office to enable them to do what I used to do on the floor by giving them the decision-making ownership.

In addition to culture change amongst teams, leaders and educators described the various ways in which their service culture had become more inclusive for educators and families and more child-focused. Their stories highlight how changes instigated by individual educators have created flow-on and feed-back effects that build relationships and connections between educators, children and families that converge to create an inclusive service culture.

The other two [Indigenous] staff members have just said to me recently that this is the first childcare centre that they've ever worked in or ever been in that they immediately know that they're valued because in the front we have our action research wall that's got our Acknowledgement to Country, our Indigenous flag, the Torres Strait Islander flag, the Australian flag and then all the mind maps of the processes that we've gone through. They automatically knew walking through the door that their culture was going to be valued, their

heritage, their history and who they are was going to be valued and not be seen as a burden on their employment.

I really feel that they are connected and in our situation, probably there's been a core lot of educators that have been really involved and that ownership has just grown and grown but it was when the parents and the families started getting involved that that ownership grew within the professionals and within the communities because it was growing within everyone then – it was growing in the children, it was growing in us and it was growing in the families and I think that's what's really made a difference.

I guess in the end the whole ethos of our centre has changed from being quiet and the same. You know we always thought we were being very child focused but now it's sort of finding ways to let the children do the things that they really want to do rather than stopping them from doing them.



Contributing to shifts in service culture, were changes in the explicit processes, routines and procedures employed within children's services. At the fore was the use of the action research process through following the steps associated with the research process and employing different methods for developing questions and gathering and analysing information to inform and evaluate practice.

We put easels up where we would have a question per week to pose [to families], a challenging question, and we got feedback that way. We just felt that by doing it that way rather than put something in our pocket they were going to respond more positively and we got massive support doing it that way.

So we took that to the staff and posted it on the notice board and asking them for input there and then we were going to bring it up at a staff meeting and before the staff meeting we gave them a letter asking them to think about it... we also did a thank you saying thank you very much for your input – greatly appreciated. And then at that staff meeting, it was a wonderful staff meeting, and we had lots of ideas flowing.

We started off with a couple of ideas of our own but what we really found, after we got the results back from our parent survey which we did on-line, there was some pretty confronting information that came through on that and we had to take a step back and look at it through their eyes.

The lessons learned through the deliberate use of the action research process resulted in a wide range of changes in formal and informal processes to promote quality underpinned by the principles of the Early Years Learning Framework. For example, many services

implemented changes in programming to support being, belonging and becoming for children:

We first started with the benefits of uninterrupted play but it led us to introduce flowing meal times and a full indoor outdoor program into our centre which has been really amazing for our centre and our staff and for the children and families as well. Our centre flows beautifully throughout the day.

...we had a breakthrough where home corner would be with real plates and real glasses even in our two year old room and I'd walk into the nursery and they'd have glass jars and the kids would be practicing pulling the lids on and off of ceramic jars and things like this... there was times when we had to talk to parents about it because we had a real cutlery set in one of the rooms and a parent was like, 'what about the knives?' They're only butter knives but for that parent that was a concern so we had to deal with things like that along the way.

*And what we've come up with is creating an opportunity for the older children to jump in and create some activities for them. And by doing that we're creating a page where you [develop] the program **with** the older children. At the moment we're talking about ideas for excursions that the older children are able to do and keep them engaged.*

Other services focused on enhancing processes associated with building stronger partnerships with families:

[Educators] came to meetings and we explained the data we collected on this word 'partnership' and we explored that and what sort of tools might we make and they did this genie lamp that they made with three wishes about what they could change about the relationships they had with the families that they were working with now.

It's changed our centre philosophy, our parent handbook changed, our enrolment procedures, our orientation process – it changed everything about the centre.

So it has worked really well and its been really positive and we've actually formed a parent committee so other parents get the word and get the info and that spreads through the families rather than me doing the work all the time so the parents are very reliable with that.

In many services, a range of leadership and management processes were also established or re-designed to promote workforce development for teams of educators. These included processes surrounding deliberative decision-making, team building, professional development, recruitment and retention.

So from this team building process we have a weight loss challenge, an exercise group's formed, we've had a couple of morning teas out of the centre, an employee of the month, various staff meetings on how we're going to promote team work at the centre over all and I'm sure all of our ladies at work have felt that positive change has happened in the centre.

We all swap ideas now because we're all in our individual rooms we have a team with the group leader and the assistant but now we are a team as the whole entire centre instead of just individual groups.

We started off with group leader meetings every week or every fortnight where I would take all my group leaders off the floor together and I would have some time, just decisions that I needed made like programming or things that were happening at the centre... and that was the time that we would sit together and [group leaders] had that time off the floor to make those decisions as a group. So we have group leaders meetings and we do lunch time meetings as well. I think I've enabled them to have time to make those decisions and [that] was not happening before.

The reason we got involved to try to promote professionalism amongst the leaders in our [organization] through a new induction process which we've achieved I think. We've moved in different directions throughout that. Now we are developing a new induction process so everyone coming on board understands how they fit within it...

While in some cases, these processes were the focus of particular services' action research projects, in many cases, they represented unintentional flow-on effects from engaging with the action research process.

The activities that we've done at the staff meetings have been fun things that we've learned here so that's been a really positive thing. So in just over the period of a year I've been able to sit back and let the staff run their own meetings so that's been extremely positive.

So as I was trying to motivate the team to come on board with it I had to think, is it in their job descriptions? So I re-did all the job descriptions. And we still needed to look at the assessment side of it too so that became a part of it. So, yeah... you can't just look at one part. You have to look at the whole thing is what I found.

And I think mine is systemic change and I think my teachers now value critical reflection time and they don't see that as a waste of time or something that you don't block off a section of your day to do. Because if you're trying to communicate with a parent about their child's day and they're rushing... as a teacher you need that reflection time to think about how can we differently approach this parent.



The overarching aim of the PSCQ Action Research Project was to “set the foundations for practice improvement through continual learning and progressive problem solving” (PSCQ, 2009). The project model was explicitly designed to promote the transfer of knowledge and skills

learned by leaders and educators participating directly in the project to other educators in their service to facilitate change in practice at a service level. Hence, it is outcomes relating to service practice that provide the key source of evidence against which to assess the overarching effectiveness of the project.

In this respect, several educators commented on how the use of action research as a conscious process had informed the up-take of practices that have become embedded at the service level. Their descriptions point to the application of tacit knowledge and skills on the part of educators that represent 'what we do' as a service:

So we had to make that connection with the staff to get the staff and our parents on board to understand that this is a long term thing that is going to make a big impact on our community and to get the staff to pull down their differences and to create the third perspective when it comes to 'I've got history and you've got history and you've got history but we need to all put those prejudices aside to make it better for the children in the service'. So once we broke down those barriers the staff very much jumped on board with it and had no issues with it and now it's just what we do.

We don't even do the evaluations anymore because now it's just flowing and its easy and staff are just doing it themselves.

It wasn't just about making changes to the activities and the experiences that the children were doing but it's created a change in our head on how we do things now and we're always conscious now of being culturally respectful.

As the time went on over 12 months, the Action Research Project name went out the window and we kept doing it but we were doing it without recognising it... It was just 'we've got an idea and we think we might tackle this and how do you feel'. And that process then just started to flow without us even realising.

Once you know the process of action research - and that was something that I felt was really good was learning about those processes that are behind action research like literature reviews, gathering data, surveys, all of those things that you don't do in your day to day life very often and you might have done it differently before - learning more about that has opened up the process – it's demystified the process and you just do it all the time now. It's part of the professional understandings that you have at work.

Another dimension of service practice commonly described by educators was the adoption of continual learning and support processes amongst educators. Their descriptions highlighted mentoring, professional conversations, reflective practice and collaboration as practices that have become embedded in their service.

So it got everybody and instead of it being like a negative it became a positive because then it became a link between the educators that they had in common with each other... And then they started mentoring. Someone might have had the courage to ask that person for help. They were writing learning stories but didn't know how to do the learning outcomes. Or it might have been stories that weren't rich enough or they didn't know how to put the photos onto the learning stories so it just sort of gained momentum but in a positive way.

[Educators] are so enthused. Just professional conversations about their day-to-day and all the little things that led up to building those partnerships... and they go and talk to others and then we have workshop. So in these realms of things it just feeds through the whole scheme.

But doing it together, that collaboration, makes such a difference to the sense of ownership. It doesn't really happen if a couple of people keep the dream and they try to fulfil it. So action research I think has really facilitated that. It's helped us understand that more deeply.

I think too... probably our really profound learning, and that's gone through to our whole service, is the whole process of critical reflection and how important that is in everything that we do and really how simple it is. You know like it was a really scary thing and you thought 'this is too much' and you saw this as a great big process and eventually it just becomes what you're doing

It's exceeded in my mind. I think I didn't really expect that you would probably get that much out of it and what we've learnt. It's continual learning for us.

Most importantly, from the staff point of view, I've noticed a huge change in the staff's outlooks. It actually made them a lot more reflective of their own practices and really challenging, if they had a certain belief, really challenging why and quite often when you ask them that, they quite often don't know why they felt so passionate about something when they then reflected it back and sort of made those decisions to 'hey, let's do something different. Let's make a change'. And I mean the outcomes have just been amazing. And for me as a director watching the staff's confidence and their ability to walk the talk has just been amazing.

Many more educators surmised the long-term application of action research and continual learning as an implicit service practice through their descriptions of its 'never-ending' and 'on-going' nature:

I find that I do mini action research things and I don't even realise I'm using it. If we've got a problem at work and I say 'Okay, we need to link that back to our philosophies'. We get together, share ideas, collate it and it's a little mini-action research project. It might not go for a year. It might only go for three weeks and we've got an outcome.

That's where we've seen the biggest change. We're all listening to each other and understanding, we've got a direction to go in, we've got some dreams that we're all trying to fulfil and everyone's helping each other and obviously the children are benefiting from all of it. It's just an on-going thing.

And I guess where we are now, we know we're near the end but you think you're coming to the end but you're actually at the start of something else. So it's going to be going on and on forever.

It's all their input so it's another action research project. We're pursuing our partnerships with families – that's on-going, forever. But we've got a lot more information behind us to work through.

OUTCOMES FOR THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES SECTOR

Sector Level Change...

Given the scale of the project, it was not expected to have transformational outcomes at a sector level in isolation of the broader context of professional development and support provided by the PSCQ. Despite this, a number of outcomes were achieved that indicate that the PSCQ Action Research Project has provided a strong foundation for participating leaders, educators and services to influence the culture, process and practice of the children's services sector in their regions.



With respect to the capacity of the project to influence sector culture, of particular note was the way in which the project worked to build a strong sense of professionalism amongst leaders and educators. This new or renewed sense of professionalism represented an important temporal and reflexive element of the outcomes that resulted from the project at all levels. In essence, as educators developed an increased sense of professionalism within themselves over time, they also developed the confidence to instigate and drive change resulting in a spectrum of outcomes which, in turn, reinforced their individual and collective identities as professionals.

Yes! We are a professional service here and we are professionals and we need to be respected for that.

I think it's give us a better understanding of what professional means.

And [our facilitator and mentor] definitely validated us as professionals and they treated us with so much respect and validated all the different services.

Exactly how leaders and educators own professional growth and self-confidence will impact on sector culture outside of participating services remains largely unknown. However, the accounts of several leaders and educators highlight the potential for their own understandings of professionalism to be reflexively transferred to others in the sector through setting new expectations relating how professionals behave and how they ought to be treated by others.

I think that's the problem with professionalism. We don't value ourselves. We think that we're just doing a job but we are professional people who probably need to be recognised more so in the community than we are. But I think with projects like this we're going to probably get out there into the community with a voice and the community will value us more. .. not just with our parents, within the whole community because the parents come and go and come and go. It's the community that stays there forever...

I think just to articulate to people say how excited you were by the project and how much we've learned from each other and also as a centre you personalise and contextualise. That's what professionals do. They go and take what they need. It's a living thing so they're making sense of it for them as well.

... we will have it eventually for all levels of entry but right now its all the directors and making sure they are professional, that they all behave professionally and making sure they really understand what we're going to expect of them.



Sector Process

Cross-service collaboration was an underpinning principle of the PSCQ Action Research Project, which is reflective of the Workforce Council's broader approach to industry engagement and workforce learning and development. In this case, the project design supported leaders and educators from different services to come together for at least nine days over the course of a year. In addition to learning and applying the action research process, leaders and educators described the collaboration with leaders and educators from other services in their regions as resulting in its own set of outcomes. Their comments highlight the reflexive relationship between participating in collaborative cross-service processes and the outcomes that manifested for services and individual educators.

I think that... for us to get together with our different personalities, our different experiences, our different attitudes to things, creates a change... we're looking at things with a new lens. Just from spending time with other people. You know, I haven't met you before and I look at what you've done in your old position as a group leader and how inspirational you're going to be in your centre. And I look at that and go 'oh wow, I hope my group leaders know how

much I value them' and it's a conceptual change from being with these personalities here. And that's got nothing to do with my project, that's got to do with these people here and it's about my professionalism and how I carry out my role.

To have some time set aside to actually meet with professionals... Working with this whole group has been extremely valuable and we've obviously made some strong links from service to service as well. So I think just to have the time to engage in those professional conversations has been really useful.

... it was really refreshing to come here and be around like-minded professionals and actually know that people understood where you were coming from in that sort of sense. And just hearing [our facilitator and mentor] - it just sort of validated why I joined this industry.

This has been such an empowering group of people though. Like you couldn't ask for a better group of professionals to come together and I think we've all generally got on quite well. But it's been an absolute pleasure and if I could say to anyone that was thinking about doing it, like don't even hesitate - the amount of work and the rewards that you get out of it. It's just absolutely inspiring so thanks everybody I really appreciate it.

It was fantastic to be able to network, not only with other family daycares, but different service types. It was really interesting to hear about their process. You'd think 'Ooh that's a good idea, I can take that back to my service.' It was learning though the process.

While the evaluation did not incorporate formal follow-up processes, leaders and educators from all action research groups discussed plans and strategies to remain in contact, with the intent of continuing to support each other through professional conversations, sharing ideas and celebrating on-going achievements.



Sector Practice

The PSCQ Action Research Project model incorporated a final 'sharing day' where leaders and educators 'shared the lessons' from their action research projects with leaders and educators from other services in their regions (and beyond in some cases). How leaders and educators from other services have taken up or developed their own projects and initiatives based on the information and resources provided on the sharing day remains largely unknown, reflecting the temporal dimension of change. However, some evidence exists that suggests that shifts in practice (including attitudes to practice) may be occurring as part of the flow-on effects of the project as a whole and/or individual action research projects carried out within services.

In the first instance, throughout the course of the project many educators reported having conversations with others who claimed that 'they wished' that had participated in the project and inquired about whether the project would run in the future. Given that the Workforce

Council's PSCQ team initially experienced significant difficulties in generating interest in the project due to a resistance to the long-term commitment and perceptions of action research as being 'too academic', this suggests that word of mouth about the project has played a role in shifting attitudes towards action research and longer term commitments to professional development.

Furthermore, a number of descriptions offered by leaders and educators pointed to the ways in which their services were taking steps to influence practice at the broader sector and community level. Many services have incorporated information about their projects on their websites. Some services have invited others to collaborate with them in the continuation of their action research projects, others have utilized political channels and local media to create a voice for educators, children and families. Also, Inclusion Support Facilitators who participated in the project are actively applying and sharing their knowledge, skills and insights of action research with leaders and educators across their regions to promote inclusion for all children.

I think another thing is the power of change. It inspires and it's contagious. You know, just thinking 'oh look at that' and then thinking 'yeah, I can do this!'. And then you go to another service and 'well, we can do that too!' and it's like a spreading wave of change. It's unstoppable. So I would say that everybody here has that power of inspired change wherever they go and it doesn't matter if they change industry, if they change services, everybody here will take whatever has happened here with them because it becomes who you are as a person, who you are as a professional. So it really really inspired. It changed you inside as well as outside. It is a very very powerful way of actually learning for life.

The kids make us braver as well. So much of what we've learned on this and what we believe at our core, and there's been so much, we've been really challenged to stand up and fight for that and the kids are the reason for that. We are confident now to challenge the regulation because we do not believe in it. We do not believe they are in the best interests of the children and if you didn't have the kids driving that and you didn't have the support of the families – if you didn't know that they disagree with it just as passionately as you did – you couldn't do that. But because we've worked under this shared vision together you know that that's what they want as well. So you can stand up and say 'this is not right. This is not how it should be'.

One of the things where these inconsistencies kept occurring was around audits, the environmental audits that we do in people's homes. So we recognised that there was other interested parties in other schemes who would be interested in looking at the environmental audit and after we met we formed a sub-committee of educators and we've now got a finished product of the new audit which we're going to trial and several educators have already nominated to be part of that project. And we will trial that and we're going to a

meeting on Thursday with schemes from the region and we will take our product for them to have a look at and they can use it if they wish.

We promoted our, not only centre, but all staff through an article that I wrote for the local newspaper. So that got a lot of positive parent feedback realising that, you know, "I didn't realise that that's what people saw of you". And "ah yes they do" and from that it just created a big improvement because the staff knew that we valued them, and they'd ask us 'how you going?' 'what can we do?' 'how can we implement this?' and from there we improved on our philosophy, the way we want to see the centre go, the way in which we do approach parents, the information about the day for parents and things like that.

And we've found along the way, because we come from quite a big organisation with a number of children's services, that we've had a ripple effect across the other services as well – childcare centres and other family daycare schemes as well. It's pulled us together more so that cross-fertilizations happening.

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childcare centres and other family daycare schemes as well. It's pulled us together more so that cross-fertilizations happening.

OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

As a professional development initiative, the primary goal of the PSCQ Action Research Project was to build the action research capacity of children's services leaders and educators and "set the foundations for practice improvement through continual learning and progressive problem solving" (PSCQ, 2009). However, as with all professional development for leaders and educators, it is children and families who are ultimately the intended beneficiaries. As the framework for understanding the transitional outcomes of the PSCQ Action Research Project indicates, outcomes for children and families occurred in relation to transitions for individual educators, services and the sector. These outcomes are organized temporally in so far as they cannot result until outcomes are achieved at other levels. Outcomes for children and families also have reflexive qualities as they provide a critical source of feedback to motivate and inspire on-going change.

Through accounts provided by leaders and educators, a spectrum of outcomes for children and families were identifiable. Sometimes these outcomes related to the tangible actions and activities carried out as part of specific individual action research projects. This was particularly evident in action research projects that involved re-designing the physical environment.

Language and literacy, the arts and technology, family corner, and manipulative, fine motor and gross motor development areas and group time. So we made a huge transformation in the room and the best effect after was the response from our families. The immediate response from our families was a good way to motivate all the staff that were involved in that transformation. But the most ultimate thing was when we saw the children's behaviour change. We were snapping all these photos, well not me but the staff, and the children didn't even realise they were being photographed. That's how engaged they were with the resources they were able to access.

We were having all these behaviour issues so we moved them in our 2 to 3's room basically and then shuffled the other one up to the larger room. And that was a huge success. We noticed a distinct change in the children because automatically that happened. They were in a massive amount of space, the girls were able to work with them more, providing them with small intimate spaces.

So we really focused on the outdoor environment and the children were instrumental in all the changes that we made. We actually spoke to them and got their permission to change the

environment and we wanted to empower them and give them the ownership that this was their space and we wanted to respect that it was their space.

And before when you walked in the door it was just this big open space with children playing, noise and everything like that and now when you walk in the door, with just the way we've structured our equipment, there are resources. The parents have an area. It's their area. And you'll notice parents, they're having conversations with each other and communicating with each other. They communicate with us more now.

For many educators, improved relationships with families also represented a significant outcome of the project for children, families and educators alike.

... after having a meeting with [our mentor and facilitator] we were so wrapped with what we'd learnt we thought we could share that with the families and that we would then work in a partnership at home. So what we're doing at the centre, they're doing at home... and that also makes families have that ownership and belonging. So [our mentor] came out and did a workshop with our parents only just recently and that was a real success. I stole [another educator's] idea I think, about the babysitting and we had over 20 parents come which was really good and they really loved it.

...and from there we improved on our philosophy, the way we want to see the centre go, the way in which we do approach parents, the information about the day for parents and things like that.

There's no point putting posters up because they're busy and in the survey they said they don't read them. They're too busy trying to see what their child's playing with. So now it just gets emailed through to their iPhones or whatever and I get responses. Half the time I say 'no need to reply' or 'please reply to this email' and I just get these three liners back from the parents. So I know that they're receiving it, I know that they're understanding it and it's great.

It's not just about what families can do for [educators]. It's also about what I can do and how can I change my approach to work in with [families]? It's a two way partnership and a lot of that needed to come through. Not 'but why won't they do this?'. Well their children are precious too and they've got their own little reasons that are different for them.

In many children's services, parents showing their support and becoming involved in the action research project and their children's learning represented a significant mutual outcome for children, families, leaders and educators, highlighting another way in which the achievement of outcomes facilitates and inspires the pursuit of on-going change.

And the parents really jumped on board. They were donating potting mix, cement, all sorts of different things to our environment. And we had several meetings talking to them about all of

the changes that we wanted to make and they sort of jumped on board and wanted to support it.

I think when the other staff started getting on board and parents and you go 'oh yeah! Now I can do this!' Yeah, when everyone else embraced it, it made it click even more.

... there's been a core lot of educators that have been really involved and that ownership has just grown and grown. But it was when the parents and the families started getting involved that that ownership grew within the professionals and within the communities because it was growing with everyone then – it was growing in the children, it was growing in us and it was growing in the families and I think that's what's really made a difference.

And with regard to the parents, just see that extra enthusiasm now that they've got in their child's learning. I mean, I'm sure that it was there but when it's a long day childcare centre, really trying to generate that interest, it's just blossoming

While many projects focused on topics related to team building amongst educators, several leaders and educators also spoke of how outcomes for children and families occurred, or will occur, as a result of a flow-down effect.

It's wonderful that it's going to have a ripple effect in many many ways and, in the end... whichever way its rippling to, through other staff or parents and families or whatever, the ripple will stop at the children. It's like the pebbles at the beach. The children will benefit the most.

Just a lot of things to build partnerships amongst staff and it's just reflecting on the whole centre and everyone's happy and getting along and, therefore, the kids are happy, the parents are happy and it's just like the whole things just, yeah, it's been really good.

And with all the new preps coming through, all the new ideas that we've implemented are going to filter through to them so hopefully in a few years we're going to have that wonderful service. I can't say we won't have any problems but we'll be a better service for it.

In addition to the outcomes that have already occurred for children and families as a result of participation and engagement with the PSCQ Action Research Project, descriptions provided by leaders and educators suggest that a more comprehensive set of outcomes can be expected over time through implementing the Early Years Learning Framework and My Time, Our Place using action research.

...just little things showing value to staff. So we actually order the [hard copy of the Early Years Learning Framework] and everybody got a big book so that's a lot easier to read. We also did that with the staff information booklet to make sure that it's nice and presentable and that the staff are valued in the workplace. And everyone carries the books around with them so they are used well and respected.

Page 36 *Principle has been revised or added as a consequence of lessons from the project

So through that we've had lots of surveys go out to parents. After the analysis that we did from those that were returned we actually did a parent information night around the EYLF and from there... we've seen an increase in our families' involvement, we've seen an increase in parents at P&F meetings, we're getting emails all the time from people who are on holidays, bringing in photos, emailing photos because they understand that link between the home and the centre and how that is important for their children and their learning and development.

And with the new curriculum too, as a framework, it's been a wonderful underpinning because it's pulled everyone together because it's a national curriculum and for the first time ever we're on the same page and we're learning about it and thinking about it and contextualising it. I think it's been great for staff and also for everyone in this room.

I think [the PSCQ Action Research Project has] been a fantastic tool for understanding the framework and also bringing in a sense of belonging... I was interested because we were interested in doing another centre, adding on, and I thought this would be really great to develop this deeper [understanding] but [action research has] become a tool that you can use all the time

We're a family daycare and our action research question was about reflective practice and how we can develop strategies, tools, identified by educators to support them in using reflective practice when implementing the EYLF. And it's crossed over as well because we found that the educators have really taken it on board and we've used it all the time when we go and visit in our mentoring, just asking questions, and it's really opened up conversations. So [educators are] actually talking to us in the language now, the outcomes and constantly communicating with us... Basically, they've taken on different ideas from everywhere and now they're doing their own programming tools with blank paper and documenting it that way. So it went from purchasing booklets with it already set out to doing it themselves. So it's been a really winding journey for all of us.

[Educator's have] really got the whole concept of reflective practice, what the EYLF means, how they can implement it, what the outcomes are and how they can do it and that's rippling down through the other educators because they're setting up their own networks now. They're really getting it and they're communicating with each other and then back to us. They send us information about what they're doing and then we distribute it to everyone so that's been something that is the shock that's come out of it that's awesome. It's really been easy to see.

Our project was about looking at how we could basically change our outdoor environment to be reflecting the Early Years Learning Framework better. So we started off with having a couple of ideas of our own but what we really found after we got the results back from our parents survey ... we had to take a step back and look at it through their eyes. And that gave the whole team an opportunity to really focus on what parents want to be seeing from the

information – we tried to give them as much information about the framework so when they were answering the questions they were doing it with some kind of knowledge.

Summary

Overall, the outcomes of the PSCQ Action Research Project were diverse and dynamic, representing layers of change that spread through individual leaders and educators, children's services, the children's services sector and, most importantly, children and families. Through accounts of the project provided by leaders and educators, it was possible to elucidate the complex set of relationships that facilitated the transition from supported learning to self-directed learning for leaders, educators and their teams, providing a foundation for continuous improvement and the proactive pursuit of quality and inclusive outcomes for children and families.

In addition to the contribution leaders and educators in participating children's services have made through their own action research projects, together they have also made a significant contribution to the knowledge-base surrounding the nature and dynamics of transitions facilitated by participation in the PSCQ Action Research Project as an example of a professional development initiative. This provides a critical platform for understanding and evaluating the role and effectiveness of professional development, in all its forms and combinations, for children's services educators and, ultimately, the flow-on benefits for children and families.

Appendix I

YARN UP—TOK BLO YUMI PROJECT Invitation

YARN UP—TOK BLO YUMI PROJECT

Yarn up - talk together

Tok Blo Yumi - talk belong to you and me

Invitation

We would like to invite you to participate in **Yarn Up -Tok Blo Yumi Project** linking **FAR NORTH QLD** and **MORETON BAY** regions technology, this will enhance our learning community and assist to build a culturally competent and inclusive early childhood education and care environments.

Over eight sessions, this innovative approach will enquire and explore our understanding of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander culture, community and history using a participatory learning approach. The bringing together of professionals across the early childhood education and care sector will support you to embed the principles, practices and outcomes of the learning frameworks and to meet national quality standards.

Face to face conversations (**yarning circles**) with colleagues in **CAIRNS** and **CABOOLTURE** via video link simultaneously are designed to allow participants to guide the way the content is delivered and will include reference to:

- Reflect an awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture in work practices
- Reflect an awareness of own and other cultural realities in work practices
- Communicate effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Reflect cultural safety in workplace and professional relationships
- Work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities

Participants will have the opportunity of enrolling in units of competence **HLTHIR403 Work effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people**, which can be credited in a range of Children's Services qualifications.

Date, Time and Location:

Session 1:	17/04/13 9.00am-1.00pm Cairns / Caboolture
Session 2:	15/05/13 9.00am-1.00pm Cairns / Caboolture
Session 3:	12/06/13 9.00am-1.00pm Cairns / Caboolture
Session 4:	24/07/13 9.00am-1.00pm Cairns / Caboolture
Session 5:	21/08/13 9.00am-1.00pm Cairns / Caboolture
Session 6:	11/09/13 9.00am-1.00pm Cairns / Caboolture

TBA WALK ON COUNTRY Cairns / Caboolture
TBA SHOWCASING LEARNING Cairns/Caboolture

Participants are asked to attend all 8 sessions.

Lunch will be provided following each session 1.00pm –1.30pm.

To register please complete & return the registration form before

WEDNESDAY 3 APRIL 2013



COME JOIN US ON THE JOURNEY

Appendix J

Health and Community Services Industry Skills and Workforce Development Report 2013 – Children’s Services



Children's Services

Children's Services

SECTOR PROFILE

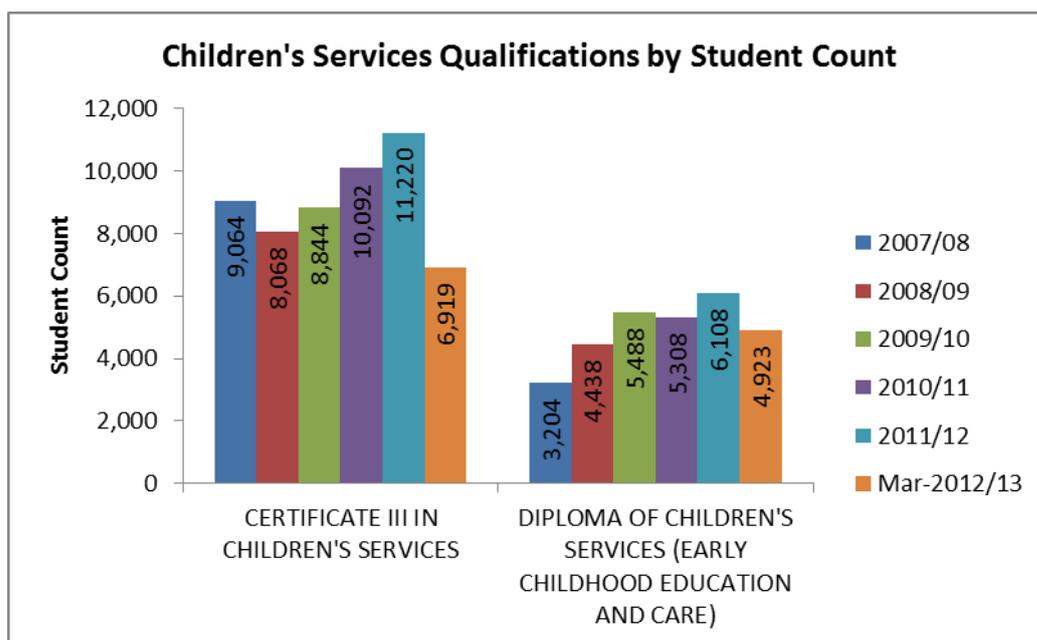
According to the Early Childhood Education and Care Services Census 2011, there were about 2,649 licensed child care services in Queensland. These are a variety of private, not-for-profit and a small number of government organisations ranging from small facilities with only limited staff, to some of Queensland's largest employers who operate many services across the state and employ hundreds of workers.

The not-for-profit sector represents nearly 74 per cent of children's services in Queensland. In 2011, the majority of all licensed early childhood services in Queensland were long day care services (57 per cent). The remainder of the services in Queensland were kindergarten services (14 per cent), family day care schemes (4 per cent), limited hours care services (2 per cent) and school age care services (23 per cent)³⁰. Wages in the sector are comparatively low and this impacts significantly on attraction and retention of workers. According to the 2010 National Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Census,³¹ "94.4 per cent of the national early childhood education and care workforce were females".³²

TRAINING PROFILE

Children's Services qualifications make up over one-third (39.4%) of all qualifications delivered by the VET sector within the Community Services Industry. In 2011/12 financial year, there were 17,328 student enrolments in Children Services qualifications in Queensland. This represented an increase of 12.5 per cent (1,928 student enrolments) from 2010/11 financial year. The Certificate III in Children's Services represented 64.7 per cent of the total student enrolments in 2011/12 financial year. There has been an increasing demand for the Certificate III and Diploma in Children Services qualifications over the past five consecutive financial years to 2012. Student enrolments in Children Services qualifications have grown by approximately 41.2 per cent between 2007/08 and 2011/12 financial years. Data for March 2012-13 shows continued growth in demand for the Diploma of Children Services (Early Childhood Education and Care) and it is expected to exceed enrolments in 2011/12.

The Certificate III in Children's Services has been identified by the Queensland Government as a qualification which best target job seekers and experience significant demand, and have been selected for the contestability model and will be delivered through the Queensland Government's Certificate III Program in 2013-14. This is likely to result in an increase in enrolments in this qualification in the next financial year.

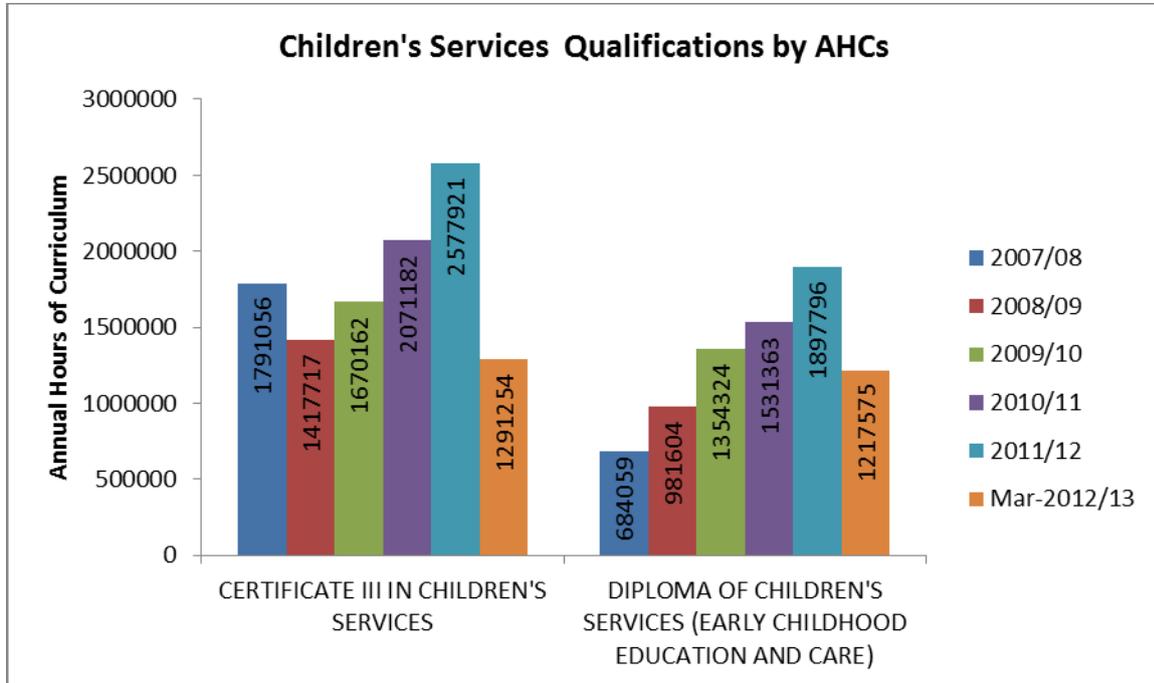


³⁰ Department of Education, Training and Employment 2011, Fact Sheet – Licensed child care service in Queensland (Queensland, 2011).

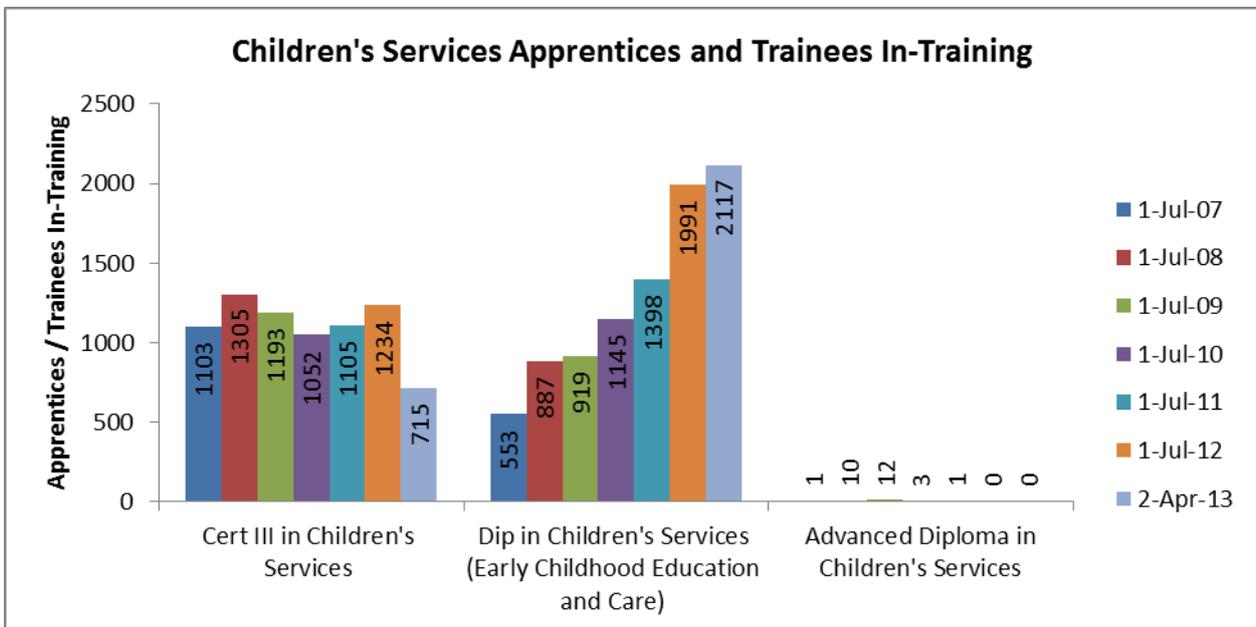
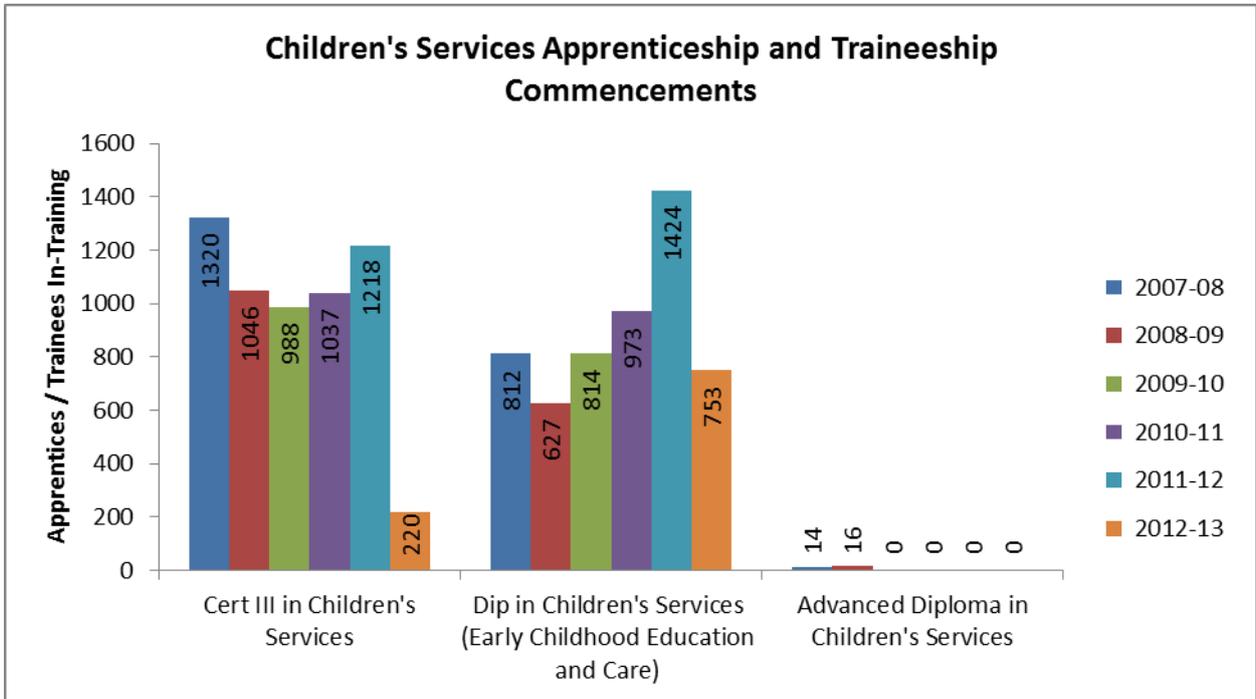
³¹ The Social Research Centre, National Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Census June 2011 (Melbourne, 2011).

³² Ibid., 2.

Children's Services qualifications by AHC show similar patterns as student enrolments with approximately 4.5 million AHC in 2011/12 representing a 24.2 per cent increase from 2010/11 financial year. Queensland has the Priority Category One User Choice funding for Children's Services qualifications; the traineeship related to the Certificate III in Children's Services and the apprenticeship related to the Diploma of Children Services (Early Childhood Education and Care). In addition, there is also the unfunded traineeship specific to the Advanced Diploma in this sector.



Changes to Federal Government policies to allow 'fee-free' delivery by TAFE institutes of Children's Services qualifications at Diploma level or higher, reduced the level of commencements in the Certificate III during 2008/2009. By 2011/12 apprenticeship and traineeship commencements were on the increase again. In the 2011/12 financial year, there were 2,642 apprenticeship and traineeship commencements in Children Services in Queensland. This represented an increase of 31.4 per cent (632 commencements) from 2010/11 financial year. Data for March 2012/13 shows demand for the Certificate III has decreased this financial year; this may in part be due to workers in the Industry having already gained this qualification and at the present time the system has been exhausted as there are few workers in the sector without the qualification or are enrolled in Diploma level qualifications.



As at July 2012, there were 3,227 Children's Services Apprentices and Trainees In-Training. This represented an increase of 28.8 per cent (722 In-Training) from the corresponding period in 2011. There is a risk that we may see attrition of many educators with an Advanced Diploma as under the new standards there is no mandatory requirement for employees to continue to employ and pay wages at the Advanced Diploma level after January 2012.

Drivers influencing and shaping the sector

The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care continues to be the key driver for change in the sector. The Early Year Workforce Strategy provides a coordinated approach across the State and Federal Governments to workforce issues in the sector.

The Early Years Learning Framework, and My Time, Our Place Framework for School Aged Care requires the current workforce to embrace and enact a whole new way of thinking about and approaching work.

\$300 million will be invested into early childhood education and care over the next two years to boost the quality of the sector. The federal government fund will support the implementation of the National Quality Framework (NQF). Services will be provided with grants to offset the cost of employing a higher qualified workforce. This will ensure quality education and care is being delivered whilst maintaining affordability for parents. From July 1 employees with a Certificate III will receive a wage increase of \$3 per hour if they work at an eligible service. The initiative follows on from the workplace reforms in Social and Community Services and Aged Care sectors which achieved significant outcomes in respect to pay equity.

At the national level, the Federal Government conducted roundtable discussions with representatives from the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector in mid-2012 in regional locations across Australia. The aim of the roundtables was to build relationships between local early childhood services and educators in the early childhood sector, as well as retaining and up-skilling existing educators. The response was very positive with over 1,000 people attending, 95 per cent indicating that it was a valuable experience and approximately 70 per cent agreed that the discussion will help meet the workforce need of the ECEC sector in their region. Broadly, the issues raised at the Roundtables fell into five key themes:

1. Recruitment, retention and promotion of the ECEC profession
2. Professional development
3. Training qualifications
4. Sector responsiveness to community needs
5. Awareness and effectiveness of government initiatives.

The Regional Education, Skills and Jobs Coordinators (RESJs) are currently working with stakeholders to implement many of the solutions proposed to address the five key themes to support improvements that will assist the sector to meet the workforce requirements of the National Quality Framework, as well as informing future initiatives and policy work for federal and state governments and future Early Childhood Education and Care Industry Roundtables.

In Queensland, the work of the Roundtables and the RESJ's is being conducted in partnership with the Health and Community Services Workforce Council to help ensure coordinated approaches to workforce issues in the sector and drive whole of industry solutions.

There will be significant changes to the suite of Children Services qualification as a result of the review being undertaken by the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council (CS&HISC). Changes include:

- significant changes to the early childhood qualifications in line with the National Quality Reform Agenda
- transitioning all qualifications to the New Standards for Training Packages, including development of Assessment Requirements
- development of an Implementation Guide and Companion Volumes

Implementation of the 2013 National Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Census (the last Census was in 2010). The National Workforce Census is an important collection to help inform planning for the early childhood education and care sector and ensure that high quality early childhood services are provided to young children and their families.

Key Challenges Impacting on the Sector's Workforce

The Children's Services sector is faced with a number of challenges in recruiting and retaining appropriate staff, these include a shortage of qualified educators.

Impacting on the workforce in Children's Services is the lower than average weekly wage and the perception that educators in child care are not well valued and respected has a negative influence on the number of people attracted to the sector and the retention of those in the sector. The highly regulated nature of the sector also impacts on attraction and retention of educators as the lower than average remuneration for workers in the sector is not commensurate with the level of responsibility and reporting.

The severe skill and labour shortages experienced in the sector, along with growth in service demand and rapid changes in policy and service delivery, require high-level human resource management skills and systems.

Challenges in understanding the role of the Educational Leader and the lack of clarity around the definition of 'leadership' in the sector have been identified. This has led to challenges in attracting Educational Leaders and Teachers to the sector especially in remote and regional areas. The long lead time in developing leadership skills and attaining qualifications for individuals is also impacting on recruiting for these roles.

Smaller services and those in remote and regional areas are at highest risk of not having or being able to generate the necessary qualified workforce. Many of the challenges experienced by the sector are exacerbated in rural and remote areas, especially in access to professional development and backfilling. Lack of affordable accommodation in remote and rural regions impacts negatively on the workforce as individuals cannot afford to remain working in the sector. Increased service demand along with the increased demand for workers threaten the viability of smaller services and those in more remote locations as they struggle to meet the regulated staff-child ratio and maintain a viable business.

The Closing the Gap agenda has increased demand for teachers and other qualified educators delivering quality and appropriate services to children and families from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds. This includes a need for teachers and educators from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background but also an increase in non-indigenous educators understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander inclusion practices. This focus will accentuate the workforce demand pressures for Indigenous focussed Early Childhood Development Services and the extent of these pressures will differ between jurisdictions and according to remoteness. In Queensland, it is imperative that the emphasis of both policy and resources are dedicated to increasing the number of educators from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.

Also a priority is increasing the Children's Services sectors' capacity to work with children and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Programs that aim to both increase and support the numbers of educators from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and support educators to attain appropriate qualifications must be prioritised.

FUTURE WORKFORCE NEEDS

The children's services sector will continue to grow and will continue to experience staffing shortages. The new National Quality Reform Agenda seeks to advance and standardise the educational services of the sector, and its workforce will need to be supported and skilled to undertake this work. Low wages and poor retention of younger workers will be important issues to address in order to remain viable in an increasingly tight labour market. As a labour-intensive service sector, it is unlikely that technologies and job redesign will provide the efficiencies that may be expected in other sectors and industries.

STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS PRIORITY SKILLS AND WORKFORCE NEEDS

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategies

Develop and offer entry points and career pathways which complement current training and employment trajectories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. S

Attraction and Retention

Develop workforce models and learning pathways that capitalise on educational and business leadership requirements while retaining current workforce and attracting new workers to the sector. M

Deliver professional development for new leaders which includes change management, working with and empowering others, participatory decision making, strategic thinking, advocacy skills to talk up work in children's services. M

Engage key leaders to champion the positive work in the sector including through the use of media campaigns. M

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Needs

Link contemporary approaches to developing culturally inclusive practices to the National Quality Framework. S

Identify VET products to support the Inclusion Support Facilitator workforce within Children's Services to be informed by the professional development framework for inclusion support facilitators. M

Reconceptualise the concepts which underpin culturally inclusive practice and adapt training in culturally inclusive practice accordingly. M

Institute recruitment practices that aim to increase diversity in the workforces in our sectors. M

Offer multiple entry points into the sector to support accessibility of qualifications for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. M

Industry Pathways

Repair the disconnect between university and VET qualifications to design career pathways and align. M

Skills and Training

Identify skills, knowledge, attributes, qualifications and competencies which may support those in leadership roles—package qualifications accordingly. S

Review of RTO learning and assessment strategies in Children's Services qualifications to ensure compliance with the National Quality Framework. Such a review would include attention to learning and assessment materials; RPL tools, processes and skills; currency of skills of VET practitioners in the sector; integration of learning and assessment into the workplace; and use of third party reports to support RTO evidence of assessment. S

Increased use of industry brokerage and enterprise/industry RTO delivery to support training in priority sectors such as Family Day Care and School Aged Care. S

Australian Skills Quality Authority to emphasise during RTO audit and registration processes the procedures and tools for mapping CHC02 qualifications for the purposes of RPL and entry requirements to the CHC08 Children's Services qualifications. S

Improve employer understanding of VET and their role in influencing the training system and the training they purchase. Engage industry to provide advice to Australian Skills Quality Authority in relation to RPL and learning and assessment strategies aligned with the National Quality Framework. S

Explore options for ensuring quality of delivery by RTOs and Universities in relation to Children's Services qualifications. M

Support the establishment of a refresher program for educators to contextualise previous qualifications to contemporary practice and national quality requirements. M

Regional and Remote

Support local clusters of employers, industry bodies, education and training providers, government agencies and other stakeholders to develop collaborative responses to key workforce issues locally. M

Workforce Planning and Development

Support the implementation of the Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Action Plan 2011-2014. S

Support the implementation of the national Early Years Workforce Strategy. S

Increase professional development and training opportunities in strategic workforce planning and development. M

Improve data collection, reporting, access and analysis related to workforce and training in the sector to support collaborative workforce planning and improve return on investment. M