

**INDEPENDENT EDUCATION UNION OF AUSTRALIA**

**SUBMISSION TO PRODUCTIVITY AGENDA WORKING  
GROUP – EDUCATION, SKILLS, TRAINING AND EARLY  
CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT**

**A NATIONAL QUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR EARLY  
CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE**

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**Information about the submission**

**Please provide your details below:**

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**Your interest**

**Please outline the nature of your interest in the early childhood education and care sector.**

The IEUA is the federally registered union representing over 65,000 education professionals (teachers and other education staff) in the non-government education sector, many of whom work in community kindergartens, early child care centres and community preschools which may be either not for profit or profit corporations.

The size and diversity of the sector impacts on the industrial context and the salary and working conditions which have been negotiated into awards and collective agreements for early childhood educational professionals in all States and Territories reflects a similar complexity and diversity.

Existing across the early childhood sector are generally two types of governance structures – those early child care centres which are corporately owned and run for profit and those 'not for profit' preschool, long day care centres, community crèche and kindergarten centres.

The IEUA is responsible for negotiating many of the awards and collective agreements for members in community kindergartens, preschools and early childhood centres (both profit and community based and preschools attached to schools). The processes and outcomes of these negotiations as well as the experiences of our members have strongly formed the basis for our views regarding this sector.

## CONSULTATION QUESTIONS – NATIONAL QUALITY FRAMEWORK

### NQF1 - STRONG QUALITY STANDARDS

***Question 1: What do you consider to be key drivers of quality that should be included in the standards? Do you agree with those listed in section 5.2 of this paper? (Leadership and management, Relationships between staff and children, Family and community partnerships, Differentiated play-based curriculum, Physical environment, Staffing requirements and arrangements) Can you suggest others?***

IEUA supports research which demonstrates that early childhood programs which produce high-quality outcomes are led by well resourced and supported early childhood teachers and have the following characteristics:

- Children are active and experiential learners.
- Teachers:
  - have clarity of focus,
  - centre on children's learning and use curriculum informed by research,
  - have knowledge and understanding of the curriculum and professional autonomy in its implementation,
  - know and understand how children learn,
  - are supported with ongoing professional development.
- Interventions focus on all aspects of the child – their intellectual, social, emotional and physical wellbeing.
- Settings view educational and social experience as complementary and equal in importance.
- There is a mixture between responsive teaching that extends and elaborates on what the children are already learning, and direct teaching designed to be engaging and extend children's learning.
- Curriculum is a framework for learning which fits the children and is play based.
- Pedagogy includes interactions traditionally associated with the word 'teaching', such as the provision of instructive learning environments, and sustained shared thinking.
- Quality verbal interactions and sustained shared thinking: children interact one to one with an adult or another child, with engaged conversations which go beyond giving directions.
- Small group sizes and high teacher–child ratios.
- Stability and continuity of staff.
- The teacher–child relationship is seen as central to children's learning.
- There is a balance of teacher- and child-initiated activities.
- Adults show skills in supporting children's capacity to resolve conflicts.
- Support for programs across whole services and organisations.
- A strong focus on teachers' ongoing learning – professional conversations, in particular.
- Parents are helped to support children's learning at home.

The IEUA agreed with the criteria mentioned in the discussion document as being important key drivers of quality. However we emphasise the following criteria:

## **1. Play Based Curriculum and Qualified Teachers and Teacher Assistants/Childcare Workers as Key Drivers to Quality Early Education**

IEUA acknowledges that good quality early childhood education sets the right foundation for children's further development.

IEUA strongly supports play based curriculum undertaken by qualified early childhood teachers who are continually supported with ongoing professional development.

Play based curriculum provides children with the opportunity to learn about the world they live in through interactions with their environment and the people in it.

IEUA believes that quality early childhood education is provided only through tertiary qualified and registered (where applicable) early childhood teachers supported by early childhood teacher assistant/childcare worker.

Such qualified early childhood teachers utilise their comprehensive knowledge of child development to observe and assess children's abilities, strengths and needs and to plan appropriate activities and experiences in a play based learning setting in order to address each of these.

Teachers write very detailed developmental summaries, which include definite long-term goals for each child. These are then broken down into short-term goals and form the basis of the play base curriculum.

The curriculum in early childhood settings is designed to foster school readiness and encompasses pre-academic skills in literacy and numeracy, such as letter recognition, story comprehension, asking and answering questions, counting with one-to-one correspondence, classifying and awareness of spatial relationships. In addition, the learning environment fosters social skills such as turn-taking, cooperating with daily routines and following instructions.

Staff record and analyse detailed observations of all children in order to assist them to determine how each child is developing and learning. The tasks each child performs are broken down into their component skills in order to assist the child to progress to the next logical step in their development. A variety of activities and resources, appropriate to the child's current understanding and interests, are selected in order to challenge children's thinking. Early childhood teachers evaluate the effectiveness of their program according to how effective and motivating experiences were in assisting the child to acquire new skills.

It is important for a play based program to be developmentally appropriate. There are predictable sequences of growth and change that occur during the pre-school years. This growth occurs in language, thinking, social, emotional and physical skills.

Significant numbers of IEUA members report anecdotal evidence from Principals and teachers in schools which indicate better integration and better learning habits into formal schooling amongst students who have experienced an early childhood educational programme conducted by a tertiary early childhood education trained and registered teacher.

## **Role of the Teacher Assistant/Childcare Worker**

The role of the teacher assistant/childcare worker in providing quality early childhood educational support should not be overlooked. Teacher assistants/childcare workers provide the essential support to the teacher and the children during the various activities in a play based program which caters for the individual child's needs, interests and abilities.

In Queensland employment arrangements in the 'Prep' year where teacher assistants/childcare workers are employed on less than full time hours basis results in teachers being left with 25 children as the sole facilitator of the programs. A teacher can not effectively observe, plan and implement and evaluate in such a situation.

A significant number of teacher assistants/childcare workers have achieved at least Certificate III qualifications in child care so that they may more appropriately assist the teacher in the educational programs being implemented.

**IEUA believe that it is essential for teacher assistants/childcare workers to be in attendance for the hours of operation of the service so that adequate support for teachers working with children on play based models is provided. The IEUA believes that appropriate staff ratios need to be maintained for the entire period of the child attending.**

## **2. Staffing Requirements and Arrangements**

Children and parents benefit from long term care relationships. Stable care relationships, and the recruitment and retention of qualified teachers and teacher assistants/childcare workers requires secure jobs, attractive salary and conditions and recognition for higher education and professional development.

There is a significant discrepancy between the wages and conditions of early childhood teachers working in community kindergartens, long day care centres, preschools and primary schools.

For example, in New South Wales, a 4 year trained first year out teacher who works casually with DET earns \$261.31 per day, rising to \$301.71 on Step 4. The same teacher earns \$219.14 rising to a maximum of \$260.33 in an early childhood setting. For permanent staff, the early childhood teacher working for DET earns between \$50522 and \$75352 per annum, compared with \$43946 to \$64557 in a long day care setting. This represents a 15-17% difference.

Not for profit community early childhood education centres without adequate Government support struggle to provide adequate funds to ensure consistency of conditions. It has been reported anecdotally by our members that the profitability of private providers is often in conflict with those conditions that have been linked to positive outcomes for children such as high staff-child ratios, quality regulation and qualified staff.

In Queensland, the current State DECKAS funding model provides for 80% of approved staff costs for a teacher/director and an assistant employed for each community kindergarten. This provides for parity of wages of early childhood teachers in community kindergartens with teachers employed by Education

Queensland. However this is not case in many other states. In NSW early childhood teachers earn far less than their colleagues in schools. .

However no other conditions of employment are reflected with the same degree of parity due to these funding arrangements. While a few industrial instruments for early childhood provide some paid parental leave, the majority do not and fall well below those of teachers in schools. This is a shameful situation considering the majority of early childhood teachers are women.

Warrilow et al. (2004) found reasons for the shortage of staff include a lack of ongoing education opportunities, poor working conditions, a lack of professional support, limited opportunity for career progression and the low status of the profession in society. The situation is exacerbated by the fragmentation of the sector, funding restrictions and a mismatch between pre-service training and job expectations, the level of administrative work required and workplace stress and burnout” (cited in Fisher & Patulny, 2004, p. 7).

Brennan (2006) tells us that staff turnover in the child care industry is very high: “Approximately 70 per cent have been working in the area for four years or less” (p. 224). Noble & Macfarlane (2005) state “...at the beginning of their second year of service early childhood teachers reported significant increases in burnout, in comparison to primary and secondary school teachers” (p. 53, cited Noble, Goddard & O’Brien 2003). Early experiences as a teacher influence the decision of whether or not to remain in the field. Conditions experienced at this time can substantially influence the level of effectiveness the teacher is able to achieve and maintain throughout her/his career (Noble & Macfarlane, 2005, p. 53) . Research confirms: “Dissatisfied children’s services staff generally prefer to leave the profession rather than participate in industrial action” (Sumsion, 2005b, p. 44)

Equitable salary and conditions are essential for the attraction and retention of qualified, experienced and capable staff.

**IEUA believes that the attraction and retention of qualified and experienced staff is fundamental to the delivery of quality educational outcomes. Early childhood teachers who are qualified should receive salaries and conditions which are comparable to those teachers in other educational settings if staff are to be recruited to the sector.**

### **3. Access to Professional Development for Staff**

Ongoing professional development and professional support of teachers and staff is an essential element to ensuring quality early childhood education. Variations exist in the amount of professional development provided to staff in early childhood centres. In some locations, preschool teachers and their assistants are able to access five days of approved planning time and staff development including extra days in designated periods during working hours. In other settings, professional development is only available in out of work hours and at the employee’s expense.

Where staff are supported by regular good quality professional development and coupled with a professional support which could be delivered by early childhood advisors visiting the service then staff can keep up to date with policy and professional development issues, then quality is improved and assured.

**IEUA believes that an increase in the investment in the support of teachers and their professional development is an essential criteria for the determination of quality early childhood education.**

#### **4. Family and Community Relationships - Not-For-Profit and For-Profit Corporations**

Quality early childhood programs cater for diversity and capitalise on difference while ensuring rich, educationally significant learning experiences and equitable outcomes for all children. The best outcomes will occur when families and communities share similar goals for young children's development and learning, and are active in planning early childhood programs.

Existing across the early childhood sector are generally two types of governance structures – those early childhood centres which are corporately owned and those 'not for profit' community crèche and kindergarten centres.

There is evidence that 21% of corporate chain employees would not send their own children to the centres in which they work because of concerns about quality, repeatedly rating their services lower in the nutritional value and amount of food provided, time to interact with children, individualised programming and variety of equipment, than those employed by non-profit organisations (Horin, 2006, p. 1).

The 'not for profit' nature of community kindergartens means that the focus of the institution is on the children. In the experiences of the IEUA, this specific focus is one of the main reasons that parents choose to send children to not for profit services. The enhanced staff/child ratios which exist in Queensland for C&K affiliated community kindergartens result in smaller group settings. Smaller groups in turn lead to greater individual attention being provided on the educational needs of a child.

A significant distinguishing factor between Community Kindergartens in Queensland and other institutions is their focus on the involvement of parents and family in both the education process and the operation of the centre. This community involvement has benefits both for the all round education of the child and more broadly in society.

In NSW early childhood services must meet the same regulatory requirements whether they are not for profit or profit, however a greater proportion of the "for profit" sector have exemptions for the regulatory requirement for qualified staff.

#### **5. Physical Environment**

International research demonstrates that positive outcomes for children arising from early childhood education are directly related to the quality of these environments. High quality is a function of staffing ratio, teacher skills and size of the group.

National quality standards must reflect international best practice. Research supports staff/child ratios of at least 1 teacher to 3 children for infants (1:3); at least one adult to four children for one to two year olds, (1:4) and at least one adult to eight children for three to five year olds (1:8). (OECD Country Note)

**IEUA believes that any commitment to high quality education and care should require implementation of these ratios in all sectors of early childhood education.**

***Question 2: How should the increased focus on early childhood education and care and outcomes for children be reflected in the new standards?***

The IEUA believes that emphasis should be placed on demonstrating the child's progress towards outcomes / skills, taking into account the individual development and emotional and environmental needs of the child and the centre.

The acquisition of knowledge and mastery of concepts and skills by the child falls along a continuum (for example – is able to use training scissors with assistance, holds fingers correctly when using scissors independently, is able to open and close blades independently, supports paper with non-dominant hand, is able to cut along a straight line, is able to cut along curved lines, is able to cut simple shapes, is able to cut out detailed objects).

It must always be remembered that the development of these skills is a precursor to the development of more complex skills necessary later in life.

Children progress through these skills in differing periods of time depending upon development and past experience. In addition, young children arrive at preschool with differing abilities. Children with additional needs, for example, may not be able to use scissors independently at 4 years of age, although this would be expected of a typical developing child.

***Question 3: Given that preschool can be delivered across a range of settings, what is the best way of monitoring and reporting on preschool delivery for four year olds (that is, in the year before formal school)?***

Early childhood education has goals and aims that are distinct from and broader than those of the school. Early childhood education centres should be institutions in their own right where the first task is not preparing children for school but supporting children as learners in a wide range of contexts, and by providing children with the chance to find their individual way towards society.

IEUA notes the Commonwealth strategies to raise the standards of literacy and numeracy of all Australian children. However, it recognises that there are dangers in the Commonwealth focus for early childhood education through the framework of a literacy and numeracy agenda.

The danger is the potential push down of school based literacy and numeracy expectations into the early years. Such a situation may result in early childhood educators attempting to prepare children for inappropriate school expectations. Parents may become distressed that their children will fall behind in school if the early childhood curriculum does not explicitly focus on literacy and numeracy. It is essential to articulate in any framework and standards that literacy and numeracy can be integrated throughout broad and holistic early childhood curricula in ways that can balance the importance of life long skills and social skills which help children become competent learners.

Play and self motivated actions are the “motors” of children's development and learning.

**Thus, IEUA supports research that shows that formal testing of pre-school age children is not developmentally appropriate. Children need to be assessed in familiar environments/ contexts whilst performing relevant tasks, by familiar adults qualified in early childhood education.**

The IEUA supports a system of checklists supported by detailed observations of the child as it allows the educator to express the child's developing understanding. Such a system of detailed observations will give the parent and the school the information on the child's developing intellectual, social and physical skills.

## COVERAGE

***Question 1: What are the considerations in applying an integrated set of standards across all service types, including family day care, outside school hours care, Indigenous services, etc? Possible considerations: health and safety, physical environment and staffing standards in different settings, integrating preschool and child care?***

Different setting types have diverse resources with significant variations in budgets. Consideration must be given to the different numbers of staff employed with various qualifications, children and families from a range of cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, children and families with diverse needs, children of different ages when applying an integrated set of standards.

***Question 2: Would a core set of standards supplemented by service-specific standards overcome these barriers? For example, a modular approach which sets out a common core set of principles, supplemented by specific modules for each service type.***

The IEUA believes that a set of standards should outline the requirements that all early childhood education services must and can meet.

Standards such as positive/ warm interactions, health and safety standards, and minimum child-staff ratios, combined with service-specific requirements such as minimum qualifications of teachers and childcare workers and assistants, staff ratios for specific age groups should form the core set of standards.

***Question 3: What other options are there for an integrated set of quality standards?***

An integrated set of quality standards poses the risk of minimizing the standards in order for them to be applicable to all services. Therefore, steps must be taken to prevent such a situation, should an integrated system be developed.

***Question 4: How could the standards take account of the age of children?***

Standards need to be appropriate to the age and developmental abilities of each child. Standards could be further differentiated (beyond service type) to the age of the child. Considerations must also be given to standards for children with additional needs and Indigenous children.

## IMPACTS

**Question 1: What are the potential impacts of the introduction of a new set of quality standards on early childhood education and care services? Possible considerations: workforce, financial viability, implementation arrangements, service provision?**

Careful planning is needed to ensure educationally significant outcomes for all children. Given the closely linked nature of the early childhood agenda items and the quest for nationally consistent quality standards, conceptual planning cannot stand alone; the issues – such as workforce strategy, funding, resources and logistics, and implementation options and priorities – must be considered simultaneously.

Any new set of quality standards on early childhood education and care services must take into consideration the broad and diverse range of student needs as well as the varying environments in which early childhood and care services are offered.

It is essential to consider the impact of remote and regional access on early childhood services as well as support to providers and their staff in these areas.

The IEUA considers the following as potential impacts of the introduction of a new set of quality standards on early childhood education.

### **1. Impact on Workforce**

#### **(i) Increased workload**

Quality standards will require ongoing documentation. It is strongly recommended that staff/directors of centres are provided with programming time (away from the children) to complete documentation.

Currently teachers are expected to carry out programming duties, research and sourcing of resources outside of working hours. This occurs both in centres which work school terms and child care centres which provide long day care.

Teachers record observations, write assessments of children's abilities, needs and development, write educational programs and evaluate their lesson plans, as do their counterparts in schools.

However, little or no programming or administration time is provided for within current award and collective bargaining agreements.

Many teachers working in Long Day Care Centres estimate that they work between 4 and 20 unpaid hours per week at home and at the centre.

These factors need to be considered when designing documentation for reporting against standards, otherwise quality education will be greatly effected.

**IEUA strongly believes that quality education occurs where teachers are supported with appropriate time to undertake all that is required of them. Resources must be made available to allow teachers and assistants/childcare workers with adequate time to undertake program design, documentation, reporting and in service training. Additional administrative time should not deter from the preparation and provision of quality education.**

## **(ii) Access to ongoing professional development**

Teachers and co workers teacher assistants/childcare workers need to be supported through accessible, affordable and relevant professional development on any new system.

Such professional development must be subsidised and offered to employees at no cost.

Consideration will need to be given to delivery in remote and rural regions to ensure equity of support and hence quality.

## **(iii) Mentoring and Support**

Professional networks should be set up to assist staff with ongoing questions/ issues regarding quality standards. The use of professional advisors or consultants to assist centres in addressing standards is highly recommended.

## **2. Living experiences for staff and parents**

The divide between remote, rural and Indigenous Australia provides considerable challenges when considering equity of quality early childhood education. There are higher than average levels of unemployment, poverty and disadvantage in these areas. This places additional pressures on the provisions of educational and social services in a context where distance and delivery already make access and participation difficult.

Implementation of standards must take this into consideration Issues of access and choice, affordability and quality, staff qualifications and retention are most acute in remote settings.

**IEUA believes that to ensure quality of early childhood education services in these areas must involve community development activities. This will ensure that services meet the particular needs of communities and that they are viable in the longer term.**

***Question 2: What are the particular issues with changes to the 'iron triangle' structural indicators of quality: staff qualifications, child-to-staff ratios, and group size? Possible considerations: workforce, training, relative costs and benefits of each indicator.***

IEUA believes that quality early childhood education is provided only through tertiary qualified and registered teachers supported by early childhood teacher assistants/childcare workers.

Further, teacher assistants/childcare workers working in early childhood should have a qualification in early childhood, a Diploma or Certificate III.

To assist in achieving this, incentives to improve the level of qualifications of staff should be provided (fee subsidies including travel and accommodation expenses for those in rural and remote areas, course fee scholarships/ subsidies, substantial wage

increases, wage subsidies paid to services to offset the additional costs of highly qualified staff and paid study leave).

As mentioned previously, child-staff ratios should be improved to reflect international standards and should be mandatory at a national level. Ideally, this would be 1:3 for 0-2 year olds, 1:4 for 2-3 year olds and 1:8 for 3-5 year olds.

## **TRANSITIONS TO A NEW SYSTEM**

**Question 1: What transition arrangements do you consider appropriate for implementing the proposed changes? What timeframe might be required to fully implement all changes? What supports for the early childhood education and care sector do you think would assist these transition arrangements? Possible consideration: professional support program.**

Implementation of any proposed changes must take into consideration the varying needs of the centre, its staff and children as well as the stages of current curriculum program implementation. It would be appropriate to have phased implementation with benchmarks set for each year of implementation.

It would be very disruptive for teachers and children if staff are expected to follow one set of curriculum requirements for part of the year and another set for the remainder of the year. The Curriculum Framework should be implemented at the beginning of the year of commencement.

Further, comprehensive, locally available and ongoing professional development and support needs to be provided for ALL staff employed in early childhood services needs to occur before the implementation of any changes.

Implementation should be phased with professional development so that early childhood education staff are able to follow the adopted Curriculum Framework. Advisors should be available to assist services by regular visits during and after the implementation stage.

Such professional development should be subsidised and offered at no cost to the employee and occur during their normal working day.

This is essential to ensure quality of education.

In addition a national help-line/web service should be available during working hours in order for centre directors to seek advice. This will be particularly of assistance to those who are remote and regional based.

## **NQF2 - A QUALITY RATING SYSTEM**

### **OBJECTIVES**

**Question1: What do you think should be the objectives of a rating system? Do you agree with the objectives listed in section 6.1.2 (Indicator of service quality, Continuous improvement in the early childhood education and care sector, Information for families and communities)?**

The IEUA recognises that Commonwealth Government funding has been allocated to the development of A-E quality rating system with the aim to drive higher quality early childhood education and care services.

The IEUA believes that the compilation of data which profile early childhood needs and character has some merit to inform decisions regarding quality education.

However, process of ratings must safeguard against having measure of standards reduced to a narrow set of outcomes as there will be an inevitable tendency to make these the centre of all endeavours in early childhood education centres to the detriment of the overall development of the child.

The IEUA is strongly concerned about the potential for the development of simplistic league tables, which may arise from the publication of an A-E rating system.

IEUA is also is gravely concerned that a rating system will fail the sector by treating all environments, children and communities as equal.

Safeguards must be put in place to ensure that the quality of education and the individual community and child's needs are protected.

To fail to do so, will fail quality education in early childhood sector.

**The IEUA believes that continuous improvement in the early childhood education and care sector should remain the major focus on any rating system. This can only be achieved through continued access to funding and mindful of the various needs of the sector in terms of remote and regional, low SES environments, providers .**

***Question 2: Which objective is the most important? For example, is informing parental choice of service the primary objective ?***

The quality of early childhood education, taking into account the physical, mental, and social developmental and environmental needs of the child must be the main objective of any rating system.

## **DESIGN ISSUES**

***Question 1: What principles do you think should underpin the design of the rating system?***

IEUA considers the following as essential elements to ensuring quality education and thus underpinning a rating system of a provider:

- Child-staff ratios, staff qualifications, group sizes
- Child-staff interactions
- The educational content of the curriculum, program evaluation and assessment of children's learning/ development
- Health and safety
- Relationships with families
- Policies and procedures.

**Question 2: How should services be rated against standards? What should the rating system look like in order to achieve its objectives? Possible considerations: measurement, attainment or other approaches, how the rating system will link to the standards, accreditation and licensing.**

The IEUA supports the replacement of individual state-based standards and licensing regulations with a national quality standards as a mechanism of providing a more streamlined and consistent approach to the delivery of early childhood education.

**Question 3: What kind of information should the rating system provide to parents and others in the sector? Possible considerations: grades of quality at each level e.g. A-E, incentives for continuous improvement.**

Early childhood education providers and professionals need to be given clear and specific feedback regarding how they can improve the quality of their service regarding each of the quality standards and provided with subsequent professional development and professional support in order to achieve these standards.

**Question 4: What potential risks are there in introducing a rating system? How could potential negative implications be minimised?**

IEUA recognises the national rating system Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS) which currently rates long day care services according to quality standards

Support, resources and professional development needs to be provided for those services which need to improve their quality standards.

Any implementation of rating system must protect early childhood education from a “one size fits all” approach.

**Question 5: Who should carry out the rating process and why?**

IEUA believes that qualified and very experienced early childhood professionals who can provide advice to staff regarding quality improvement and who are well-trained in determining how adequate quality indicators are being met, are the appropriate personnel to carry out the rating processes.

Such qualified professionals would be able to justify and explain the importance of each of the quality indicators and would be able to assist services in the development of improvement plans.

Further such professionals should have recent experience in relevant settings (preschool, long day care, out of school hours care, family day care and/or Indigenous services) and thus ensure that the advice given is applicable to various service types and is practical and realistic in nature.

## COVERAGE

***Question 1: Should the rating system include all services in the early childhood education and care sector e.g. long day care, preschool, family day care, outside school hours care, Indigenous services, etc? What are the implications of bringing all service types under one rating system?***

IEUA believes that, whilst a Quality Rating System needs to cover all service types, it must have core principles supplemented by service-specific indicators/ criteria to provide appropriate flexibility to the varying needs of the service provided.

As such quality indicators can vary between service types, it is important to focus on how well each service meets the needs of children and families in their local community.

## IMPACTS

***Question 1: What are the potential impacts on early childhood education and care services? Possible considerations: workforce, financial viability, implementation arrangements, service provision?***

As indicated earlier, increased workload associated documentation to demonstrate how quality standards are met remains a concern. In addition, there is a need for equitable access to training and support.

All these issues will have financial implications as improvements to quality may mean centres need to invest in staff training, employing additional and qualified staff.

## TRANSITIONS TO A NEW SYSTEM

***Question 1: What transition arrangements do you consider appropriate to implement the proposed changes? What supports for the early childhood education and care sector do you think would assist these transitions?***

Training on the new standards and required documentation needs to be provided for all staff employed in early childhood services. This should be free of charge, comprehensive, locally available and include ongoing support. A national help-line / website should be available during working hours in order for centre directors to seek advice.

***Question 2: What timeframes are required to allow services to transition to a new rating system?***

The implementation of new standards should not be rushed. Early childhood education staff must have understanding and ability to follow through on what is expected according to each of the Quality Rating Standards.

**IEUA supports phased in implementation that is supported by time allowances, resources and ongoing professional development.**

## **NQF3 - STREAMLINED AND/OR INTEGRATED LICENSING AND ACCREDITATION ARRANGEMENTS**

### **STREAMLINING AND/OR INTEGRATION**

***Question 1: What are the current issues or problems with the existing regulation, licensing and quality assurance system?***

From information provided by IEUA members, concerns exist in some long day care centres regarding the process of QIAS validation in New South Wales.

Validator visits to centres are either one or two days in length and in this brief time they must ask questions of the director and other staff, observe the staff interacting with children, families and other staff members, check QIAS documentation and make a judgment regarding their recommendation regarding how well the centre meets benchmarks of quality. One day is not an adequate amount of time to complete all of these tasks satisfactorily.

The limited time QIAS validators are currently present within a centre does not allow time for thorough assessment of practices or any attempt to be made towards supporting or mentoring staff. Validators observe what occurs in centres but do not give advice regarding how staff can improve the quality of their service.

NSW Department of Community Services Advisors provide little professional advice to services, they ensure that the service is meeting licensing standards only. Many services do not have access to any professional support services.

**IEUA also recognises the existing over-laps between the current QIAS system and other state-based regulations which can cause confusion and duplication. Larger organisations which have a number of early childhood services under their umbrella frequently employ early childhood consultants which provide support and advice to services. The IEUA recommends that all services have access to specialist early childhood consultants to assist in the delivery of high quality early childhood services.**

***Question 2: What changes to the structure of the quality assurance system would you suggest to increase consistency, effectiveness and efficiency across service types and/or jurisdictions ? How might these changes affect you or your service? Possible considerations: administration, governance and delivery arrangements, reducing administrative duplication.***

**IEUA recommends that validator training be extensive and initial visits be supervised by a senior validator (who independently marks the centre against quality benchmarks) until inter-rater reliability/ consistency of at least 90% is achieved.**

**The IEUA recommends that a clear system of appeals be implemented.**

Further, validators should have experience working in each of the types of services they are able to assess.

## TRANSITIONS TO A NEW SYSTEM

**Question 1: What would be the issues for you in moving to a streamlined or integrated system? What supports for the early childhood education and care sector do you think would assist these transitions? How much time should be allowed for the sector to make the transition to the new system? Possible considerations: implementation arrangements, service provision.**

The need to refer to different regulations, explanatory documents and authorities in order to maintain the standards required for service provision is puts an onerous burden on early childhood education staff.

**An integrated system should remove the need for duplication between the current systems.**

**The IEUA has a concern that the standards of an integrated system might be lower than what is currently required in some states. The IEUA believes that the standards must be improved rather than reduced to ensure quality outcomes for children.**

The IEUA supports a phased in implementation system with ongoing professional support and resourcing to ensure that all services can meet high quality standards.

## NQF4 – WORKFORCE

### **WORKFORCE**

**Question 1: How could the status and recognition of the early childhood education and care workforce be raised?**

IEUA members are concerned that the public perception is that early childhood education is not of the same standing as other educational programs.

IEUA has been informed by their members that they often feel compelled to justify their choice to teach in early childhood.

Hayden (2000) reports that in a public survey, “Sixty eight per cent of respondents expressed negative views about the need for tertiary qualifications for those who work in the early childhood field. Eighty percent of respondents did not believe that early childhood specialists should be classified as ‘professionals’ (p. 62).

Warrilow et al. (2004) stated that thirty nine per cent of survey respondents stated that inadequate child:staff ratios contributed to the shortage of trained staff. Several stakeholders highlighted the impact that caring for a large number of children can have, with staff feeling they are unable to meet individual requirements and the demands placed on them by parents expecting individual care at all times.

Improving the staff-to-child ratios was raised as a way to address the problem of working conditions by 45 per cent of respondents (Warrilow et al., 2004, p. 24 cited in Fisher & Patulny, 2004, p. 7).

**IEUA believe that early childhood teachers desperately want families and wider society to recognise the value of what they do. This lack of recognition of their**

**professional status is a contributing factor to early childhood teachers leaving the profession.**

This could partly be addressed by ensuring:

- that all state teacher registration bodies equally recognise early childhood education;
- that all early childhood providers have requirements placed upon them to employ teachers with tertiary early childhood qualifications;
- that teachers are remunerated commensurate with teachers in schools and through teacher registration recognition of early childhood education teachers;
- through teacher registration; and
- that staff:child ratios are appropriately addressed.

Currently, the requirements for early childhood educational providers to employ teachers with tertiary early childhood qualifications varies across the nation.

For instance, teachers within Community Kindergartens in Queensland must be specialised, tertiary early childhood education trained teachers who are registered under the Queensland College of Teachers. The majority of teachers possess a four year degree qualification in early childhood. The degree qualification focuses on the learning and needs of children in this particular instance.

In NSW, while Department of Education preschools all employ tertiary qualified early childhood teachers, only child care centres and preschools with 30 or more licensed places are required to employ university-trained early childhood teachers.

Members have informed us that private providers are building two separate buildings next door to one another with 29 places each in order to avoid the need to hire early childhood teachers.

Teachers with specialised early education qualifications possess significantly greater knowledge and skills in relation to early childhood learning theories and models than employees with other qualifications.

In addition, ongoing professional development requirements for teachers to undertake a minimum level of professional development each year exist in many collective agreements

However, this is not the situation in all early childhood facilities, especially in childcare facilities.

Such actions undermine the status of early childhood education.

Further, some private providers in NSW hold a disproportionate number of interim approvals, allowing them to employ a TAFE trained Child Care Worker instead of a qualified teacher for up to 12 months.

Research regarding interim approvals shows: "Privately operated services are highly over-represented among services with interim approvals... One corporate service provider alone, ABC Learning Centres Pty Ltd, holds 31 interim approvals, or 17.6

per cent of all interim approvals, even though they have only 65 centres (4 per cent of centres) requiring early childhood teachers (Purcal & Fisher, 2004, p. 4).

**IEUA believes that tertiary early childhood education qualifications are needed to ensure early childhood programs achieve school readiness goals including pre-academic skills in literacy, numeracy and social skills. All children between 0 and 5 years of age should be taught by such qualified teachers.**

As stated earlier, there are significant discrepancies between the wages and conditions of early childhood teachers working in community kindergartens, long day care centres, preschools and primary schools.

**IEUA strongly asserts that equitable salary and conditions are essential for the attraction and retention of qualified, experienced and capable staff.**

***Question 2: What could be done to address limited advancement options and career paths?***

By increasing the opportunities and awareness of steps required to follow diverse career paths including management roles (directors or service co-coordinators who manage a number of services), training, resource development, Additional Needs/ Inclusion Support Facilitators, Quality System validators, staff would be provided with more knowledge regarding career paths.

However, salary structure must be adjusted to encourage and recognise those teachers and teacher assistants/childcare workers with further qualifications relating to early childhood education.

Qualified early childhood teachers earn less in their first few years of employment than Diploma qualified workers in early childhood education. Qualified teacher directors of large services (60 to 90 children) earn \$30,000 per annum less than principals of small schools in New South Wales.

While there may be a requirement to have a relevant teaching qualification in early childhood education, there is no recognition for further relevant qualifications obtained during a career is provided, for example a Master of Early Childhood or Master of Special Education.

**Other**

IEUA recognises the value of research which suggests that a centralised management, training and support system that allows for early childhood teachers to train as centre directors while also providing for the ability to transfer between services. Such a system would not only ensure exchange of expertise between services but should also provide also portability of entitlements.

***Question What possible approaches could be used to improve retention strategies?***

**(i) Equitable salaries and conditions**

As stated previously, parity of salaries is an essential strategies to improving retention.

Staff will not remain in services where they are undervalued or underpaid compared to other services.

Early childhood teachers must have parity of salary and working conditions with their counterparts in primary schools.

Early childhood teachers must be entitled to the same working conditions as teachers employed in primary schools (long service leave entitlements, school holiday periods, paid maternity leave, relief from face-to-face teaching for programming etc).

Early childhood teachers in New South Wales or Queensland do not have access to any paid maternity leave, whilst their counterparts in schools have access to 12 or 14 weeks paid leave. Although a few NSW employers provide access to some paid paternity leave, most early childhood employers refuse to even consider the possibility.

## **(ii) Accessible and affordable professional support**

In addition to improving the salary and conditions, early childhood teachers require support to do their job.

Early childhood teachers are often isolated and lack access to feedback from more experienced teachers. Most centres employ between one and two early childhood teachers (a minority have three or four). This is particularly so for those services in remote and rural areas, where professional development and professional discourse is rarely experienced.

Also, in many centres, due to need of supply, it is not uncommon for a 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> year graduate teacher to assume the position of director in a centre. However, university courses are not equipped to provide new graduates with the range of skills needed in order to assume a directing role (the role of centre director is extremely varied and changes to regulatory requirements and curriculum development are frequent).

**IEUA recommends the development of a support system which includes telephone advice, face-to-face mentoring and networking opportunities which will greatly assist in removing the sense of isolation which early childhood teachers experience. The ability of transferring your employment without loss of entitlements between employers would also provide a variety of experiences for early childhood teachers.**

## **(iii) Induction and ongoing mentoring for graduate teachers**

As mentioned previously, the recognition of early childhood teachers through state teacher registration bodies is an essential feature of recognising the profession. In addition, one of the most important features of the teacher registration system is the mentoring / professional support required to be offered to new graduates.

Where registration is not accessible, such as in NSW, professional mentoring of new graduates is implemented haphazardly.

**IEUA recommends that induction programs and on going mentoring be provided to graduate early childhood teachers as they enter the profession.**

Such programs should provide a variety of forms of assistance to the graduate teacher which supplement the graduate teacher's background knowledge with

information of a specific kind relating to the early childhood education centre and its community, which capitalises on the graduate teacher's previous training, and assists him/her to deal in a practical way with student development, curriculum planning, teaching method, and other facets such as administrative procedures of the graduate teacher's teaching.

Induction and mentoring programs should protect the graduate teacher from unreasonable demands, encourage the graduate teacher, strengthen the graduate teacher's confidence and satisfaction in the graduate teacher's work, and respect the graduate teacher's style.

Currently there is very little evidence of such induction and mentoring programs in place for graduate early childhood teachers.

#### **(iv) Recognising and Addressing Work Intensification**

The incidences of workplace stress in the profession needs to be addressed.

The majority of early childhood teachers questioned by the IEUA NSW Branch report working between 4 and 20 hours per week (unpaid) on programming, evaluating, planning, acquiring resources, researching, completing paperwork including observations and developmental records. This is equally experienced in long day care centres as well as kindergarten and preschools settings.

Early childhood teachers employed in child care centres work 48 weeks per year whilst their counterparts employed in primary schools and preschools work 41 weeks per year.

Only one industrial instrument provides programming time in NSW. Teachers and Directors must negotiate time away from the children to perform administration and programming on a case by case basis.

Some teaching directors are not given any administration time by their employers during the week. This means they must attend to many tasks outside of working hours including returning telephone calls, enrolments, completing licensing documentation, staff management, policy development, OH&S checklists.

Many early childhood teachers employed in child care centres do not have the opportunity to set up their classrooms prior to children arriving at the centre.

The IEUA is aware of a number of centres in NSW where staff are expected to set up the indoor and outdoor environments for up to 40 minutes (without pay) before their eight to ten hour shift commences for the day.

This occurs because children arrive at the centre at opening time and some children do not leave the centre until closing time. Staff cannot maintain their duty of care in supervising and interacting with children whilst preparing activities and equipment and must perform these duties outside their normal working hours.

Adequate time in the work day must be provided to staff to do non face to face duties.

## **(v) Addressing special needs**

Currently support for children with special needs is woefully inadequate. Higher level support, training, resourcing and specialised staff must be provided for children with additional needs, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The current support available to preschools and child care centres covers the cost of an untrained casual for a maximum of five hours per day despite many children being enrolled for eight or more hours per day and despite the need for qualified and experienced staff to develop individual educational programs for these children. Current government programs offer assistance only for particular categories of disabilities and many children miss out on early intervention programs as a result. Children who fall outside specified categories, and those whose disability has not been classified, are ignored by the system, regardless of the additional stress this places on staff in assisting these children to participate successfully in the program.

## **(vi) Legislation protection against Unfair Dismissal**

Teachers employed in early childhood services experience a lack of job security, compared with their counterparts working in primary and secondary education.

Most early childhood centres employ a small number of employees and are greatly affected by any removal of unfair dismissal protections.

It is very disheartening to have members report that when they informed their employer they were being underpaid their employment was terminated.

IEUA has experienced too many such cases.

For example, despite a paid “crib” (lunch) break specified in the award (early childhood teachers are unable to leave the premises during working hours in order to maintain DoCS regulations), many teachers inform us that they are not being paid for their break and are afraid to challenge this situation.

The owner of one centre recently threatened staff that she was going to “find out who reported her to the union and deal with them” when the IEU wrote to inform her that crib breaks need to be paid.

Another teacher recently confided that when she took a position as a centre director the owner of the centre told her she had to sign a contract saying she would not receive a paid break or any rostered days off. Consequently this teacher was working a 42.5 hour week whilst being paid for 38.

Services which receive funding either directly or through subsidies paid to parents should be required to commit to ‘best industrial practices’ or the government should ensure that there is appropriate legislation which protects their working conditions.

## **(vii) Improving child:teacher ratios**

Centres that work to minimum child ratios are placing excessive stress on staff and undermine outcomes for children.

Warrilow et al. (2004) stated that 39 per cent of survey respondents stated that inadequate child:staff ratios contributed to the shortage of trained staff. Several stakeholders highlighted the impact that caring for a large number of children can

have, with staff feeling they are unable to meet individual requirements and the demands placed on them by parents expecting individual care at all times.

Improving the staff-to-child ratios was raised as a way to address the problem of working conditions by 45 per cent of survey respondents (Warrilow et al., 2004, p. 24 cited in Fisher & Patulny, 2004, p. 7).

#### **Question 4: What strategies could be adopted to increase the numbers of Indigenous child care workers and teachers?**

##### **(i) Qualified early childhood teachers available for every centre**

IEUA welcomes the federal government's funding focus on indigenous early childhood education and stresses that emphasis must be placed on ensuring that qualified early childhood teachers are available to every child.

Currently small preschools and kindergarten classes in the Northern Territory are conducted by teacher assistants/childcare workers or by teachers without formal early childhood education qualifications.

While bilingual experience and the recognition of children's culture, strength and knowledge provide an important experience, children need access to planned play based educational programs conducted by qualified early childhood teachers.

##### **(ii) Access to teacher accommodation**

Recent reviews into indigenous education has shown that over crowding and inadequate housing accommodation in communities is a reality. IEUA members within the Northern Territory have identified that the need for appropriate teacher housing and accommodation is not being met. For example currently, in Wadeye teaching staff are without accommodation and are sharing facilities with other families. In Nguiu, Bathurst Island, IEUA members have identified accommodation which is in need of repair and maintenance.

It has been also been confirmed that housing is provided where possible to non-indigenous teachers as a first priority. Indigenous teachers are required to share with families within the indigenous community, often in high numbers. Pressures resulting from shared accommodation and lack of personal space have added to the stressors involved in teaching in a remote community.

The responsibility for provision of housing seems to be an ongoing issue between employer and government and land council. While this jurisdictional debate regarding responsibility and ownership continues, early childhood educators are left without support and adequate satisfactory shelter.

**IEUA recommends the provision of adequate housing for early childhood teachers within indigenous communities and the ongoing maintenance and repair of such housing to a standard that is acceptable within the general wider community.**

### **(iii) Recognition of the role of the Indigenous Education Worker/Childcare Worker**

Support for the early childhood teacher is also vital. A balance between qualified early childhood education programs and culture must be reached. Classes where children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds staffed by monolingual teachers are unlikely to be effective.

The role of the Indigenous Education Worker and Teacher Assistant/Childcare Worker is vital to assisting in the student learning and engagement, by bringing cultural understanding and language into the classroom to ensure that students and educators are able to be more fully engaged in the curriculum.

Migrant children of non-English speaking backgrounds have access to an English as a Second Language (ESL) support person and indigenous children from non-English speaking backgrounds should receive similar support.

**The IEUA believes that it is imperative that the Teacher/Indigenous Education Worker relationship is recognised and strengthened professionally through training and skill development and career structures.**

### **(iv) Access to professional development and support**

Staff living in indigenous communities and in regional and remote areas experience disadvantage due to the high costs associated with travel and accommodation required in order to attend formal training institutions.

This must be overcome if equity of quality early childhood education is to be delivered and the following are recommended:

- Scholarships for indigenous, remote and rural communities covering tuition fees, travel and accommodation expenses.
- Strong support networks established in order to encourage Indigenous child care workers to enter the field and to upgrade their qualifications.
- Ongoing, culturally inclusive professional development.
- The development of preservice courses and ongoing professional development courses with culturally inclusive curricula
- Alternative pathways for entry, such as the Bachelor in Teaching (Early Childhood Services) program for Indigenous Child Care Workers at Macquarie University.
- Courses and mentoring support systems designed to assist Indigenous students to develop literacy skills that enable them to cope with study at TAFE and university.

The IEUA recognises the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education which offers distance education in childcare training in a number of remote communities. It also provides community support to remote centres. The increasing demand for both training and support reflects the growth of, and interests in early childhood education in both Indigenous and remote communities.

Close community liaison and the tailoring of programmes for adults and children to meet community needs is the key to success (Wiltshire 2000).

The cost of this in terms of time, people and resources must be factored into early childhood education funding.

**Question 5: What is the likely impact of any suggestions on the price and demand for services?**

Substantial increases in fees would make quality early childhood services unaffordable for many families. The government must fund services to ensure the financial viability of services. Increased funding will ensure that the costs associated with higher wages, improved working conditions and the employment of more qualified staff can be met.

**Question: What possible approaches could be used to address shortages of early childhood teachers in regional and remote areas, long day care services and community preschools?**

Teachers, like all other professionals, need incentives to work away from culturally safe or familiar contexts.

Living expenses in remote and rural regions are substantially higher than those in urban metropolitan regions.

Early childhood education teachers and teacher assistants/childcare workers and other childcare staff living in regional and remote areas experience disadvantage due to the high costs associated with living in the area. For example early childhood teachers in Wadeye, Northern Territory, are required to pay excessive air freight costs to access fresh fruit and vegetables.

The following is recommended as mechanisms to support early childhood teachers in regional and remote areas:

- Remote area allowances and subsidised accommodation.
- Assistance with travel and accommodation required in order to attend formal training institutions.
- Scholarships covering tuition fees, travel and accommodation expenses.
- Strong local support networks need to be established to address isolation and the need for ongoing professional support.
- Offer higher wages, bonuses, relocation allowances and subsidised accommodation to early childhood teachers who are willing to relocate to regional and remote areas.

## **EYLF1 - PURPOSE OF THE FRAMEWORK**

### **Question 1: What philosophy would you want an Australian framework to use?**

The framework should be based on domains of learning (physical, social, emotional, cognitive and linguistic) whilst being flexible enough to allow for cultural diversity and individual needs.

The framework should begin with the child and should acknowledge the skills, prior experience and needs of individual children. The focus needs to be on demonstrating progress towards specific outcomes.

Children do not follow a universal order of progression through skill development and cultural (child development theory is based on western scientific testing) and developmental (children with additional needs may exhibit a variety of behaviours) diversity must be taken into account.

Progress should be demonstrated along a continuum, rather than as a series of discrete stages based on the age of a child. For example, in acquiring the ability to write children generally begin using a fist grasp, progress to a pincer grasp and finally a tripod grasp. However, the age at which each stage is reached varies markedly between individual children.

All children are perceived as successful learners when the focus is placed on the process of learning/progress made when compared with their own past performance, as opposed to being compared with a set of criteria they “should” meet at a particular age.

### **Question 2: What form or format should the Early Years Learning Framework take that would be most useful to you in guiding your programming for young children?**

Specific and clear outcomes in each of the developmental domains need to be detailed.

Opportunities to record children’s progress towards specific outcomes, as opposed to a “yes/no” checklist style of document allows teachers to record a more accurate picture of the processes involved with learning. For example, simply writing that a child is not able to “cut along a line” ignores many other skills the child may have such as being able to place his/ her fingers correctly when using scissors, is able to support the paper with his/ her non-dominant hand and is able to snip along the edges of a piece of paper.

A continuum of skills acquired from birth to school age needs to be included to allow for individual variations in the timing of achievement of specific outcomes, particularly for children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, children with challenging behaviours and children with additional needs.

### **Question 3: How prescriptive do you think the Early Years Learning Framework needs to be? Do you have a preference for the actual length of the framework?**

Skills and abilities listed for each developmental domain need to be measurable, detailed and clear.

There needs to be flexibility and a continuum of skills to accurately record the diverse range of skills and abilities of children in the classroom.

**Question 4: What type of supporting documents/ resources would be most valuable for parents and others working with young children?**

Tables of skills for each developmental domain are needed for quick reference.

Explanatory documents need to supplement reference tables. These documents should show the various stages children may progress through whilst acquiring particular skills and examples demonstrating (pictures and written explanations) how skills could be classified.

Support documents detailing activities, resources and teaching strategies that could be used to foster the development of particular skills.

Suggested resources and useful articles and Internet links should be listed.

**Question 5: Do you see any issues with the implementation of the Early Years Learning Framework in all education and care settings from July 2009? What suggestions would you offer to overcome these issues?**

Training needs to be provided for ALL staff employed in early childhood services. This should be free of charge, comprehensive, locally available and include ongoing support. The Early Years Learning Framework should not be implemented until all services have attended appropriate training.

It would be very disruptive for teachers and children (and confusing for parents) if services were expected to follow one set of curriculum requirements (i.e. state government frameworks) for half of the year and another set for the remainder of the year (i.e. the National Early Years Learning Framework). The Curriculum Framework should be phased in or implemented at the beginning of the year.

**EYLF2 QUESTIONS RELATING TO RESEARCH FINDINGS**

**Question 1: Is the analysis of the trends in the literature accurate and comprehensive? Are there any other issues in the research relevant to the development of the framework?**

The literature analysis is an accurate reflection of the issues that need to be considered when developing the framework.

**Question 2: Do you support a focus on language and communication development, social development and play-based learning in the framework?**

Each of these issues is very important in early childhood services.

Play-based learning must be balanced with comprehensive knowledge of child development (in order for staff to assess the level at which children are currently functioning and provide appropriate scaffolding in order to assist them to progress/ master new areas of competence).

**Question 3: How would you define the roles of the educator and the child in the learning process in the framework?**

The teacher stimulates thinking, responds to children's observations and questions, assesses where each child is on a learning continuum and develops new challenges in order to facilitate learning. The teacher initiates planned experiences and spontaneous learning experiences when responding to children's interests. The teacher models appropriate behaviours and skills and uses a wide repertoire of teaching strategies and resources in order to facilitate learning.

The child initiates interactions and learning based on their interests and past experiences. The child responds to objects, people equipment and discussions within the early childhood environment. The child internalises modelled behaviour and observed learning strategies in order to build their own understanding of the world.

**EYLF3 FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FRAMEWORK**

**Question 1: What would you want included in the framework's vision for early learning and children?**

The IEUA agrees with the inclusions to the framework's vision as detailed in the discussion paper.

**Question 2: Would you support the values and rights proposed to underpin the framework?**

The IEUA supports the values and rights proposed to underpin the framework.

**Question 3: What other values or rights would you want included and why?**

IEUA believes that the right of children and families to universal access to high quality, well funded, well resourced and supported early childhood programs should be included in the framework's vision because affordability underpins accessibility.

**EYLF4 BUILDING THE FRAMEWORK**

**Question 1: How should the curriculum framework provide guidance and strategies to meet the various learning and development needs of children including those with special needs, English as a second language, and/ or challenging behaviours?**

Skills and abilities listed for each developmental domain need to be measurable, detailed and clear, however, there needs to be flexibility to accurately record the diverse range of skills and abilities of children in the classroom.

A continuum of skills acquired from birth to school age needs to be included to allow for individual variations in the timing of achievement of specific outcomes, particularly for children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, children with challenging behaviours and children with additional needs.

All children are perceived as successful learners when the focus is placed on the process of learning/ progress made when compared with their own past performance, as opposed to being compared with a set of criteria they “should” meet at a particular age.

**Question 2: Is it appropriate for children’s learning to be assessed? If yes, how should children’s learning and development outcomes be assessed?**

Opportunities to record children’s progress towards specific outcomes, as opposed to a “yes/no” checklist style of document, allows teachers to record a more accurate picture of the processes involved with learning. For example, simply writing that a child is not able to “cut along a line” ignores many other skills the child may have, such as being able to place his/ her fingers correctly when using scissors, is able to support the paper with his/ her non-dominant hand and is able to snip along the edges of a piece of paper.

**Question 3: How would you ensure the curriculum framework is appropriate for all educators, regardless of qualifications?**

All staff need adequate and appropriate training in order to understand the requirements of the framework and to familiarise themselves with supplementary documentation.

Explicit evidence, including pictures and anecdotal examples, are needed to demonstrate what criteria should be used to assess particular skills (such as completes puzzle from memory, uses trial-and-error, rotates puzzle pieces, matches colours and/ or shapes when completing puzzles).

**Question 4: What kind of professional development will need to be provided in order to support educators in using an Early Years Learning Framework**

Training that specifies the requirements of the framework (in terms of programming, developmental records to be kept etc). Training should be free or heavily subsidized and occur during work time.

Training to familiarise staff with supplementary documentation.

Training that encourages staff to show examples of the programming and developmental records they are currently keeping and discuss how these could be adapted/ enhanced to reflect the requirements of the framework.

Ongoing support (telephone advice and networking/mentoring) in order to address issues and questions as they arise.

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