

Children's Services

About the Children's Services Sector

Children's Services are provided by a variety of private, not-for-profit and a small number of government organisations across Queensland. These range from small facilities with only limited staff, to some of Queensland's largest employers who operate many services across the state and employ hundreds of workers. The not-for-profit sector represents nearly 75% of Children's Services in Queensland.

Currently in Queensland there are just over 2,577 licensed child care services. Of these 1,499 are Long Day Care centres, 85 are Family Day Care schemes, 600 are Outside School Hours Care services, 341 are kindergartens and 52 are Occasional Care services. There are also 24 In-Home Care services with approximately 2,970 home-based educators. There are no statistics available on the number of playgroups, adjunct care facilities or nannies because these numbers change constantly. Wages in the sector are comparatively low and this impacts significantly on attraction and retention of workers.

Children's Services qualifications make up what is by far the largest subsector of VET delivery with the Community Services Industry. In 2009, 44,802 participants undertook Children's Services VET qualifications in Queensland, representing 42% of the Community Services enrolments that year. In all, over 9,023,000 AHC were delivered under Children's Services qualifications in Queensland in 2009, making up 38% of the Community Services delivery for the year.



Queensland has a User Choice funded traineeship related to the Certificate III in Children's Services and an apprenticeship related to the Diploma of Children's Services (Early Childhood Education and Care). There is also an unfunded traineeship related to the Advanced Diploma in this sector. Changes to Commonwealth Government policy to allow fee-free delivery by TAFE institutes of Children's Services qualifications at Diploma level and higher has reduced the level of commencements in the funded traineeship and apprenticeship², however overall enrolments in these qualifications have continued to grow.

Occupations in Long Day Care centres have been regulated for some time, requiring a Children's Services Certificate III as the minimum qualification for Assistant roles, the Diploma for Group Leader roles and the Advanced Diploma for Centre Director roles. Under the new national quality framework—a nationally consistent regulatory system due to be in place in January 2012—there will be no specific qualification requirement for Centre Directors. The need for minimum

² Queensland TAFE implementation of this policy allows participants to enrol in a combined Certificate III and Diploma program without student fees.



qualifications will be extended to Family Day Care services in January 2014 and similar requirements are being clarified for Outside School Hours Care services.

The minimum education requirements for Long Day Care centre Directors is being replaced with the requirement that an Educational Leader with a degree in Early Childhood Education or equivalent must be in attendance at the service whenever the service is being provided to 25 children or more, and a second Educational Leader be in attendance for half or all the time the services are being provided to more than 60 and 80 children, respectively.

The Children's Services qualifications are large and complex qualifications by comparison with other qualifications at the same level. There is also an array of high quality and highly respected training providers in the sector, along with inconsistent articulation into a small number of qualifications at the higher education level. Given the extent of vocational training delivery in Children's Services and the number of RTOs delivering in Queensland, it is not surprising there is constant feedback from both the sector and from training providers with concerns about the quality of training and assessment services. These include very short and low quality qualifications delivered to jobseekers, poor integration of training and assessment into the workplace, poor support for learners within flexible delivery arrangements, poor use of supervisor third party reports, and questions about the competency and currency of VET practitioners. There is also specific concern about the adequacy of mapping processes to recognise the competency of staff with

qualifications from the CHC02 qualifications for the purposes of entry requirements for the CHC08 qualifications.

Furhtermore, there are concerns about the cultural and linguistic accessibility of training programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds. Learners in rural and remote locations experience increased difficulty accessing training services. Lack of staff and resources to backfill while on training is an increasing barrier to accessing training and development opportunities.

A key part of the National Quality Reform Agenda in Early Childhood Education and Care is the *Early Years Learning Framework*. The *Early Years Learning Framework* is the first nationally consistent framework which guides practice in the early years across all sectors working with children in the 0-5 age group. During the transition to the national quality framework between now and 2012 the Children's Services workforce will be required to build the knowledge, skills and capacity to implement the key principles, practice and learning outcomes within the Framework. From January 2012 this framework will be part of the standards against which children's services will be assessed.

Other key issues include:

- Poor understanding of the Children's Services sector, its size and its career options — often seen as a form of babysitting rather than a part of early education and development.
- Scarcity of funds leading to insufficient investment in supporting and developing current workforce, and a culture where cost minimisation is a primary concern.
- Increased costs of compliance with quality, regulatory, professional and program requirements.
- Altered funding contributions of government and fee structures.
- Demand for services increasing as the population increases and workforce participation rates increase.
- Workforce under-representation of marginalised populations across industry.
- Insufficient data collaboration to support workforce planning initiatives.

Workforce Implications

The Children's Services sector continues to have difficulty retaining and re-attracting workers. Increased service demand along with a shortage of workers prepared to stay in the sector create pressure on employers to meet the regulated staff-child ratios and regularly threaten the viability of smaller services and those in more remote locations. Employers have limited resources available to invest in training and workforce development, and often don't have the funds and/or available staff to backfill positions while workers are in training. The high proportion of casual workers—mainly in Outside School Hours Care—receive less support for training and development, and workers in rural and remote locations suffer increased costs and poor access to training opportunities. Strategies such as the Children's Services Skilling Plan have helped to support the training and development of remote workers.

The severe skill and labour shortages in the sector, along with growth in service demand and rapid changes in policy and service delivery, require high level human resource management skills and systems. The sector currently has limited capacity for workforce planning and has traditionally underinvested in leadership and management development.

Other key workforce implications include:

- Insufficient resources available for workforce development, replacement and growth.
- Limited human resource capacity and low capacity for strategic workforce planning.
- New qualification regulation could prove to be a barrier for new workforce moving to start their own Family Day Care business.
- Attrition of many workers with an advanced diploma—no mandatory requirement for employees to continue to employ and pay wages at the advanced diploma level after January 2012.
- Requirement for Educational Leaders to hold a degree qualification may see a leakage of workers at this level to higher paid roles in primary education sectors
- Current regulatory workforce may not have the skills and knowledge to support and regulate under the new national quality standards
- Current inconsistent articulation arrangements to higher education may break down under new regulations given the Advanced Diploma no longer a mandatory requirement

Key Actions

The Department of Education and Training, through the Office for Early Childhood Education and Care, have developed an *Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Action Plan 2010-2013*. This plan was developed in collaboration with Training Queensland, Skills Queensland, the Health and Community Services Workforce Council, Queensland Children's Services Alliance and other stakeholders. The Health and Community Services Workforce Council has a large project supporting professional development in the Children's Services sector and also supports the Queensland Children's Services Alliance, which acts as a sector advisory body on workforce matters.

The Australian Government Productivity Commission released its Early Childhood Development Workforce issues paper in November 2010. Submissions are due in early 2011 and a report is expected later in the year.



The Health and Community Services Workforce Council proposes a potential strategic industry audit of Children's Services RTO to ensure compliance with the new *Early Years Learning Framework* and confirm adequacy of current delivery and assessment in the sector. Such an audit would include: attention to learning and assessment materials; RPL tools, processes and skills; currency of skills of VET practitioners in the sector; integration of learning and assessment into the workplace; and use of third party reports to support RTO evidence of assessment.

Other key actions recommended in relation to skilling and workforce development in the Children's Services sector include:

- Fund the *Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Action Plan 2010-2013*.
- Advocate for successful and sustainable workforce development and planning to be an integral part of the evaluation process through the new national quality standards.
- Develop effective workforce planning skills.
- Development of workforce models and career pathways that capitalise on pedagogical leadership and business leadership requirements while retaining current workforces and attracting new workers to the sector.
- Identify and promote career opportunities for both educational leadership and management pathways.
- Expand existing staff exchange programs to incorporate other subsectors such as kindergartens and preschool programs.
- Review implementation of Children's Services qualifications to incorporate the new National Quality Framework and the *Early Years Learning Framework*. The new Australian Middle Years Framework is expected to be released in 2011 and will also impact on the Outside School Hours Care subsector.
- Promote employment opportunities within the Children's Services sector and the professional work undertaken by Children's Services staff at careers fairs and events across Queensland including: tertiary studies expos; career expos; Indigenous careers and employment expos; baby expos; and large children's events.
- Flexible training delivery programs that support access by new sectors and workers in non-standard employment arrangements such as casual, or self-employed.
- Increased use of industry brokerage and enterprise/industry RTO delivery to support training in key sectors such as Family Day Care and School Age Care services.
- Scholarship program to up-skill existing Children's Services workers to teaching qualifications.
- Establish a refresher program for educators to contextualise previous qualifications to contemporary practice and industry regulation and quality requirements.
- Specific emphasis in RTO audit and registration processes on the procedures and tools for mapping CHC02 qualifications for the purposes of entry requirements to the CHC08 Children's Services qualifications.
- Investigation of the appropriate VET products to support the Inclusion Support Facilitator workforce within Children's Services.
- Improve data collection, reporting, access and analysis related to workforce and training in the sector to support collaborative workforce planning and improve return on investment.
- Explore and invest in funding models that remove the common access barriers to training including backfill, travel and accommodation and related costs.



- Develop strategies to improve the effectiveness and credibility of RPL in the sector, for example:
 - Inclusion of industry-employed assessors in RPL processes.
 - Focus on RPL tools, processes, assessments and HR in audit and regulation processes, and in RTO continuous improvement processes.
 - Review requirements for RTOs to be included on Skilling Solutions Queensland (SSQ) to ensure only quality services are funded.
- Support the promotion of the Children's Services sector and roles within the sector to potential new workers including school leavers and those considering a career change.
- Develop promotion and career pathways initiatives to attract and retain workers from marginalised and under-represented populations including skilled and unskilled migrants, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, and people with a disability.
- Increase focus on development of management and leadership capacity, including HR, workforce planning, job redesign, partnership development, change management and business development skills and systems.
- Ensure pre-vocational training is responsive to local employer needs, and employers understand competency outcomes.
- Support local clusters of employers, industry bodies, education and training providers, government agencies and other stakeholders to develop collaborative responses to key workforce issues locally.
- Improve employer understanding of VET and their role in influencing the training system and the training they purchase.

