

Health and Community Services Workforce Council Submission to the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry 2012

October 2012

About the Health and Community Services Workforce Council

The Health and Community Services Workforce Council (Workforce Council) is a not-for-profit peak body that leads workforce planning and development in the Health and Community Services Industries in Queensland and has represented the industry advice to the Queensland and Commonwealth governments for twenty years. We facilitate more than forty regional networks, coalitions and alliances across Queensland to build workforce capacity, prioritise regional workforce development needs and respond accordingly. We work with a range of government agencies, peak bodies, unions and other key stakeholders to develop a sustainable systemic response to workforce issues. In addition, the Workforce Council occupies a unique position working closely with the education and training sectors to ensure a skilled and productive industry workforce.

Key functions of the Workforce Council

- Provide information and assistance to our industries and industry partners
- Provide advice to Government about a wide range of training, workforce development and sector specific workforce issues
- Support innovative workforce development strategies
- Broker quality vocational education and training across Queensland
- Advocate the value of our industries within the Queensland community
- Deliver workforce planning services to industry sectors and regions

Submission Overview

This submission addresses the particular Terms of Reference that go to:

- 6(a) reforms to ensure the child protection system achieves the best possible outcomes to protect children, and
- 6(c) any legislative reforms required

The Workforce Council notes that the Commission in its *Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry: emerging issues* (September 2012) outlined that workforce and workload issues were of concern. From the hearings thus far recruitment and retention of appropriately qualified staff and the mechanism that could be engaged to support staff in their frontline roles and encourage longer careers in child protection was seen as an emerging issue.

The Commission emphasises the complexity of solutions around workforce and workload. Our Workforce Council submission seeks to highlight three major impacts on the shape and contribution of the workforce in child protection. From our perspective, qualified frontline staff in child protection are positioned at the interface of two vast and complex systems; those of child protection – child safety; and those sectors of the tertiary education systems – vocational education and training and higher education (universities). On one hand, the child protection system is transforming its orientation away from a concentration on tertiary child safety to preventative models involving new structures and skills. On the other hand, regulation of the tertiary education system is being transferred from the States to the Commonwealth. Ongoing development of the child protection workforce will require support for child protection workers to navigate their own career pathways and ongoing education.

In addition to these major paradigm shifts, the on-line environment produces challenges for workforces of both education and child protection systems. These changes are being experienced in both areas at the same time. To acquire the right skills in this environment, there is increasing movement of staff back and forth from vocational education and training to universities. Child protection needs to influence these education systems to ensure that agencies and services have capacity and that their staff have the capabilities for innovation to lead and implement change. Nimble education systems are required to aid attraction, recruitment and retention of appropriately qualified staff to meet the complexity of services on the ground.

It is the Workforce Council's belief that the current workforce issues in the child protection system are a product of labour and skill shortages along with systems failure in the education and training systems – vocational education and training and higher education. This crisis is manifested in a number of ways:

- Limited capacity within the statutory and therapeutic sectors to undertake workforce planning at organisational, departmental and industry levels to signal well in advance of innovation the workforce development required.
- Limited capacity for management of workplace learning to implement on-going workforce development
- Lack of collaboration opportunities to closely link courses to job requirements
- Over-bureaucratisation of processes to overcome skills shortages
- Lack of capacity in education and training systems to undertake workforce planning aligned to innovation in child protection

Re-engineering all systems to prevention (rather than statutory) can only occur if the workforce is well-prepared for the policy innovations and if resources accompany job design and systems reform.

The Commission is to be congratulated in taking a Ten Year Timeframe for the roadmap. Only long term action has the capability of creating vocational education systems which are engineered around five year projections and higher education systems that have longer time frames for generating accredited courses.

Summary

The Industry Skills and Workforce Development Report- Child Protection (June 2012) was produced by the Workforce Council following consultation with industry and Skills Queensland. Funding support was provided by Skills Queensland under their Industry Engagement function.

The report sets out the priorities based on consultation with industry during the first half of 2012. The priorities forecast a reform agenda influenced by the visit of Professor Eileen Munro to Queensland during 2010. Strategic development priorities are listed below and elaborated in the aforementioned report where emphasis is placed on strengthening senior roles, early intervention job design and subsequent workforce requirements, and simplifying program funding to enable the sector to work collaboratively on initiatives on pages 9 and 10 of the report:

- Identify skills, knowledge, attributes, qualifications and competencies which may support a senior practitioner role – package qualifications accordingly
- Increase professional development for residential and foster carers in relation to advocacy for young people
- Advocate for the prioritisation of workforce considerations in the development and design of new government initiatives for the child protection sector - the development of strategic workforce plans in partnership with industry
- Identify and develop appropriate professional development and training opportunities to support the management and leadership of integrated services
- Advocate for appropriate funding and accessibility for professional development and training which supports the implementation of government initiatives
- Advocate for funding to reflect an increase of senior roles which are not necessarily management roles
- Map current best practice in early intervention research to job design, role descriptions and qualifications
- Explore options to reduce complex governance structures resulting from complex funding mechanisms and multi-jurisdictional stakeholders similar to the single services agreement through the Queensland Compact

The Industry Skills and Workforce Development Report also scanned the current state of play to identify gaps in current workforce development activities. These are elaborated on page 11. Current data indicates that the child protection sector is also experiencing skills gaps in the following areas, and that these gaps may continue and/ or be exacerbated if due attention is not given.

- Residential care workers
- Family support, early intervention and campaigning or communicating in and to communities
- Integrated service delivery leadership and management
- Leaderships and management (including consideration of specialist management skills other than those from a business management model)
- Cultural competency of non – Indigenous workforce to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Cultural competency of workforce to work with people from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- Mentoring and supervision
- Critically reflective practice and resilience
- Workforce planning skills and knowledge
- Working with children who attend mental health programs
- Understanding poverty and working with children and families experiencing poverty

The long term view is that the workforce in child protection requires substantial support to avert the issues around high turnover and retention of talent in the statutory part of the sector and to accommodate the needs of an ageing workforce in the preventative and therapeutic parts of the sector. The priorities which require a whole of government, whole of industry, and whole of organisation approach are:

- Improve availability of accommodation and other social infrastructure in regional areas
- Increase professional development and training opportunities in strategic workforce planning and development

- Reconceptualise the concepts which underpin culturally inclusive practice and adapt training in culturally inclusive practice accordingly
- Institute recruitment practices that positively discriminate to increase diversity in the workforces in our sectors
- Explore possibility of Portable Long Service Leave
- Increase the recognition of the positive work of the sector through media - highlight the valuable work undertaken by all parts of the sector
- Promote career opportunities available in prevention and early intervention services as well as the highly publicised statutory or tertiary system
- Scholarships or funding to support child protection places in higher education

The quality of the learning experiences for entry level and senior roles in child protection is less than optimal. Partnerships between industry and education and training will need to be strengthened to address the workforce development needs for these specific groups. A number of solutions to improve the delivery of training have been suggested below. These are elaborated on page 14 of the report:

- Develop a mechanism of learning and teaching assessment (including RPL) which is workplace based but also reliable, valid and quality assured
- Increase face to face interaction between teachers, students and those in a supervisory role in the workplace
- Ensure more open and honest lines of communication between the person signing off and the RTO delivering the training – greater understanding of these roles
- Increase industry engagement and build mutual understandings with RTOs to increase workplace learning and traineeship offers
- Adequately resource flexible training delivery and blended delivery options including:
- Developing training programs which can be delivered through a range of mechanisms including online
- Recognise that there is a need and desire for face to face training and develop blended training models according the delivery method which best suits learning in the content area (i.e. E learning, face to face, RPL)
- Provide funding for qualifications to be delivered using blended delivery models

The report also deals on page 14 with the current situation in residential care with particular attention to the current skills shortage as well as to the innovations required generally reorienting the system to early intervention and family support. The following activities in the vocational education system are encouraged:

- Identify key competencies and attributes from qualifications and skill sets which are necessary for the delivery of best practice residential care services – develop and deliver these competencies
- Provide professional development opportunities which allow participants to critically reflect on their work and learn analytic process which support critically reflective practice
- Identify skills, knowledge and attributes and qualifications and competencies which may support a senior practitioner role – package qualifications accordingly
- Develop qualifications and/or skills sets which align with best practice in the delivery of early intervention and family support services
- Offer different entry points into the sector to support accessibility of qualifications for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- Identification of training content which is relevant across the community services- collaborative design and delivery of cross sector training

In the next five years the report suggests the following as a way to address the issues foreseen in consultations in 2012. They are:

- Advocate for funding to reflect an increase of senior roles which are not necessarily management roles
- Explore possibility of Portable Long Service Leave
- Increase the recognition of the positive work of the sector through media - highlight the valuable work undertaken by all parts of the sector
- Promote career opportunities available in prevention and early intervention services as well as the highly publicised statutory or tertiary system
- Map current best practice in early intervention research to job design, role descriptions and qualifications
- Develop qualifications and/or skills sets which align with best practice in the delivery of early intervention and family support services

- Offer different entry points into the sector to support accessibility of qualifications for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- Identification of training content which is relevant across the community services - collaborative design and delivery of cross sector training
- Explore options to reduce complex governance structures resulting from complex funding mechanisms and multi-jurisdictional stakeholders similar to the single services agreement through the Queensland Compact
- Scholarships or funding to support child protection places in higher education

A copy of the Industry Skills and Workforce Development Reports- Child Protection (June 2012) is attached.

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Child Protection Sector

Industry Skills and Workforce
Development Report: June 2012



The Workforce Council acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the original inhabitants of Australia and recognises these unique cultures as part of the cultural heritage of all Australians. We respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we do our work across Queensland. For more information on our commitment to Reconciliation visit www.workforce.org.au/about/reconciliation

All portraits are a part of the Workforce Council's Photo Exhibition
<http://www.workforce.org.au/gallery/our-people.aspx>

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This report summarises information related to the Queensland Child Protection Sector to date. It forms part of the Industry Skills and Workforce Development Report for the Community Services and Health Industries, June 2012. Information in this report has been validated through consultations with the sector, including a sector forum held early in February 2012. This version was created in September 2012; updates were made to pages 1 and 4.

PROFILES

Industry sector profile

Child protection services in Queensland can be divided into three service platforms. Primary or universal services, providing for all children and families; secondary services, targeted at families at higher risk or in need of additional support and tertiary services, designed to respond to abuse or neglect in situations where children have been harmed or are in immediate danger of harm. This report will focus predominately on the child protection workforce in the secondary and tertiary parts of the system.

In Queensland, the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services, Child Safety Services provides statutory child protection services to children. In addition, a range of services are required to respond to the different levels of support needs of the child or young person to provide stable, quality care within a Child Safety Service Framework. Child protection services currently provided by organisations across Queensland include:

- Placement Services (Foster and Kinship Care, Specialist Foster Care, Organisations, Residential Care, Therapeutic Residential Care, Safe Houses, Supported Independent Living and Specific Response Care)
- Support Services (Family Intervention Services, Counselling and Intervention Services, Sexual Abuse Counselling, Outreach Support, Targeted Support Services and Family Support (HOF),
- Indigenous Child Protection Services (Indigenous Recognised Entities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Support)

A variety of organisations deliver child protection services in Queensland, ranging from large, statutory government organisations and large national charities to small and medium stand-alone enterprises and non-government organisations. Improvements need to be made in relation to the consistency across private and non-government agencies in understanding and implementing child protection services. The diversity of organisations delivering child protection services requires workforce planning and development initiatives that are able to respond to the diverse range of issues which may be experienced by these organisations, while also supporting consistency in delivery.

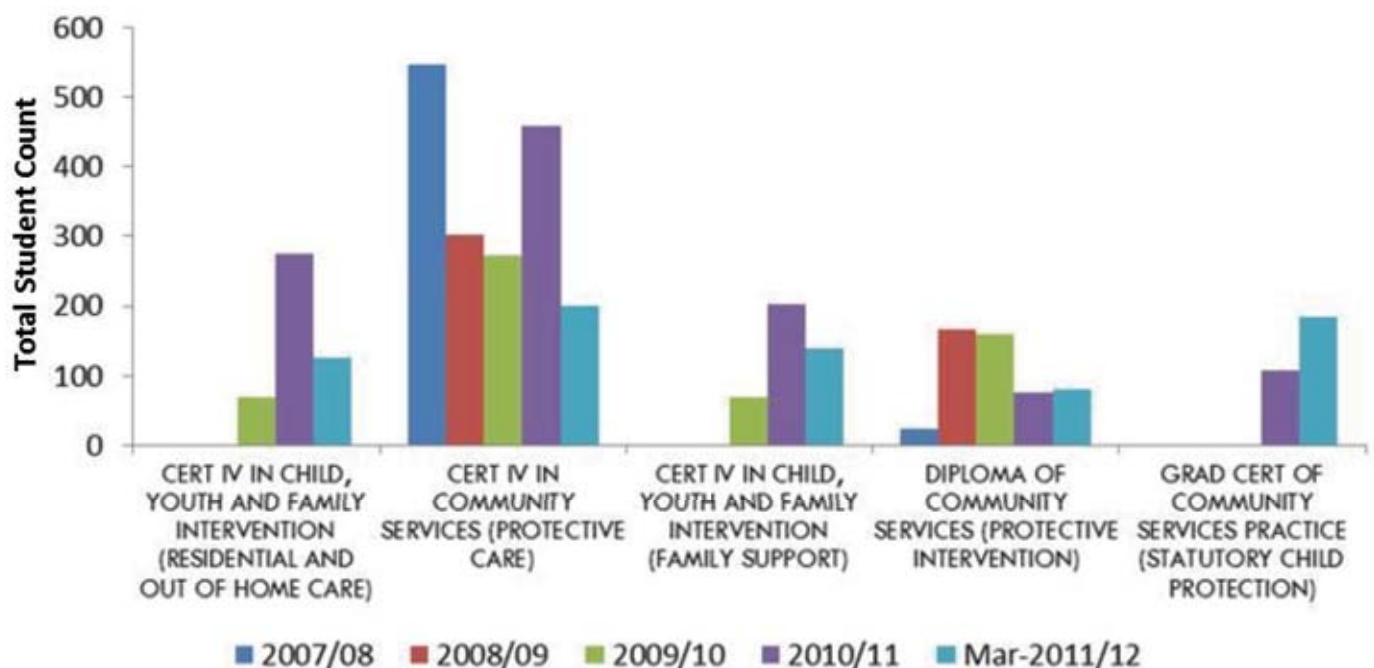
The Child Protection Working Advisory Group (CPWAG) develops strategies to enhance the training and development of the child protection workforce for the future. The group was formed as a result of the Industry Leaders Group of the Child Protection Skills Formation Strategy of 2006 – 2008. CPWAG's membership is drawn from service delivery agencies, relevant peak bodies and representatives from Department of Education, Training and Employment, and Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services.

Training Profile

The data used in these reports was provided by the Queensland Department of Education and Training. It includes training places which attract funding from State or Federal Governments, and fee-for-service training places delivered by TAFE institutes *only*. The latest data (Mar 2011-12) is for the period 1 July 2011 to 31 March 2012 and does not cover the full financial year. Please also note that student count and AHC data is provided by qualification in which the student has enrolled, including those who enroll to complete a skill set (i.e. partial qualification).

Child Safety qualifications represent a modest but increasing proportion of the Community Services VET delivery in Queensland. The Child Protection Skilling Plan – a partnership between Department of Education, Training and Employment, and the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services – has been instrumental in supporting quality delivery of the key qualifications in this area. In addition, as a response to the difficulty in retaining graduates, some organisations are recognising the Certificate IV in Child, Youth and Family Intervention as an alternative entry qualification, on the condition that new employees at this level commit to completing their degree. These changes along with investment and coordination through the Child Protection Skilling Plan saw a significant increase in delivery of Certificate IV and Graduate Certificate Child Safety qualifications during the 2010/2011 financial year. Data for the period 1 July 2011 to 31 March 2012 indicates demand for the Diploma and Graduate Certificate qualifications may be increasing again in the current financial year, while numbers of participants in the Certificate IV qualifications may be stabilising (see graph below).

Child Safety Qualifications - Student Count by Course Name



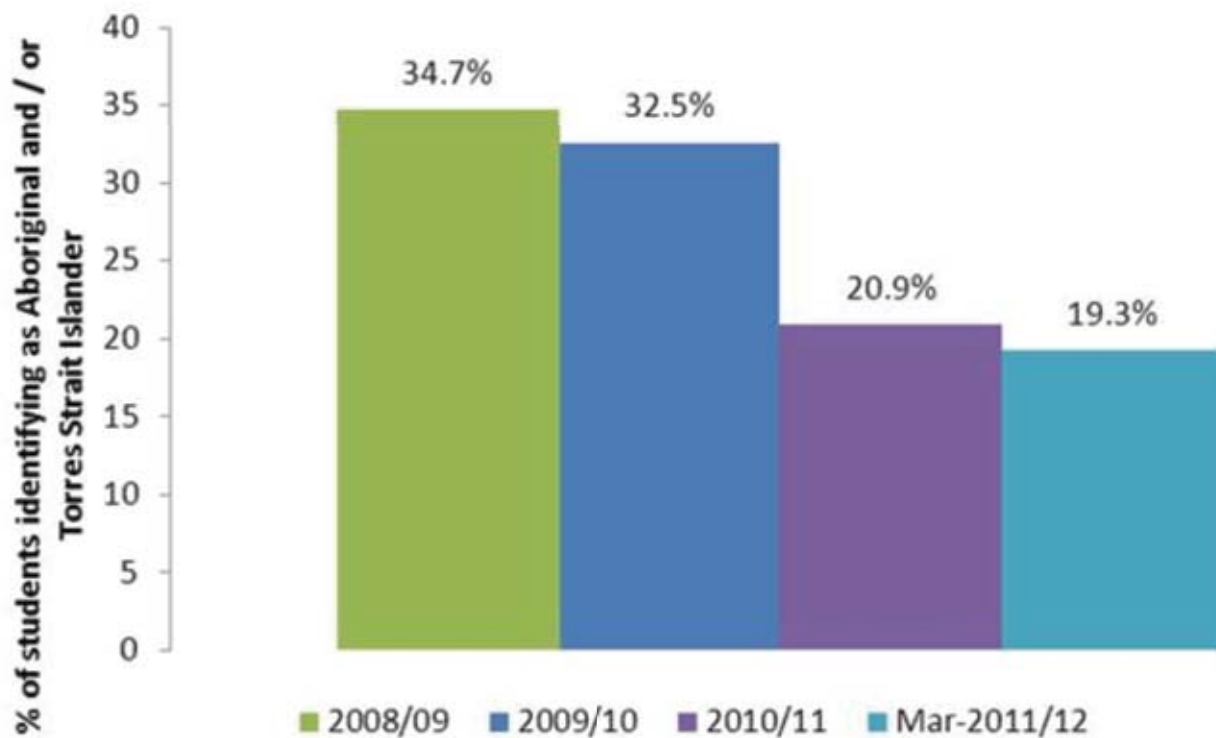


Currently, 83 non-government organisations are funded to deliver 279 services or programs to children, young people and families throughout Queensland

Traineeships related to the Certificate IV in Child, Youth and Family Intervention Qualifications were declared in 2009. Since that time there have been 41 commencements in 2009-2010, 20 commencements in 2010-2011 and a further 16 commencements between July 2011 and March 2012. Of these 77 trainees, 38 have completed, 11 have withdrawn or cancelled, and 23 remain in-training at the end of March 2012.

The graph below demonstrates a decline in the number proportion of students in Child Protection qualifications who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (acknowledging the voluntary nature of identification of cultural heritage). In 2010, the Queensland Government reduced 32 recognised entities to 11 across Queensland. The impact of this policy shift requires further investigation but the market for qualifications in child protection for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people seems to be in decline.

Aboriginal and / or Torres Strait Islander Participation in Child Protection Qualifications*



* Includes the following qualifications: Cert IV In Child, Youth And Family Intervention (Residential And Out Of Home Care), Cert IV In Community Services (Protective Care), Cert IV In Child, Youth And Family Intervention (Family Support), Diploma Of Community Services (Protective Intervention) and Grad Cert Of Community Services Practice (Statutory Child Protection).

CHALLENGES IMPACTING ON THE INDUSTRY'S WORKFORCE

Economic, social demographic, environmental and technological factors

There has been a significant increase in the demand for child protection services in Australia over the past five years. The number of children on care and protection orders, admitted to orders and entering out of home care has increased by 57%, 27% and 51% respectively between 2004-2005 and 2009-2010.¹ In Queensland, the numbers of children coming to the attention of Child Safety Services have grown, although there have been declines in the numbers of child protection notifications and substantiations.² The Commission for Children and Young People also report a growth in the number of children and young people in out-of-home care with a significant increase in young people living in residential care.³ In addition, the proportion of children engaged in ongoing intervention has also been trending upwards, increasing by 38% over the past 3 years.⁴

According to the Child Protection Australia 2009-10 Report, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are over-represented in all areas of the child protection system. These statistics reflect only the statutory response to child protection issues and indicate that there has been a rise in the numbers of children placed on orders and removed from homes. This is also reflected by the Commission for Children and Young People Snapshot Data which reports that "[w]hile substantiations declined in 2009-10, this decline was greatest for non-Indigenous children, meaning a further widening of the over-representation of Indigenous children in this area."⁵ The Commission for Children and Young People also found that "Indigenous children had a rate of living in out of home care that was eight times greater than the rate for non-Indigenous children at 30 June 2010."⁶ For non-Indigenous children across Queensland, the most common type of abuse substantiated was emotional abuse,⁷ while for Indigenous children the most common type of abuse substantiated was neglect.⁸ Sexual abuse was the least common type of abuse for Indigenous and non-Indigenous children.⁹

The experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families in contact with child protection system are markedly different to those of non-Indigenous children; statutory responses are more likely to be more intrusive than for non-Indigenous children and the further into the system, the higher the level of disproportionate representation.¹⁰ In 2010-11 (AIHW 2012), Indigenous children comprised 29% of Queensland children subject to a substantiated notification. At 30 June 2011, over 37% of children under orders and children in out of home care were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. Indigenous children are also less likely to be subject to non-custodial orders than non-Indigenous children.¹¹ PeakCare notes that notifications involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are far more likely to be substantiated for emotional abuse and neglect than physical or sexual abuse yet the current focus is not on the underlying causes and highly successful preventative and intervention measures regarding neglect and emotional abuse.¹²

1 Child Rights Taskforce, Listen To children 2011 Child Rights NGO Report Australia (2011), 13.

2 Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, Snapshot 2011 Key Data: Children and Young People in Queensland, (Brisbane: 2011).

3 Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, Snapshot 2011 Key Data: Children and Young People in Queensland, (Brisbane: 2011).

4 Ibid

5 Ibid

6 Ibid

7 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Child Protection Australia 2009-10 (Canberra: 2011) 9.

8 Ibid, 14

9 Ibid, 14.

10 PeakCare QLD, Child Protection Roundtable Meeting 31 January 2012 Key Groupings of Issues Papers. (Brisbane: 2012) 2.

11 Ibid., 6.

12 Ibid., 6.

Also impacting on the child protection workforce is the negative perception of child protection work in general, which influences the numbers of people attracted to work in the sector, particularly those who are currently studying qualifications which allow them to work in a number of community services sectors. In addition, those working in the sector report that they don't feel like their roles are valued and respected by the community in general.

Government policies impacting on the industry's workforce

Over recent years there have been increases in both the number and complexity of child protection programs provided in Queensland. This has placed significant strain on the capacity of the child protection system and on the workforce in particular. Increasing the visibility of and attention to workforce implications within and outside of Government is a priority. Greater understanding of and heightened accountability in relation to the impacts of Government policy (including internal recruitment policy) and their effects on the workforces across the sector are required. This greater focus will support the development of initiatives to effectively plan for and address any skills or workforce gaps or demands that new or existing policy decisions may have on workforce.

A focus on clients is paramount to achieving quality child protection services and job satisfaction in the child protection sector. Currently a focus on the system (rather than the clients) presents a challenge for workforce retention and job satisfaction as increased compliance and administrative responsibilities shift the focus of work from clients to the system itself. The challenge for organisations in recruiting and retaining a skilled child protection workforce is to develop new ways to support the workforce to learn on the job while engaging with the sometimes competing demands of funding (compliance and service provision). In addition, to ensure child protection workers are kept up to date with the system and how they best support families, provision must be made to ensure there are no barriers to child protection workers keeping up to date with the statutory system.

It is not only the increasing burden of compliance in service agreements but also short term service agreements and the incidents of agreements not being renewed in a timely manner which have seen workers leave employment prematurely. In some areas, this has caused unnecessary exacerbation of organisational upheaval and skills shortages. Narrow services agreements result in the limiting of opportunities for NGO's to implement innovative solutions to workforce issues and service delivery models.

Other key pieces of legislation and policy that are impacting on the child protection workforce in Queensland are:

- The Queensland Government quality assurance (QA) framework for government and non-government services including minimum standards for the licensing of non-government services
- The Queensland Government Human Services Quality Framework
- Closing the Gap
- Legislative changes to confidentiality rules regarding Child Safety Services in the context of implementing new collaborative care models which have enabled more information about family and young people to be shared between the department and NGO's
- The Helping Out Families initiative - \$55 million over four years will be established across the state following a trial in two locations. New services are available for families who require support but not ongoing statutory involvement through the two new bodies – Family Support Alliance Service and Intensive Family support Service. The Community Services Skilling Plan is working with the Helping Out Families Initiative
- Increased numbers of family support services require an increased number of qualified family

support workers whose qualifications align with the skills and knowledge necessary to provide high quality and effective early intervention

- *Australian Government's National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children (2009-20)* is a comprehensive national approach to protecting children. The Framework has been endorsed by Council of Australian Governments. A wide range of initiatives and policy reforms are expected to be rolled out over the next 10 years
 - Increased focus on prevention and early intervention, requiring greater demand for family support workforce (as above)
 - The research priorities include a focus on systems, which incorporates cross agency collaborations, workforce and organisational structure as areas of inquiry.
 - The Family Support Services National Collaboration Framework (2011-2013) which states *"a critical element of joint policy and planning activity is the identification of workforce development strategies, particularly in the community services sector to ensure the capacity of family support services systems is enhanced"*
 - Increased focus on providing appropriate and effective services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families

Identification and prioritisation of gaps between the existing/forecasted workforce and future workforce needs

The exit of leadership and knowledge in the sector as the ageing workforce moves to retirement presents a challenge which will hinder the availability of experienced child protection leaders and workers into the future. Further exacerbating this gap is that currently, professional development of new graduates and new workers is heavily reliant on the presence of learning cultures within organisations. This reliance creates a barrier for ensuring skilled and sustainable workforce as the demands associated with service delivery often result in mentoring and workplace training not being prioritised within the service environment. System changes will always require the acquisition of new knowledge and new processes and practice improvement will only be achieved through access to ongoing learning opportunities. Consequently, it is predicted that unless this barrier is addressed, the skills and knowledge gaps experienced by the child protection sector as the workforce ages will continue to grow. The necessity to provide backfill is also considered problematic as limited availability of staff to backfill often results in staff attending training in their own time or missing opportunities all together. It has been suggested that this gap in future workforce could be ameliorated by the introduction of an additional role ('technical expert' or 'senior practitioner') in organisations, this role would enable skilled and experienced practitioners to continue to deliver services and have additional responsibilities to mentor and pass on their acquired knowledge. This will also allow a 'technical expert' or 'senior practitioner' role to be remunerated and build in an additional career choice which allows practitioners to be rewarded for skills, experience and expertise, without necessarily having to take on management responsibilities.

Currently the increasing policy focus on family support and early intervention is predicted to result in increases in the number of services and programs in this area. This increase in services may result in a skills shortage as training and education systems catch up with the increased demand for high level family support and early intervention skills. It is suggested that current and future research projects which focus on identifying the most effective interventions for families and children are linked to job design, role descriptions and qualifications to ensure that our child protection workforce has the necessary skills to deliver services which have the most positive outcome for children and families.

At the other end of the system, recent statistics point to a substantial increase in the number of

children and young people using residential care. The current ad hoc approach to training and development which predominantly provides training only in areas that are linked to licensing requirements limits broader professional development and the development of a skilled and knowledgeable workforce in this area. It is anticipated that a more strategic approach which identifies key competencies and attributes for this workforce in the form of qualifications and/or skill sets will be necessary to begin to address the current skills gap.

Flat organisational structures impede the development of robust and resilient organisations because workforces aren't supported to grow – either through their structural design or the remuneration and reward structure. Flat career paths also result in a gap in leadership and management skills as individuals are required to move directly from service delivery to service and organisational management without the requisite professional development. In order to support roles such as the senior practitioner and to provide the workforce with dynamic career paths it is necessary for organisations to rethink their own workforce and structure, and for funding policy to accommodate such organisational flexibility. It must also be acknowledged that in order for such innovations to be implemented, flexibility will need to be built into industrial relations tools and mechanism.

In Queensland, an additional consideration is the inequity experienced by those in geographically isolated areas, in some remote and regional locations the only services available are often those run by non-government organisations. In these areas, child protection workers access to professional support and career pathways is limited, with geographic and professional isolation being compounded by lack of departmental presence, limited training opportunities and no career advancement opportunities.

The increasing national and state focus on the development of integrated services across the health and community services sectors will require the development of new skills and knowledge across our sectors, specifically in managing and leading an integrated service and working in an integrated service delivery environment. The child protection sector now and into the future is expected to experience gaps in the workforce specifically in relation to competencies and qualifications which support integrated service delivery.

Demand/supply disparities

Government policy, internal government recruiting practices and a negative image of child protection work in the university education sector have contributed to shortages of social workers and human service professionals within the sector. Increased demand for workforce, combined with lowered supply of social workers has seen the government recruit from other existing professions such as teachers, police and corrective services officers. Concerns are emerging as the increase of multidisciplinary child protection workers may have an impact on service delivery and client focus as the once coherent practice philosophy, which was drawn from the discipline of social work, is diluted



PRIORITIES

- ✎ Identify skills, knowledge, attributes, qualifications and competencies which may support a senior practitioner role – package qualifications accordingly
- ✎ Increase professional development for residential and foster carers in relation to advocacy for young people
- ✎ Advocate for the prioritisation of workforce considerations in the development and design of new government initiatives for the child protection sector - the development of strategic workforce plans in partnership with industry
- ✎ Identify and develop appropriate professional development and training opportunities to support the management and leadership of integrated services
- ✎ Advocate for appropriate funding and accessibility for professional development and training which supports the implementation of government initiatives
- ✎ Advocate for funding to reflect an increase of senior roles which are not necessarily management roles
- ✎ Map current best practice in early intervention research to job design, role descriptions and qualifications
- ✎ Explore options to reduce complex governance structures resulting from complex funding mechanisms and multi-jurisdictional stakeholders similar to the single services agreement through the Queensland Compact

and imbued with philosophies from diverse disciplines such as education and juvenile justice. As the child protection workforce often moves between government and non-government employers, government recruitment practices have a flow on effect for non-government organisations and this gap in supply of qualified social workers and human service professionals is experienced across the sector.

Compounding these shortages is that new graduates of some degree level qualifications appear not to have the required skills for the sector and often have unrealistic expectations of working in the sector. Consequently, many new graduates are leaving the sector within twelve months. A coordinated approach to ensuring appropriate practice placement between universities and organisations, in line with other initiatives may help alleviate the high turnover being experienced in the sector. Again, the development and funding of senior practitioner roles with mentoring and supervision responsibility may also assist in alleviating this turnover.

Increases in the number of jobs in the sector due to reforms and demographic changes have created higher demand in some areas and subsequent difficulties in recruitment may result in a delay in the commencement of new programs. The supply/demand disparity is pronounced in the following areas:

- Child Protection Workers from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Backgrounds
- Child Protection Workers from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds
- Younger workers (as a result of the ageing workforce)
- Workers in remote and regional areas, particularly those in mining areas where organisations are competing with other industries to attract and retain a skilled workforce
- Child protection workers with university qualifications in social work and human services work

These shortages are intensified in communities in which high levels of mining activity occurs as organisations in remote and regional areas are often competing with other industries to attract and retain a skilled workforce. Compounding the competition for workforce is also the availability of affordable housing for the health and community services workforce.

Current data indicates that the child protection sector is also experiencing skills gaps in the following areas, and that these gaps may continue and/ or be exacerbated if due attention is not given.

- Residential care workers,
- Family support, early intervention and campaigning or communicating in and to communities
- Integrated service delivery leadership and management,
- Leaderships and management (including consideration of specialist management skills other than those from a business management model)
- Cultural competency of non – Indigenous workforce to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people,
- Cultural competency of workforce to work with people from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- Mentoring and supervision,
- Critically reflective practice and resilience,
- Workforce planning skills and knowledge
- Working with children who attend mental health programs
- Understanding poverty and working with children and families experiencing poverty

PRIORITIES

- ✎ Improve availability of accommodation and other social infrastructure in regional areas
- ✎ Increase professional development and training opportunities in strategic workforce planning and development
- ✎ Reconceptualise the concepts which underpin culturally inclusive practice and adapt training in culturally inclusive practice accordingly
- ✎ Institute recruitment practices that positively discriminate to increase diversity in the workforces in our sectors
- ✎ Explore possibility of Portable Long Service Leave
- ✎ Increase the recognition of the positive work of the sector through media - highlight the valuable work undertaken by all parts of the sector
- ✎ Promote career opportunities available in prevention and early intervention services as well as the highly publicised statutory or tertiary system
- ✎ Scholarships or funding to support child protection places in higher education

Advice concerning training product, pathways, training quality and delivery methods

Training System

The child protection sector has concerns about the quality of programs being delivered through the VET sector and the relevance of their content to the work of child protection, surmising that VET qualifications are not currently serving the needs of all organisations. Foremost concerns include that the VET system is becoming more complicated and less user friendly for organisations and currently, organisations need a deep understanding of the system to ensure meaningful interactions and suitable delivery of training products from the sector.

Training product

Difficulty in engaging with the system contributes to a mismatch between the expectations of the work of child protection gained through training and the actual lived experience of daily work, further exacerbating retention issues. Training products need to be reviewed and updated regularly and delivered to suit the context of the work. In order to support the development of relevant training products, a joint strategy which involves organisations and RTO's developing an understanding of each other's needs is essential, enabling organisations to know what questions to ask and what they need from the training providers and have relationships to support the development of products which support the industry.

Currently, the child protection sector has identified the following areas of focus for the improvement of training products:

- Ensure current unaccredited training, delivered to meet various licensing regulations, is mapped to competencies or units under the ATQF – thereby ensuring that workers undertaking compulsory study can be rewarded through credits towards VET qualifications
- Increase content relating to community development theory and systems perspectives (ie. Ecosystems) in the delivery of qualifications which relate to work in child protection.
- Increase content relating to community education, particularly in relation to family support qualifications
- Explore qualifications and skill sets to support the development of advanced practitioners or technical expert role – including content to support the development of mentoring and supervision skills

Training pathways

It has been suggested that a greater focus on training products which create pathways for job readiness and ensure that the delivery of training explicitly matches job roles and tasks may increase retention rates in the sector. The following areas have been identified as a focus for enhancing and creating new pathways:

- Create job pathways through the utilisation of skill sets which support child protection workers induction into the sector and movement between roles in the sector
- Ensure multiple and specifically designed entry points for workers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- Ensure multiple and specifically designed entry points for workers from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds
- Ensure stepped opportunities which mirror peoples journeys in relation to both accredited training and professional development - allow people to learn more deeply at all levels of experience and knowledge
- Increase the number of formalised pathways between RTO's and university qualifications

- Increase assessment and recognition of overseas qualifications and explore option of developing a bridging course for people who have relevant overseas qualifications
- Development of senior practitioner role

Training quality and delivery methods

The Department of Communities, Child Safety co-funded the delivery of Certificate IV in Child, Youth and Family Intervention managed through Sunshine Coast TAFE. The initial roll out of Certificate IV in Child, Youth and Family Intervention in the last five years has included a majority proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants. Subsequent delivery of this qualification, however, has depended on supervision by recent Certificate IV graduates from the previous cohort. Concerns have been raised regarding the ongoing development and support of supervising graduates and standards of supervision in the workplace. Further support and incentives for graduates to undertake further training would enable workplace learning and improve the quality of supervision; however shift work, limited pay and workloads reduce the likelihood of further training being undertaken. As casual staffs are increasingly used as short-term solutions to recruitment challenges, training levels and access to training become a more of an issue.

Workplace delivery as a part of the teaching and learning approach can be problematic as workplace learning has to compete with significant demands in the service environment. Unfortunately the sector is not resourced through current service agreements to provide a quality learning environment and as a result some employers have indicated a bias in favour of university based education at Bachelor or higher level. In addition, the high staff turnover experienced throughout the industry can lead to a high turnover of workplace supervisors and trainers. An example of a strategy to improve the delivery of qualifications is to provide backfill support to resource mentor and trainee so that teaching and learning can happen away from the busy service delivery environment.

Also, the Certificate IV in Child, Youth and Family Intervention may not prepare the student for the complex environment presented by child protection in Queensland; the service delivery environment relies on the capability of workers to engage in critical self-reflection and understanding complex situations. A number of solutions to the delivery of training have been suggested below:

- Develop a mechanism of learning and teaching assessment (including RPL) which is workplace based but also reliable, valid and quality assured
- Increase face to face interaction between teachers, students and those in a supervisory role in the workplace
- Ensure more open and honest lines of communication between the person signing off and the



RTO delivering the training – greater understanding of these roles

- Increase industry engagement and build mutual understandings with RTO's to increase workplace learning and traineeship offers
- Adequately resource flexible training delivery and blended delivery options including:
 - Developing training programs which can be delivered through a range of mechanisms including online
 - Recognise that there is a need and desire for face to face training and develop blended training models according the delivery method which best suits learning in the content area (i.e. E learning, face to face, RPL)
 - Provide funding for qualifications to be delivered using blended delivery models

PRIORITIES

- ✎ Identify key competencies and attributes from qualifications and skill sets which are necessary for the delivery of best practice residential care services – develop and deliver these competencies
- ✎ Provide professional development opportunities which allow participants to critically reflect on their work and learn analytic process which support critically reflective practice
- ✎ Identify skills, knowledge and attributes and qualifications and competencies which may support a senior practitioner role – package qualifications accordingly
- ✎ Develop qualifications and/or skills sets which align with best practice in the delivery of early intervention and family support services
- ✎ Offer different entry points into the sector to support accessibility of qualifications for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- ✎ Identification of training content which is relevant across the community services - collaborative design and delivery of cross sector training

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Workforce Council continues to support the Child Protection Workforce Action Group in partnership with key industry, training and government stakeholders. The Workforce Council also supports the Child Protection Skilling Plan to improve and expand training delivery in this sector. Key partnerships with Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak, Remote Area Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Child Care and family and domestic violence workers have been key developments recently. Act for Kids has implemented an innovative traineeship program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander new entrants, as well as new programs for up-skilling residential care workers in the Cape region

Child Protection Skills and Workforce Development Workshop

- On 14 February 2012 Health and Community Services Workforce Council and PeakCare Queensland jointly hosted a Child Protection Skills and Workforce Development Workshop.
- Approximately 50 child protection professionals from across Queensland attended the forum held in Brisbane.
- The Forum aimed to seek the advice of industry workers to discuss workforce issues including skills shortages within the child protection system.

Outcomes of the workshop included:

- Increased profile of the sector and the workforce through media coverage of this event
- Identification of key strategies and actions for workforce development and planning and skilling needs for the industry.
- Input from the forum contributed to the Workforce Councils Industry Skills Body reports to be finalised by June 2012.
- Child Protection Workforce Action Group agreed to continue discussions and address issues raised at Forum.

Ten Year Skilling and Workforce Development Outlook

Child Protection services will continue to struggle to attract and retain appropriately skilled and qualified workers over the next decade. Increasing demand for Child Protection services and the increased stress and workload of this workforce will add to the general pressures felt by other sectors in this industry. The following priorities have been identified by industry stakeholders in relation to the current and future workforce and skilling needs. Further consultations will be required to identify key actions in the next one to five years, as well as to identify key agencies responsible for leading these actions.

Five Year Skilling and Workforce Development Priorities

- Advocate for funding to reflect an increase of senior roles which are not necessarily management roles
- Explore possibility of Portable Long Service Leave
- Increase the recognition of the positive work of the sector through media - highlight the valuable work undertaken by all parts of the sector
- Promote career opportunities available in prevention and early intervention services as well as the highly publicised statutory or tertiary system
- Map current best practice in early intervention research to job design, role descriptions and qualifications
- Develop qualifications and/or skills sets which align with best practice in the delivery of early intervention and family support services
- Offer different entry points into the sector to support accessibility of qualifications for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- Identification of training content which is relevant across the community services - collaborative design and delivery of cross sector training
- Explore options to reduce complex governance structures resulting from complex funding mechanisms and multi-jurisdictional stakeholders similar to the single services agreement through the Queensland Compact
- Scholarships or funding to support child protection places in higher education

Priorities for Action Over the Next Year

Identify skills, knowledge and attributes and qualifications and competencies which may support a senior practitioner role – package qualifications accordingly

- Improve availability of accommodation and other social infrastructure in regional areas
- Increase professional development for residential and foster carers in relation to advocacy for young people
- Identify key competencies and attributes from qualifications and skill sets which are necessary for the delivery of best practice residential care services – develop and deliver these competencies
- Increase professional development and training opportunities in strategic workforce planning and development
- Advocate for the prioritisation of workforce considerations in the development and design of new government initiatives for the child protection sector - the development of strategic workforce plans in partnership with industry
- Identify and develop appropriate professional development and training opportunities to support the management and leadership of integrated services
- Provide professional development opportunities which allow participants to critically reflect on their work and learn analytic process which support critically reflective practice
- Reconceptualise the concepts which underpin culturally inclusive practice and adapt training in culturally inclusive practice accordingly
- Institute recruitment practices that positively discriminate to increase diversity in the workforces in our sectors
- Advocate for appropriate funding and accessibility for professional development and training which supports the implementation of government initiatives



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