

SNAICC's Submission on the Early Childhood Development Workforce Issues Paper

The Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) is the national peak body representing the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. SNAICC is a non-government, not for profit organisation, governed by a national executive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people drawn from members in the early childhood education and family support community sectors. For further information, see www.snaicc.asn.au.

SNAICC is happy to assist the Commission further with the study, including facilitating discussions, research and future consultations with our members and networks, as well as the provision of advice around cultural competency training or any of the implementation issues discussed below.

1.0 General comments

1.1 Background

Children's services are key to meeting the early childhood targets under the national *Closing the Gap Agenda* and promoting strong communities and families. The essential support that early childhood development (ECD) services provide for many of our children and families is widely recognised by our services and sector (SNAICC, *Early Childhood Case Studies*, 2004) as are the well documented health, developmental and protective benefits of early childhood education and care (Smart, Sanson, Baxter et al, *Home-to-school transitions for financially disadvantaged children*, 2008).

It is clear that formal education literacy and numeracy gaps between our children and other children exist even in the early years (AEDI, *A Snapshot of Early Childhood Development in Australia*, 2009) and that there are many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents who do not access mainstream early childhood services (Flaxman, Muir and Oprea, *Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services*, 2009). Government data indicates that access to early childhood services by our families is half the rate of other families (ABS, *The health and welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples*, 2005). The findings also suggest that where our families and children do access child and family services, these services are more likely to be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific than mainstream ones (Flaxman, Muir and Oprea, *Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services*, 2009).

There is a pressing need for appropriate, well-resourced services that our families will readily access. Our members report high levels of existing unmet demand and we are aware of the future need created by the anticipated growth and the age structure of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population (ABS, *Measures of Australia's Progress*, 2010). Consequently, policy formulation and program funding requires consideration of how access is facilitated, as

simply increasing the number, scope and capacity of services targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families will not necessarily result in higher levels of engagement. For various and widely recognised historical, cultural and socio-economic reasons, our families are often the 'hardest-to-reach' by early childhood and family services (Flaxman, Muir and Oprea, *Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services*, 2009).

1.2 Overcoming barriers to accessing early childhood services

Understanding the considerable barriers to accessing services faced by our children and families is crucial to any workforce development initiative. Service engagement with our families incorporates two elements: initial access and ongoing contact (Cortis, Katz and Patulny, *Engaging hard-to-reach families and children*, 2009).

The list of challenges with engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families is extensive and includes many of the factors affecting engagement of 'hard-to-reach' families. Work that has been done in this area includes consultations with services users - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and community members - and service providers (SNAICC, *Indigenous Parenting Project*, 2004 and *Working and Walking Together*, 2010), and the comprehensive study by Flaxman, Muir and Oprea that focuses on service providers. However, the views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are an area for further development.

To adopt the categorisation of McCurdy and Daro, the challenges that have been identified can be grouped into individual, provider, program and social and neighbourhood factors affecting engagement (*Parent involvement in family support programs: an integrated theory*, 2001). It is also noted that there is often overlap between these factors because of the complexity of the issues.

The literature identified the following barriers:

- a. Individual factors** that refer to beliefs, attitudes and needs that will directly affect whether people will seek and accept services.

These include:

- **Complex needs and circumstances** of clients, including family breakdown, client behaviour, and low income.
- **Unwillingness to engage with services** because of distrust, lack of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander staff, communication and language barriers, or feeling that other supports were sufficient.

- b. Provider factors**, or service delivery style, promotion, outreach, staffing and practice approaches.

These include:

- **Unsuccessful service promotion**, including a lack of awareness that the service exists.
- **Legacies of mainstream services**, including associations with child protection removals.

- **Inflexible entry points**, such as access only through a referral from another service.
- **Lack of cultural awareness or programming.**
- **An unmet need for long-term trained staff**, which is often a particularly difficult factor for remote or regional communities.
- **An ad hoc approach to cultural competency training** for staff.
- An **unmet need for staff fluent in local languages**, particularly in remote areas.
- **Prohibitive fees** preventing access by low-income families.
- Existing **community or family conflict** preventing access.
- A **lack of comfortable, appropriate and proximate venues.**
- **Limiting practice approaches**, including an inability to build and maintain relationships with the community, and a limited awareness of child rearing practices.

c. Program factors, including funding structures and collaboration with other services.

These include:

- **Ongoing funding uncertainty** that makes planning extremely difficult and stressful. The lack of certainty compromises the flexibility required to meet families' needs. This is compounded by the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific programs and mainstream programs.
- **Programs and initiatives tend to operate as silos.** As the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner noted in 2007 that 'there is a tendency to substitute rather than to complement and supplement programs within portfolios.' The recent Children and Family Centres initiative is a good example of this.
- **Maintaining quality standards and training** while meeting community demand is difficult.
- **An unmet need for additional funding** to offset the low income of many families.
- A need for an **infrastructure upgrade.**
- **Limited coordination or collaboration** between services, even in urban setting.
- **Difficulty in coordinating service delivery** in remote areas.

d. Social and neighbourhood factors, primarily referring to the immediate community within which the service operated.

These include:

- Concerns about **individual perceptions and social stigma** related to the access of services such as relationship counselling, stigmatisation of teenage parenting.
- **Access to transport**, particularly for regional and remote communities, but equally an issue for outer suburban clients.

In addition to these factors, the literature focusing on *Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004-2009* noted difficulties in identifying, contacting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients and then sustaining client attendance at services.

Key to ensuring access and engagement is the provision of appropriate service choice to match identified needs, through both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander controlled community services and culturally competent mainstream services.

The literature on both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and the broader 'hard-to-reach' groups have found that the most successful child and family service providers incorporated the following considerations:

a. Individual factors were addressed through:

- The promotion of services through **informal environments and strengths-based models**, acknowledging strengths rather than deficits.
- **A holistic response**, including a range of programs that may be universal, secondary or tertiary.
- **Building on pre-existing relationships** within communities to encourage access.

b. Provider factors were addressed through:

- The adoption of strengths based models, acknowledging strengths rather than deficits.
- Community **responsibility, design, development and delivery of services and programs**.
- The existence of **multiple service providers**, both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and mainstream services with cultural competency policies.
- **Informal and flexible entry to services**, whether through mobile playgroups, health clinics, child care centres or schools.
- Employment of **bridging strategies**, such as home visits and longer service hours.
- **Partnership and collaboration** between services, providing a full continuum of programs. This promotes a holistic approach to programs that are comprehensive and ongoing, such as antenatal, postnatal support; ongoing child development information programs; child care and preschool.
- Ensuring **flexible program delivery**, including recognising expertise of parents and extended family, focusing on the best interests of the client rather than the service provider.
- Ensuring that program and parenting information was **embedded with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural and historical material**, including materials in local languages and tailored to local cultures and knowledge.
- Program facilitation by **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff trusted by the local community**.
- **Services celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child rearing** approaches.
- Non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff completed **cultural competency training**.
- **Limited staff turnover** and **continuity of staff-client relationships**.
- Strong involvement of **community mentors and role models**, representative of the client group, for example, ensuring fathers are involved.
- **Working with existing frameworks of care, including a whole of family approach**, recognising that grandparents and other family members should be involved.
- Use of **venues** where participants felt **safe and comfortable**.

c. Program factors were overcome by:

- **Consistent, sustainable government policies and funding**, particularly given 'the history of short-term or incomplete programs that had characterised many Indigenous policies. The cycle of aborted programs and 'unfinished promises' had damaged the

- sustainability of successive initiatives...’ (Flaxman, Muir and Oprea, *Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services*, 2009).
- **Flexible, highly competitive fee arrangements** for vulnerable families that do not prevent their access to services. It is of particular importance that the costs associated with the up skilling of the workforce do not create another disincentive for parents to engage with services.
 - **Recognition that ‘effective community engagement takes time’**, noting that the four year funding period for the *Communities for Children* model was inadequate and ‘insufficient’ and did not enable ‘input by a diversity of community members [or establish] trust and community sanction’ (Flaxman, Muir and Oprea, *Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services*, 2009).
 - **Staff continuity.**
 - **Auspice arrangements with other organisations**, particularly where a non-profit organisation is involved, provided it is not associated with the statutory child protection system.
- d. **Social and neighbourhood factors** were overcome by:
- An **awareness of client needs and specific responses**, such as outreach programs, provision of transport and food programs. For example, a study on the parenting needs and practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents found that intergenerational loss and the need for healing was a consistent theme (SNAICC, *Indigenous Parenting Project*, 2004).
 - **Community ownership and design.**
 - **Awareness of social norms and encouraging involvement** from all family members, whether through targeted groups or strengths-based resources (SNAICC, *You’re a Dad 7 storylines about being a Dad*, 2009; *Through Young Black Eyes*, 2007).

1.3 The need to build the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood workforce

Two key factors that increase our families’ access include local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staffing and control of these services (Flaxman, Muir and Oprea, *Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services*, 2009). It is note worthy that the most successful boost to participation in child care for our children came about when the Multifunctional Aboriginal Children’s Services (MACS) program was created with a specific funding allocation within the children’s services program. This created the imperative to allocate those funds and engage with communities to develop new services (SNAICC, *Improving access to child care for Indigenous families*, 2002).

There is already a shortage of qualified staff for early childhood services from ‘untrained’ assistants to fully qualified early childhood graduates across the broader sector. The expansion of the industry, low wages and working conditions result in high turnover and low retention rates, making it difficult to recruit appropriate staff. This is likely to be more acute in the services that try to meet the diverse, specific and obvious needs of our children because of geographic and other resourcing constraints. For example, SNAICC’s members report a high level of unpaid

work by early childhood workers to meet current demand, and acknowledge the close community ties often increases the obligations felt by workers accept considerable workloads.

We are also aware that many of our children's services rely on unqualified and underqualified staff (Department of Finance and Deregulation, *Performance Audit of Indigenous Professional Support Units*, 2009). The report states as follows:

Table 4.3: Average Percentage of Staff with Qualifications

Qualifications	Flexible %	Crèche%	MACS%	OSHC%	MobPly%	Total %
None	48	85	45	69	56	59
Certificate	22	12	19	30	18	22
Diploma	9	2	16	8	11	10
Degree	8	0	8	3	9	6
Unsure	13	1	4	2	3	5

Note: Flexible = flexible/innovative centres and includes Indigenous mainstream services and Integrated services; OSHC = outside school hours care; MobPly = Mobiles and Indigenous Playgroups.

4.11 Victoria (79%) and Qld (54%) reported that over half of their staff had qualifications. The remaining states and territories had a lower percentage of staff with qualifications, ranging from 47% of staff with qualifications in NSW, 32% in Western Australia (WA), 30% in SA and only 20% in Qld.
13 NSW Department of Community Services, *Review of the Children's Services Regulation 2004*, Discussion Paper, 2008.

4.12 Qualifications also differed across service models, with MACS and flexible services having the most staff with qualifications. This is probably the result of state licensing regulations for centre-based child care services. The majority of qualifications were at Certificate rather than Diploma or Degree level.

We note, however, that there is limited recent comprehensive data collected on issues facing the current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood workforce or of the availability and employment of qualified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. However, there is a considerable wealth of material based on experience, anecdotal evidence and the comparable child protection sector (Martin and Healy, *Who Works in Community Services*, 2010). Therefore, we would encourage the Commission to recommend such data be collected.

1.4 Key recommendations

The overarching theme evident in all of the best practice responses for our sectors is **the acknowledgement that the appropriate provider approach must be determined by the local context and community it seeks to serve**. This is supported by recommendations from the former Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (Calma, *Addressing family violence and child sexual assault in Indigenous communities – A human rights perspective*, 2006) and the findings by Anderson and Wild note that '[i]t is critical that governments commit to genuine consultation with Aboriginal people in designing initiatives for Aboriginal communities.' (Anderson and Wild, *Ampe akelyernemane meke mekarle - Little children are sacred. Report of the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse*, 2007).

Second, **support via sustainable, consistent funding and a flexible policy framework for workforce development is crucial** in gearing services for success.

Third, given that our families access both mainstream and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services, it follows that **there is need for a proportionate focus on cultural competency in mainstream services**. Many of the barriers to our families accessing the services point to a system that is not attuned to the cultural needs of all its clients. As the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner has observed, 'cultural practices and social arrangements are also important determinants of the lower uptake, relative to the wider population, of mainstream services by Indigenous peoples in urban areas,' (HREOC, *Social Justice Report 2006*, 2007). Consequently, cultural competency is defined as:

a set of congruent behaviours, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals that enable them to work effectively in cross-cultural settings (VACCA, *Aboriginal Cultural Competence Framework*, 2008).

Studies have identified the need for carers and workers to receive training about the value and means of connecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people to their culture (CREATE Foundation, *Indigenous children and young people in care: Experiences of care and connections with culture*, 2005). The 1997 *Bringing Them Home* report also made a series of recommendations aimed at providing training about the history and impact of forcible removals to professionals working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children separated from their families.

However, Libesman cautions against two countervailing trends in reforms in the child welfare sector: while there is increasing recognition of the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families' participation, this is accompanied by a focus on participation within the mainstream service provision (Libesman, 'Indigenous children and contemporary child welfare' in Geoff Monahan and Lisa Young, *Children and the law in Australia*, 2008). This caution is equally applicable in the early childhood sector. Key to ensuring access and engagement is the provision of appropriate service choice to match identified needs, through both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander controlled community services and mainstream services working toward cultural competency.

These considerations demonstrate a need for a coordinated, sustainable plan for training and workforce development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific services. Current and proposed services will need to establish recruitment processes to ensure there are enough appropriately trained workers who combine the necessary cultural knowledge with familiarity of the more formalised mainstream knowledge about child development and learning capacities.

2.0 Planning the training and resourcing for this sector – some recommendations

2.1 Establish a specific, national planning process for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood sector

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood sector encounters many barriers engaging with current generalist funding models used by governments and the competitive tendering Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses. While such a strategy may be effective in meeting short term needs of employers, it is not effective in meeting the broader social policy needs under the long term *Closing the Gap Agenda*. The training needs of our students will require direct government engagement with appropriate registered training organisations (RTOs) and courses.

One example of specific workforce planning includes the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health sector's approach (*A Blueprint for Action: Pathways into the health workforce for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people - National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Council, 2008*).

2.2 Ensure adequate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood workforce representation on all Council of Australian Governments working parties and task groups

There is an urgent need for creating appropriate links between the education and training sectors to address the needs of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce. Decisions on priorities and funding must be tied to collaboration at local levels. This should be done by developing mechanisms for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood services staff and experts to negotiate on local, regional and state or territory basis with funding bodies and trainers regarding their workforce and training needs.

There should be a bottom up planning process over a five year period, to develop linked local plans for services, identifying staffing and training needs. This rolling planning process would need to co-ordinate the delivery of places and resources with current and future government policy decisions, as well as stated employer needs. This process will require policy and budget decisions to ensure the availability of appropriate funding for these training and education places. Increasing the proportion of trained teachers in early childhood services will be slow, so most of the trained staff in these services will continue to come from the VET sector. Therefore strategies should be introduced to ensure that existing expertise is effectively used to up skill staff in services that have difficulties in recruiting and retaining highly skilled employees.

2.3 Establish an annual quota of appropriately funded training places offered by RTOs with suitable training models for new and untrained Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers.

2.4 Adaptation of course content to target participants' needs

The current VET program for Certificate II does not meet the particular needs of some less qualified early childhood workers as an entry point for those with limited educational experiences. There is also a need to strengthen course content, as the compulsory units of Certificate III do not include any training on cultural diversity and very few RTOs offer options in this area. This creates a new workforce, particularly those trained through the more minimalist versions of the program, who have no access to culturally appropriate training, even in its most basic level.

There is a need for the education and training sectors to develop 'two way' teaching components, including support for bilingual education, for both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and other staff. This is urgent as there is evidence that, regardless of auspice and mix of students, programs that recognise the strong cultures of parents and children and integrate these with other early childhood learning, are the most likely to be successful. Conversely, programs without this approach are less likely to engage our families and workers.

2.5 Provision of additional funding for the expansion and development of units in Indigenous learning for VET courses from Certificate II up to diplomas and degrees

These units should be mandated for training places allocated under the *Closing the Gap* initiative.

2.6 Proposed framework for tertiary institutions and RTOs

- Using existing models, where possible, to develop curriculum and training programs that are culturally informed and will work equally well in all areas from fairly isolated communities to urban settings.
- Recognise the need to vary local content and include languages (including English as a Second Language components) literacy, cultural and local issues and offer options of various delivery modes, including onsite training and the e-health approach.
- Expand and develop early childhood curriculum and training programs that are culturally informed and work for existing local and new workers.
- Fund support networks and technological needs, such as video/DVDs and online access to close some of the education gaps for both the staff and preschool children in urban, rural and isolated settings.
- Funding for training to also cover transport, child care and other expenses of the often older workers and potential workers. This may include on site training or off site blocks of training supported by accommodation and travel allowances. This is particularly

- important in remote and rural areas. Funding must also cover backfilling of positions while staff are away upgrading qualifications.
- Research and develop a basis for assessing existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child care workers' knowledge and learning modes both for inclusion in courses and incorporation as part of Recognition of Prior Learning.
 - Ensure that these courses articulate so people engaged at local levels are able to up skill and upgrade through to university level qualifications.
 - Recruit those who are effective existing carers and informal traditional teachers. This provides formal recognition and draws on existing cultural and social skills of the communities.
 - Recognise the community and other support networks for parents and children as part of the services.
 - There should be a government funded national campaign targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to recruit both workers and students into courses and jobs, with an emphasis on local people for local services.
 - Focus on upgrading local community skills. Use fly in fly out trainers to upgrade local skills and know how, rather than short-term workers who will not remain in the community.
 - Identify training organisations that are prepared to offer training to people in their own communities. This promotes local connections and develops long-term local workers.

3.0 Response to specific questions

Given the terms of reference, is the suggested scope of the ECD workforce appropriate for the purposes of this study?

SNAICC recognises the need to maintain and support specialist services that do not fit mainstream funding and management models. The budget-based services such as the MACS have been an important part of delivering services that are based on collective, community needs and not on an individual fee based model. Any new services, such as the new specific multipurpose Children and Family Centres (CFCs) services currently being implemented, should also be based on a model of service and funding that incorporates community input, community management and meeting local needs.

SNAICC notes that the Chair of the Productivity Commission recently acknowledged the importance of services that engaged local communities and were culturally appropriate. In particular, he observed:

While outcomes data in the OID Report provide important information, for policymaking purposes there is no substitute for detailed evidence-based assessments and reviews of specific programs. One advantage of our Federation is that it has generated many different policy and program innovations. However, with some exceptions, Australia has squandered the opportunity to learn systematically from these diverse experiences in order to identify those that could make a difference if applied nationally. In a small way, the OID Report has sought to redress this, by

including mini case studies of ‘things that work’ (or appear to be working) in areas targeted by the framework, often at the level of particular communities or regions.

The report identifies four factors that are common to many of the ‘things that work’:

- Cooperative approaches between Indigenous people and government, often involving non-profit and private sectors as well. (The Cape York Welfare Trial is illustrative of the power of this.)
- Community involvement in program design and decision-making — a ‘bottom-up’ contribution, rather than just relying on ‘top-down’ direction. (There are many instances of governments designing programs that have resulted in unintended perverse consequences through lack of community input.)
- Ongoing government support — human, financial and physical. We have often seen, even between editions of the OJD Report, promising programs that have initially been very successful lose momentum for want of sustained government support.
- Good governance — as noted earlier this cannot be taken for granted, but must be nurtured and supported. It is needed in both Indigenous communities and organisations, and within government itself (Banks, *Closing the Gap Conversations Series*, 2009).

These observations are squarely aligned with SNAICC’s commitment to policies that give Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples the responsibility of designing, developing and delivering services to their own communities. Recognising the importance and value of a collaborative approach to service delivery for our families, SNAICC has developed a *Service Development, Cultural Respect and Service Access Policy* that outlines principles for partnerships and resource collaborations between our services and mainstream service providers. This has led to development of in principle agreements such as the 2010 *Memorandum of Understanding between the NSW Department of Human Services, Community Services and the Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat (NSW)*. These principles may equally be developed to apply to the early childhood sector and workforce development strategies.

We recognise that mainstream services often do not appropriately address the needs of our families. While we recommend more training and education for these services, we maintain there will be a continued need for targeted services that provide culturally appropriate services for many years to come. Attaining the skills to engage with our families for both specific and generalist services will take time to achieve and must be approached in a strategic and sustainable manner.

Which ECD services for children with additional needs should the Commission include in this study?

MACS provide integrated services in our communities and the CFC services will offer more than care services.

The *Council of Australian Governments National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development* (the Agreement) sets out to ‘achieve tangible improvements in outcomes for Indigenous children and generational change over the longer term.’ It recognises that integrated early childhood services are the best delivery platform to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families receive the support they need, and that the proposed 35

Indigenous Children and Family Centres are to 'provide a dynamic mix of services, responsive to community needs.' Importantly, the Agreement notes that 'community engagement with the Children and Family Centres is integral to their successful implementation.'

SNAICC welcomes these models of integrated and co-located services because they have the potential to develop the appropriate trust relationships and professional skills that are needed, if 'gaps' are to be reduced. There is a strong residue of distrust of mainstream services that makes such co-location with trusted services particularly useful for our families. However, to ensure the CFCs are meeting the aims outlined in the Agreement, SNAICC emphasises the urgent obligation to collect further comprehensive national data examining the implementation of the proposed CFC services.

What data collections provide information on the ECD sector and its workforce? How might these data collections be improved?

There is minimal comprehensive data on our sector and we suggest a major data collection exercise be undertaken on the sector to identify our workers, their qualifications and needs. SNAICC recommends that data collection methods incorporate a strong representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisers to oversee and collect data. This will assist with identification of the existing formal and informal knowledge and expertise in communities discussed in **2.6 Proposed framework for tertiary institutions and RTOs**.

How might the proposed qualification standards, staffing levels, and the implied mix of skills and knowledge assist the delivery of the desired outcomes for children? What effect will the new standards and targets have on demand for ECD workers?

SNAICC is aware that many workers in our services will be required to upgrade their qualifications to meet the new standards. Primarily, this raises issues of capacity to support the required training and the need for additional resources. This may be an issue with MACS and other services types which are under-supplied with formal qualifications but often have very experienced and respected staff members. See **2.6 Proposed framework for tertiary institutions and RTOs** above.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies in this sector needs to be resourced to become part of the training community responsible for designing, development, delivering upgrades that are cultural and professionally appropriate. This needs time to develop our skills, resources and expertise. A model that has adopted this approach is one currently used by the Northern Territory's Save the Children.

Do providers of ECD services have difficulties finding staff? If so, are these problems more pronounced in some ECD occupations or in some areas of Australia? Why is this the case?

The challenges faced by all ECD services are similar for our urban services. However, these difficulties are exacerbated by the geographic locations of many of our regional and remote services. The challenges of recruiting childcare services in remote communities is outlined in the 2010-11 *Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS) and Crèches* Report.

To what extent are qualification requirements a barrier to entering the ECD sector? How could any such barriers be overcome? Do people from Indigenous and CALD backgrounds face particular barriers to obtaining entry-level ECD qualifications?

Recent SNAICC consultations with early childhood services from our sector across Australia in 2010 found that there are generally insufficient ratios and a lack of support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to up skill qualifications. Primary barriers cited included limited administrative resources and the inability to backfill staff throughout the training period.

See also general discussion in **1.2 Overcoming barriers to accessing early childhood services.**

Are training providers and courses of sufficient quality to meet the needs of the ECD sector?

We agree with the section on the ECD workforce for Indigenous children in the Issues Paper. SNAICC suggests that the existing initiatives are fragmented, inadequate and urges for more resources and a co-ordinated approach.

What skills must ECD workers have in order to provide effective services to Indigenous children? Do all ECD workers who work with Indigenous children have these skills? Given the challenges faced by many services for Indigenous children, how appropriate are the remuneration and conditions for workers in those services?

Those working with our children in both specific and general services need diverse sets of skills. SNAICC emphasises that these workers must not be seen as having a lesser need for the more formal qualifications. Currently, few non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff have the necessary cultural skills to work with our children and families.

Developing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence of other staff requires implementing and continually developing a suite of programs and activities, including, for example:

- promoting and respecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and child rearing practices;
- providing staff training in cultural awareness;
- respecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self determination;
- working in respectful partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisations – as service partners, not service competitors;
- engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and

- their organisations in respectful and culturally appropriate ways; and
- supporting our staff in non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific organisations and creating culturally supportive workplaces.

All our children must have access to services that nurture, celebrate and reinforce Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and support the development of their cultural identity.

See also above responses generally for comments on working conditions.

What strategies are being used to attract ECD workers from Indigenous communities and to build Indigenous workforce capability? How effective are these strategies?

There is currently no clear overarching strategy nor is there discussion around the availability of financial resources to develop the programs we need. See **2.6 Proposed framework for tertiary institutions and RTOs** above.