

Queensland Government - Response to the Productivity Commission's Early Childhood Development Workforce Draft Research Report (issued 30 June 2011)

The Queensland Government welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Productivity Commission's *Early Childhood Development Workforce Draft Research Report*. The Queensland Government broadly supports the direction of the report and would like to draw the Commission's attention to a range of approaches the Queensland Government is taking to implementing early childhood reforms and attracting and retaining a high quality early childhood development workforce. This response does not address every recommendation, but only those that required clarification or further information.

Release of the Queensland Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Action Plan 2011-2014

The Queensland Government recognises the significant demand for a qualified early childhood workforce as a result of new National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and the commitment to provide universal access to kindergarten.

On 7 July 2011 the Queensland Government released the *Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Action Plan 2011-2014* which contains a range of workforce actions and underpinning initiatives to assist the sector in attracting, developing and retaining the necessary early childhood education and care workforce. This comprehensive plan represents a Queensland government investment in the early childhood workforce of approximately \$76 million over three years. Further information about the specific initiatives covered by the plan is included where relevant through-out this submission.

The Queensland *ECEC Workforce Action Plan 2011-2014* is available at: <http://deta.qld.gov.au/earlychildhood/pdfs/workforce-action-plan.pdf>

Implementing COAG ECEC Reforms

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 3.2

To achieve the goals of the Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) ECEC reforms without disadvantaging low-income families through the anticipated increase in fees, governments will need to ensure that there is adequate financial support for such families.

The Queensland Government wants ECEC to remain affordable for families and will be monitoring the cost impact of the COAG reforms.

In the Queensland context, the national Decision Regulatory Impact Statement, publicly released in December 2009, included an estimate that the cost of implementing national quality reforms in Queensland for long day care services was about \$5.99 per child per day by 2020. As noted by the Productivity Commission, around half of this increase is expected to be covered by the Australian Government through the Child Care Benefit and Child Care Rebate. The estimated impact for families accessing kindergarten services in Queensland is much less at \$1.21 per child per day by 2020 as current standards in kindergarten services will assist in meeting the new national standard.

The Queensland Kindergarten Funding Scheme will support many long day care centres to employ an early childhood teacher and, in doing so, will help them meet the teacher requirements in the new National Quality Framework. In addition to the standard subsidy per eligible child enrolled under the Queensland Kindergarten Funding Scheme, further subsidies are available for services in remote and lower socioeconomic areas and for services with families holding a Commonwealth Government Health Care Card. This additional funding is provided to services to help ensure that fees are not a barrier to access and to assist with the costs of attracting and retaining teachers in remote locations.

The Queensland Government is considering refinements to ensure the Queensland Kindergarten Funding Scheme is addressing barriers to access for families from remote and lower socioeconomic areas as well as for families of children with diverse needs.

Further information on the subsidies provided through the Queensland Kindergarten Funding Scheme is available in the table below.

Standard per Child Subsidy	The subsidy for kindergarten providers not eligible to receive the Australian Government Child Care Benefit payment on behalf of eligible families is \$2250.00 per child per annum. The subsidy for kindergarten providers eligible to receive Australian Government CCB payments on behalf of eligible families is \$1286.00 per child per annum. Effective July 2011 - June 2012.
Remote ARIA Subsidy	This is a per child loading of 50% of the standard subsidy rate for services in remote and very remote locations as determined by the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA) developed by the Australian Government's Department of Health and Aged Care (DHAC). This subsidy provides additional support for services to attract and retain qualified teachers.
Low Socio-Economic Subsidy	This is a per child loading of 25% of the standard subsidy rate for services operating in locations within the bottom 20% of Statistical Local Areas (SLA) as identified using the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA). This subsidy is to offset fees to reduce out-of-pocket expenses for parents.
Health Care Card Subsidy	This subsidy is provided to services not in receipt of the low socio-economic subsidy for each child whose parent/carer/guardian holds an Australian Government Health Care Card. The Health Care Card subsidy for kindergarten providers not eligible for the Australian Government's Child Care Benefit is \$1179.00 per child per annum. The subsidy for kindergarten providers eligible to receive CCB is \$402.00 per child per annum. The subsidy is provided directly to services to offset fees and reduce out-of-pocket expenses for eligible parents. Effective July 2011 - June 2012.
The subsidy payment rates are indexed annually on 1 July. The rates are increased in line with projections published each year in the mid-year Fiscal and Economic Statement. This level of indexation is based on a composite of 75% of the forecast Wage Price Index and 25% of the forecast Consumer Price Index	

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 3.5

Where voluntary committees currently manage ECEC services, governments should ensure that professional management support (such as cluster management or other shared services) is readily available to assist with management and leadership.

The Queensland Government is acting to ensure that the more than 350 Kindergarten services¹ in Queensland have the support they need to deliver a quality Kindergarten program by requiring these services to join a Central Governing Body (CGB) in order to receive Queensland Government funding through the Queensland Kindergarten Funding Scheme.

Kindergarten services in Queensland can choose from five approved CGBs. The CGB is the service's primary contact for all matters relating to the delivery of their kindergarten program and has a range of responsibilities including directing Queensland Government funding to their members and providing support and advice for their members as they work to maximise enrolments of kindergarten age children and manage waiting lists and enrolment prioritisation processes. CGBs also provide professional development and support for kindergarten teachers and assistants and promote inclusive practise.

The CGBs will also address a number of other issues identified by the Productivity Commission surrounding the need to provide further support for services to include children with additional needs in ECEC as they will:

- support member services to ensure children in priority groups who may have additional needs or require additional support receive equitable access to kindergarten programs in line with relevant legislative requirements; and
- support member services to establish and maintain referral pathways to appropriate/relevant services to promote positive early childhood development and wellbeing.

¹ Kindergarten service refers to services that provide a kindergarten program and are not approved to receive Australian Government Child Care Benefit payments on behalf of eligible families.

Further information about CGBs is available at: <http://deta.qld.gov.au/earlychildhood/service/access-kindy/central-gov-bodies.html>

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 5.1

To assist in the transition to the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education, governments should permit:

- any currently employed 3-year-qualified early childhood teacher to deliver the preschool program
- any 3-year-qualified teachers returning to or entering the workforce to deliver the preschool program, provided a plan is in place for them to upgrade their qualification to the equivalent of a 4-year degree.

For the purposes of the Queensland Kindergarten Funding Scheme, the key mechanism in Queensland for funding the delivery of Kindergarten to achieve the goals of the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education, a qualified early childhood teacher is:

- a four-year qualified early childhood education teacher, from the Queensland College of Teachers (QCT) list of qualifications; or
- a QCT-registered teacher with an approved two or three year early childhood qualification that meets the requirements of sections 113 [(a) to (c)] or 114 of the Child Care Regulation 2003²; or
- a primary teacher currently registered with the QCT who is studying towards an approved early childhood qualification that meets the requirements of sections 113 [(a) to (c)] or 114 of the Child Care Regulation 2003.

In addition to providing flexibility in relation to the qualifications that constitute an early childhood teacher and appropriate transition arrangements, the Queensland Government is providing significant support for existing workers and teachers to upgrade their qualifications to meet these new requirements. Under the *ECEC Workforce Action Plan 2011-2014* the Queensland Government is providing:

- scholarships for Advanced Diploma holders to upgrade to become early childhood teachers and teach an early childhood education program, and gain teacher recognition with the Queensland College of Teachers;
- Scholarships for staff currently employed in licensed centre-based early childhood education and care services with a three year university degree to upgrade their qualifications to teach an approved kindergarten program and be eligible for registration with the Queensland College of Teachers. Eligible early childhood staff only need two years part-time university study to upgrade their qualifications; and
- up to \$300,000 to enable Queensland registered primary teachers to gain an early childhood qualification, offered on a tuition fee basis until 2014 under a Teacher Bridging Program.

Regulation arrangements for services out of scope of the National Quality Framework

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 14.1

To achieve the COAG ECEC reform goals governments should:

- bring Indigenous-focused ECEC services into the scope of the National Quality Standard
- have a structured plan with agreed targets, and allocate additional funds to ensure all Indigenous-focused ECEC services achieve a rating of National Quality Standard or above within an agreed timeframe, without the need for waivers.

All jurisdictions are considering regulatory arrangements for services out of scope of the National Quality Framework.

² In practise this can mean a 3 year qualified teacher who has up-graded their qualifications to include a Certificate III or Advanced Diploma qualification in Children's Services (for example) can meet the definition of a "Qualified early childhood teacher".

The Queensland Government has recently consulted on a Regulatory Assessment Statement which detailed the options for regulating ECEC services currently licensed under Queensland's *Child Care Act 2002* that are proposed to be excluded from the National Quality Framework. There are approximately 94 ECEC services that are currently licensed under Queensland's *Child Care Act 2002* and are proposed to be excluded from the new national laws through the national Regulation. These services are:

- 10 occasional care services;
- 55 small occasional care services known as limited hours care services;
- 26 budget based funded (BBF) services; and
- 3 multifunctional Aboriginal children's services.

The policy objective for the new legislation is to provide for the continued regulation of licensed excluded services after the commencement of the new national laws in a way that:

- aligns, where possible, with the COAG's Early Childhood Education and Care National Quality Agenda policy directions;
- minimises regulatory burden for government, the sector and the community;
- improves or, at a minimum, maintains the quality of these services in Queensland;
- provides flexibility, particularly for those services operating in rural and remote areas; and
- contributes to providing universal access to a Kindergarten Program for all children in the year prior to Prep by 2014.

It is proposed to achieve this objective through new Queensland legislation for licensed excluded services that applies approaches from the national law wherever possible including the implementation of the Early years Learning Framework but retains certain elements of the *Child Care Act 2002* such as current workforce requirements.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 7.2

Given that children typically spend limited time in occasional care, occasional care has relatively limited scope to contribute to cognitive development. As a consequence, governments should not impose additional mandatory qualification requirements on occasional care workers.

The Queensland Government does not support the view that occasional care has relatively limited scope to contribute to cognitive development in all circumstances. In Queensland occasional care services, including limited hours care services, allow parents to attend appointments, take care of personal matters, study, undertake casual or part-time employment, or have temporary respite. Many occasional care services operate in rural and remote areas and in some cases these services are the only ECEC service within their community.

Queensland licenses occasional care services under the *Child Care Act 2002* and requires that they meet the same educator qualification requirements as long day care services. That is, Directors must hold or be studying towards an Advanced Diploma, Group Leaders must hold or be studying towards a Diploma and Assistants must hold or be studying towards a minimum Certificate III. There is a relaxation on educator qualification requirements for limited hours care services as the service capacity is for less than 30 children and the service is delivered for no more than 20 hours per week.

The proposed regulatory approach for services out of scope of the National Quality Framework in Queensland described above recognises the important role occasional care services can play in providing opportunities for children to experience a quality early childhood education program. It does not propose to change current workforce requirements for occasional care services.

Staff qualification requirements for Outside School Hours Care

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 7.1

Given the focus of outside school hours care on non-cognitive development through constructive play and socialisation, governments should not impose additional mandatory qualification requirements on outside school hours care workers.

The Queensland Government notes this draft recommendation and confirms that under the National Quality Framework existing staff qualification requirements remain in place for outside school hours care. As noted by the Commission this arrangement will be reviewed in 2014.

The Queensland Government does not support the view that the focus of outside school hours care is on non-cognitive development. The *My Time, Our Place - Framework for School Age Care in Australia* acknowledges the role of outside school hours care in both providing play and leisure opportunities, and supporting children's wellbeing, learning and development. The Framework outlines how educators can encourage learning through play and one of the five outcomes identified in the Framework is that children "are confident and involved learners".

The Queensland Government has licensed outside school hours care services since 2002 and requires that for every 30 children present there must be at least one educator who holds, or is working towards, a minimum of a Certificate III in a relevant area of study. Additionally at least one educator who holds, or is working towards, a Diploma in a relevant area of study must be present at all time when care is being provided. This approach recognises that while outside school hours care has a recreational focus it provides an important opportunity for children to continue to learn while engaged in a range of play based and recreational activities. These requirements are generally supported by the sector.

The impact of the National Quality Framework on family day care educators in Queensland

The Queensland Government notes that while the Productivity Commission has correctly identified that there is no change to the ratio of educators to children for family day care in Queensland under the National Quality Framework, there is a change to the way the educators own children are counted in the ratio which may have an impact on some educators in Queensland.

The current legislative arrangements in Queensland exclude the educator's own children over school age in the educator to child ratio. The National Quality Framework will include the educator's own children if they are under 13 and there is no other adult present to care for them.

The Commission notes in the draft report that many family day care educators may choose not to undertake training and that there are a range of particular difficulties for family day care educators in accessing training. Under the Queensland *ECEC Workforce Action Plan 2011-2014* the Queensland Government will implement a Family Day Care Training Strategy that provides over \$400,000 for Recognition of Prior Learning to support existing family day care educators towards efficiently gaining a Certificate III. The sector is highly supportive of this training opportunity.

Rural and Remote Workforce Issues

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 9.1

To meet the workforce goals of the COAG ECEC reforms, rural and remote areas will need to attract and retain more workers. Governments should assess the cost effectiveness of existing incentives aimed at increasing recruitment and retention in rural and remote areas. These incentives should be compared against alternative strategies such as:

- targeted recruitment of workers from rural and remote backgrounds
- the delivery of training in rural and remote locations
- support for pre-service teachers to experience working life in rural and remote areas.

The Queensland *ECEC Workforce Action Plan 2011-2014* identifies a number of strategies that address the issues affecting the training, attraction and retention of qualified ECEC staff in rural and remote areas identified by the

Productivity Commission and aligns with options described in Draft Recommendation 9.1. Specific initiatives include:

- **Kindergarten Rural and Remote Teacher Incentive Scheme** – Up to \$1.2 million to enhance the attraction and retention of teachers to services in rural and remote services. The incentive benefit will be paid directly to eligible teachers. This initiative will be open to teachers starting work in rural or remote long day care services without a kindergarten program, or other services experiencing difficulties filling teacher vacancies over an extended period of time.
- **Indigenous Remote Area Strategy** – At least \$1.4 million to deliver certificate, diploma and advanced diploma qualification training in a targeted and culturally appropriate manner to existing and prospective educators in the Cape, Gulf and Torres Strait Island, and other remote Indigenous locations.
- **Rural and Remote Engagement Strategy** – Up to \$1.7 million to provide eligible students studying in children's services in rural and remote high needs area access to a remote support teacher, additional face to face support, library facilities and resources.
- **Kindergarten Beyond the Range Program** – Up to \$100,000 to support selected high-achieving, pre-service teachers with financial assistance and support to undertake a rural or remote study placement.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 9.2

To attract and retain sufficient staff to achieve the goals of the COAG ECEC reforms for children in remote areas, governments should provide all ECEC workers in remote communities with timely access to appropriate housing at reasonable cost, including housing for students undertaking placement.

The Queensland Government understands that lack of suitable housing can be a barrier to recruiting and retaining qualified ECEC staff in remote communities. A key strategy for the Queensland Government to ensure access to quality early childhood education and care in remote communities is to train local residents to work in early childhood through the Indigenous Remote Area Strategy and the Rural and Remote Engagement Strategy as outlined above.

The provision of access to housing as an attraction and retention measure is a decision for organisations operating ECEC services. To support services attract and retain qualified teachers in areas classified as remote and very remote, the Queensland Kindergarten Funding Scheme provides a per child loading of 50% of the standard per child subsidy. For teachers who start work in a long day care centre with a kindergarten program in a remote area the Kindergarten Rural and Remote Teacher Incentive Scheme described above will apply.

Staff employed by the Queensland Department of Education and Training (DET) delivering the Bound for Success pre-prep program in Indigenous communities in state schools are eligible for the same remote allowances and housing as DET primary and secondary school teachers.

Australian Government Inclusion and Professional Support Program

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 14.8

To achieve the COAG ECEC reform goals, the Australian Government should make available additional funding for Indigenous Professional Support Units so that:

- general Indigenous cultural competency training can be provided to all staff without such competency working in mainstream ECEC services with Indigenous children
- tailored professional development on Indigenous cultural competency can be provided to staff working in Indigenous-focused ECEC services where there is demonstrated need
- the units can provide sufficient professional development and support to Indigenous staff

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 15.4

The Australian Government should consider if workers in non-ECEC components of integrated ECD services should have access to professional development under the Professional Support Program. Further, the Early Years Development Workforce Strategy should focus on the professional development requirements of the integrated ECD services workforce, and how to meet them.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 15.3

The Professional Support Program should provide introductory professional development in integrated ECD services to ECEC staff working in such services. Consideration should be given to the provision of similar courses for managers of such services.

The Queensland Government notes that the Australian Government is reviewing the Inclusion and Professional Support Program in preparation for a procurement process for the provision of these services from 2012-13.

The Queensland Government supports consideration of how the Inclusion and Professional Support Program can better align with the goals of the National Quality Framework and the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education across all service types.

In addition to considering whether non-ECEC workers in integrated ECD services should be able to access the program as per Draft Recommendation 15.4, the Australian Government should consider providing access to the program for sessional Kindergarten Services which are currently excluded. This exclusion results in a disconnect between the support and professional development offered to long day care services delivering an approved kindergarten program and sessional kindergartens. In this context the Queensland Government draws the Productivity Commission's attention to *A practical vision for early childhood education and care* released by Pricewaterhouse Coopers in March 2011³ which advocates a simplified, integrated funding system for ECEC in Australia.

The Queensland Government also supports further consideration as to how the expertise of the Indigenous Professional Support Units, which support Australian Government funded Indigenous early childhood services under the Inclusion and Professional Support Program, can be used to build cultural competence for both mainstream and Indigenous educators and service providers, particularly in relation to the implementation of the cultural competency requirements of the National Quality Framework.

Training the Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 10.4

The requirement for VET assessors to demonstrate knowledge of current ECEC practices should be enforced by VET regulators. The Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations should design and implement a program of professional development for VET assessors working in ECEC to identify and address gaps in their knowledge of current practice.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 10.5

Governments should provide the Australian Skills Quality Authority with sufficient resources to establish and maintain processes and staff to ensure ECEC training is of a consistently acceptable standard. The Australian Skills Quality Authority should:

- apply more robust conditions for the initial registration of ECEC training providers
- establish a rigorous and targeted system of audits and penalties to ensure that any registered training organisation that does not consistently produce graduates of acceptable quality is no longer able to provide ECEC training
- externally validate the competencies of a targeted sample of VET graduates to ensure graduate quality is maintained
- consider relaxing its focus on ongoing registration in the future, as poor quality training providers are both denied entry and progressively removed in the short-to-medium term.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 10.7

ECEC qualifications should be regarded as 'high risk' by the Australian Skills Quality Authority and audited accordingly. Organisations found to consistently provide high-quality ECEC training should be subject to progressively less regulatory intervention over time.

In relation to the concerns raised in *Chapter 10 Training the early childhood education and care workforce* regarding the perceived variability of the quality ECEC training in the Vocational Education and Training (VET)

³ Pricewaterhouse Coopers 2010, *A practical vision for early childhood education and care*, (<http://www.pwc.com.au/industry/government/assets/eccec-Mar11.pdf>)

sector, the Queensland Government notes that VET regulators are willing and able to enforce appropriate standards and respond to quality concerns.

Additionally, the requirement for VET assessors to demonstrate knowledge of current ECEC practises is currently enforced by the VET regulator in Queensland.

The Queensland Government notes in relation to Draft Recommendation 10.5 that the Australian Skills Quality Authority will be funded from revenue from registration fees, with some transition funding from the Australian Government. It is not appropriate for governments to otherwise subsidise training regulation

The external validation of a sample of ECEC VET graduates and the targeting of ECEC training for audit activities will be a matter for the Australian Skills Quality Authority to consider in response to assessed risks.

Professional Development for ECEC Staff

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 10.8

Governments should ensure that all workers in ECEC services have access to professional development and support programs. Priority should be given to enabling workers to participate in professional development that will assist them to:

- implement the National Quality Standard and the Early Years Learning Framework
- include children with disabilities and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in ECEC services
- enhance the leadership and governance of ECEC services
- work effectively in integrated ECD services.

The Queensland Government is committed to supporting ECEC workers and services with Professional Development Programs and information and training about sector reforms.

The Queensland *ECEC Workforce Action Plan 2011-2014* provides approximately \$400,000 to support services to provide quality kindergarten programs and form partnerships with peak organisations to deliver professional development activities to the broader ECEC workforce.

In addition the Queensland Government is working with the Australian Governments and other jurisdictions to develop a strategy for sector engagement and training on the National Quality Framework. A range of information products have already been developed to support service providers, educators and families to understand the requirements of the National Quality Framework.

To provide professional development in relation to the Early Years Learning Framework in 2010 the Queensland Department of Education and Training collaborated with the Professional Support Coordinator Queensland⁴ in trialling a new approach to professional learning. The Professional Conversations Trial involved fourteen groups of ECEC and related professionals from peak and sector organisations coming together in various locations across the state to participate in a series of five professional conversations which focused on the Early Years Learning Framework. The conversations aimed to build individual knowledge and capacity with the expectation that participants would apply and share what they had learned.

The Queensland Studies Authority is providing online professional development materials and workshops for kindergarten teachers in relation to the *Queensland kindergarten learning guideline (QKLG)* which builds on the Early Years Learning Framework and is an approved Kindergarten program for the purposes of the Queensland Kindergarten Funding Scheme.

The Queensland Government is also committed to providing opportunities to support ECEC services in working with children with diverse needs. An example of a professional development opportunity for Kindergarten services offered by the Queensland Government recently was a series of workshops in July and August 2011 facilitated by behaviour specialist Dr Laura Riffel, on practical strategies for creating supportive kindergarten

⁴ The organisation funded under the Australian Government's Inclusion and Professional Support Program to provide professional development and other support to Child Care Benefit approved services in Queensland.

environments, targeted strategies for children with diverse needs, and evidence based behaviour assessment strategies for busy kindergarten teachers and educators.

The Queensland Government considers that targeted professional development programs to support the inclusion of children with additional needs as recommended by the Commission should complement, not replace tertiary education and training. The Queensland Government has identified the importance of working with universities and providers of tertiary courses to explore ways to include disability studies as a core component of relevant certificate, diploma and bachelor degree courses under the Queensland Government's *Building Bright Futures: an action plan for children with a disability aged birth to eight years 2010 – 2013*.

In relation to the discussion in *Chapter 8 The Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce for children with additional needs* and *Chapter 10 Training the Early childhood education and care workforce* the Commission should also consider how the ECD workforce may be skilled to provide services to children with a disability who are from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and therefore experience multiple levels of disadvantage.

Supporting access to quality ECEC for Indigenous Children

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 14.3

To meet the goals of the Closing the Gap: National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development and the COAG ECEC reforms, more workers, and more highly skilled workers, will be required to work in Indigenous-focused services. To support service-level workforce planning and to provide for greater certainty to facilitate more effective attraction, retention and training of staff in Indigenous-focused services, governments should:

- give priority to the provision of quality ECEC services for Indigenous children, without passing on extra costs to parents
- provide multiple-year funding for Indigenous-focused ECEC services.

The Queensland Government is committed to improving outcomes for Indigenous children through access to high quality ECEC services and understands that a culturally competent workforce is essential to achieving this goal. Indigenous workers are linked to higher participation of Indigenous children in ECEC and the Queensland Government has identified a range of strategies through the *ECEC Workforce Action plan 2011-2014* to support the training, attraction and retention of Indigenous ECEC workers.

As outlined through-out this submission Queensland has a number of significant commitments that support the provision of quality ECEC services for Indigenous Children:

- Additional subsidies for kindergarten services under the Queensland Kindergarten Funding scheme to support remote services and services operating in disadvantaged areas.
- A proposal to support to continued provision of high quality services for Indigenous children through maintaining high standards of regulation for Indigenous services out-of-scope of the National Quality Framework.

Additional programs targeted at Indigenous children and their families include:

- Pre-prep in 35 Indigenous communities - The Queensland Government committed through the Bound for Success strategy to enhance pre-Prep programs for Indigenous children to better prepare them for school. Some 29 Cape York and Torres Strait communities and six other Indigenous communities were identified to be part of this initiative. The Bound for Success Pre-Prep program is delivered in different settings including community kindergartens, child care centres and schools. Pre-Prep in Indigenous communities is a part-time, early education program in the year prior to prep.
- Children and Family Centres - The Queensland Government is establishing 10 Children and Family Centres in partnership with the Australian Government which will provide integrated early childhood education and care, parenting and family support, and child and maternal health services to local communities under the National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development. Queensland's Children and Family Centres will be established in Cairns, Doomadgee, Ipswich, Logan, Mackay, Mareeba, Mornington Island, Mount Isa, Palm Island and Rockhampton.

- Additional kindergarten services – 24 extra kindergarten services, or 35 per cent of 68 extra services to be opened by the end of 2012 will be in locations where at least 6 per cent of 4 year old children are Indigenous children.
- Remote Area Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Care Program – The program provides funding for a range of child care and family support services through 31 Indigenous community organisations in communities in North Queensland and Far North Queensland. The aim of the program is to promote and support the well being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children within their extended family and cultural community and to ensure that early childhood education and care services in remote Indigenous communities are developed in accordance with community needs and aspirations and comply with relevant legislation and standards.
- In Queensland most Budget Base Funded (BBF) Indigenous services are licensed centre-based services. It is anticipated that BBF services in Queensland would be able to meet the NQF standards with minimal additional support.

Supporting access to quality ECEC for Children with Additional Needs

The Queensland Government provides a contribution towards the cost of supporting a child with disabilities in a kindergarten setting through the *Non School Organisations Program*. Funds from the Program are provided through a submission process, to non-government, not-for-profit, non school organisations to support educational programs for children with disabilities with significant education support needs. In 2011, 236 children in community kindergartens will benefit from approximately \$1 million under this program.

Additionally, the Queensland Government is committed to improving support and services for children with a disability and their families through *Building Bright Futures: an action plan for children with a disability aged birth to eight years 2010 – 2013*.

Promoting the inclusion of children with a disability in ECEC services is a priority for the Queensland Government under *Building Bright Futures*. The Department of Communities is working with the Department of Education and Training to develop a resource kit for families to help their child with a disability prepare for and transition into early childhood education and care services. The transition planning information provided in this resource kit will also assist ECEC educators to support children with a disability and their families accessing early childhood education and care services. Additionally the Queensland Government will work to ensure that more children with disabilities and their families can access the services at Queensland Government Early Years Centres and Child and Family Support Hubs.

Consistent with the discussion in *Chapter 8 The Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce for children with additional needs*, *Building Bright Futures* also provides for building a skilled and knowledgeable workforce and improving attraction and retention strategies as well as cooperation and collaboration between the disability, education and health sectors to improve services to children with a disability.

While the Queensland Government is acting through these initiatives to provide support for children with disabilities to access kindergarten, the Government recognises that barriers to access to Kindergarten remain for many Queensland families. The Queensland Government is considering measures to address barriers Queensland families experience in accessing kindergarten including challenges of affordability, remoteness and the diverse needs of children, including children in care, Indigenous children, culturally and linguistically diverse families, those in remote settings or from economically disadvantaged parts of Queensland.

The Early Years Development Workforce Strategy

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 11.1

The Early Childhood Development Working Group should ensure that the Early Years Development Workforce Strategy:

- contains clearly identified objectives
- uses sound data on the current workforce and clear, robust assumptions about future policies to make projections of expected ECEC workforce demand and supply

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">- employs the most cost-effective policy instrument (that also takes into account non-financial factors) to address supply limitations- takes into account both direct and community-wide effects in assessing cost effectiveness |
|--|

<p>DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 14.4</p>

<p>As part of the broader Early Years Development Workforce Strategy agreed by COAG, governments should work together to develop a coordinated workforce strategy that builds on workforce plans in each jurisdiction, so that priority is given to placing suitably qualified staff in Indigenous-focused services. This should include a specific plan to build the Indigenous ECEC workforce</p>

The Queensland Government supports the workforce planning process outlined by the Productivity Commission. As mentioned earlier in this Submission the Queensland Government has released an *ECEC Workforce Action Plan 2011-2014*. The ECEC Workforce census, surveys, quantitative analysis and strong consultation with key industry stakeholders, employers and unions informed the development of this Plan. The Plan clearly identifies the objectives for the period and includes performance indicators to allow for an assessment of how successful the plan has been in achieving these objectives.

The Queensland Government is working with Australian Government and other jurisdictions to develop the national Early Years Workforce Strategy and the analysis and stakeholder feedback used in the development of the *ECEC Workforce Action Plan 2011-2014* will inform our contribution to this process.

The effectiveness of Child Health services

In relation to the statements in *Chapter 12 Child Health Workforce* on the scarcity of evidence about the effectiveness of child health services, the Queensland Government notes that whilst there may be lack of empirical evidence about the effectiveness of the range of service delivery models (i.e. number of contacts with children and families) and providers (qualified or non-qualified workers) of universal child health services, there is strong evidence that there are improved health outcomes for children and families through the provision of population and public health programs.

Universal child and family health services are uniquely placed to support families, enhance parenting and monitor health and developmental progress during critical periods in a child's life. Ongoing developmental surveillance by child health services offers opportunities to positively impact upon the growth and development of children through health and developmental promotion as well as early identification and intervention. Universal child and family health services are also ideally situated to identify parental health issues, and can provide advice and support and/or appropriate referral. Prevention of potential health problems and timely intervention not only improves the health, education and life outcomes of individual children and their families, it also benefits the overall population health, and helps reduce long term health costs.

Universal child health services are the vehicle by which public and population health issues are promoted and addressed for example:

- Infant nutrition
- Child attachment
- Parenting support for child development
- Sun safety
- Injury prevention/safe infant sleeping
- Immunisation
- Developmental assessments and referrals

The effective operation of universal services working in partnership with targeted and specialist services, including the voluntary and community sector, yields not only better outcomes but more efficient use of resources. Well designed high quality universal services (particularly health services, children's centres and schools) and targeted intervention can have a long-term impact on areas where investment is high and where

public interest is intense including: crime and anti-social behaviour, teenage pregnancy and risk-taking behaviour, educational performance, health and healthy life-styles, the family and the role of parents, employment and social benefits.

ECEC Data

The Queensland Government notes that there are some minor differences between the data presented in the draft report and that provided in the Queensland Government submission in response to the Productivity Commission issues paper in relation to the number of services and children (Table 2.2 pg 20 and 14.5 pg 269) and the percentage of qualified staff (Table 5.4 pg 70). These differences arise because of the difference in data sources - the draft report uses data from the national ECEC Workforce Census while the Queensland Submission uses data from the Queensland ECEC Services Census. An analysis of the two data sources suggests they show comparable results, however.

In relation to the discussion on ECEC Data in *Chapter 11 Planning for the ECEC workforce* and *Appendix B Early Childhood Development Data* the Productivity Commission may wish to note that jurisdictions have been working to improve the availability of nationally comparable early childhood data through the development of the National Information Agreement on ECEC (NIA ECEC).

The NIA ECEC provides a framework for cooperation between the Commonwealth, state and territory jurisdictions and information agencies to develop the ECEC information base required for the COAG early childhood reform agenda.

A key activity under the NIA ECEC is the development and implementation of agreed data standards through the ECEC National Minimum Data Set (NMDS). A 2010 National Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Collection Manual was released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics to facilitate the delivery of nationally comparable ECEC statistics from 2011 onwards.

The NIA ECEC is available at: http://www.mceecdya.edu.au/mceecdya/early_childhood_development,28147.html

The National ECEC Collection Manual is available at: [http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/306B56A5F9C50EF2CA257868001504C2/\\$File/data%20collection%20manual_%20final.pdf](http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/306B56A5F9C50EF2CA257868001504C2/$File/data%20collection%20manual_%20final.pdf)

Further information on the ECEC NMDS is available on the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare website: <http://meteor.aihw.gov.au/content/index.phtml/itemId/388509>

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 15.1

Future ECD workforce censuses and surveys should identify integrated ECD services separately to facilitate analysis of the workforce and subsequent policy development.

As noted by the Commission, integrated ECD services are emerging in Australia and there is significant variability in the models of service delivery and the range of early childhood, health and family support services they deliver. Similarly there is significant variability in the types of workers employed in ECD services compared to the relatively homogeneous ECEC workforce. ECD workers can include health, welfare and social services staff as well as educators.

Given this variability, the separate identification of integrated ECD services within the Queensland ECEC Services Census and the National ECEC Workforce Census would be unlikely to capture all integrated services and workers. Qualitative analysis may be a more effective approach to understanding the skills required of the integrated ECD workforce and their specific training and professional development needs over the next few years until integrated services are well established in the ECD sector.

Re-Drafting the Report

The Queensland Government provides the following suggestions for re-drafting specific aspects of the report:

- **Role of Governments in the ECD Sector:** Table 2 (pg XXIV) summarises the role of Governments in the ECD sector. In relation to the role of State Government in ECEC the Queensland Government notes that State Governments also have a role in policy setting (for example arrangements for the delivery of Kindergarten and integrated services). This table is repeated on pg 26.
- **National Quality Standard:** 'From 1 January 2014 all ECEC staff will need to have, or be working towards, a relevant certificate III qualification and at least 50 per cent of staff in preschools and LDC will need to have, or be working towards a relevant diploma or higher qualification' (Pg XXVI). This statement is incorrect as there are a number of ECEC services out of scope for the National Quality Framework and there is no proposal for changes to current staff qualifications for staff working in outside school hours care.
- **Prep Year in Queensland:** The Queensland Government notes that the introduction of a full-time non-compulsory prep year in Queensland was in response to an independent review of the Preparatory Year trial in 2003 which found that the preparatory program is highly successful in promoting children 's social-emotional development and their communication, numeracy, literacy and motor skills. The change in the starting age for school was a consequence of this change rather than the motivation for it as implied in Box 5.1 pg 70.
- **Additional Information for Appendix E:** Section E.38 pg 77 & pg 77 could be amended as follows:
 - E.38 pg E77 – The Department of Education and Training also provides for the delivery of Triple P – Positive Parenting Program training to staff of child and family support services across the State.
 - E.38 pg E77 – The Early Years Health and Wellbeing Program operates in schools within Mackay and Ipswich, the Department of Education and Training is responsible for the delivery of this program.
 - E.38 pg E77 – Request the addition of a paragraph to identify the significant investment by the Queensland Government in integrated services, this is not currently reflected:
 - § The Queensland Government committed \$32 million over four years (2006-10) to establish four Early Years Centres across the state. Early Years Centres operate as 'one-stop-shops' that provide integrated early childhood education and care, family and parenting support, and child and maternal health services to families expecting a child or with children aged up to eight years. The Early Years Centres also provide a range of satellite and out-reach services.
 - § Through the Indigenous Early Childhood Development National Partnership Agreement the Queensland Government has partnered with the Australian Government to establish 10 children and family centres across the state by mid 2014 at a cost of \$75 million. The children and family centres will ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families receive the support they need by providing access to integrated early childhood education and care, parenting and family support, and child and maternal health services. (While this is briefly mentioned in Box E.2 on pg E8, it should also be highlighted in this section as it is a significant investment in parenting and family support services).
 - § The Queensland Government funds 25 Child and Family Support Hubs located across Queensland. Child and Family Support Hubs are multi-functional and highly flexible services providing activities for families with young children as a universal entry point, with wrap-around family support services. The focus is to promote the safety and well being of children through the use of prevention and early intervention strategies, to develop networks for families, and to provide family support and parenting education to support parents to achieve the best outcomes for their children.
 - E.38, pg E78 Remove the statement regarding the Queensland Government also funding family support programs, such as those delivered by The Benevolent Society in the Cairns Early Years Centre (addressed in additional dot point for inclusion under E.38 pg E77).