

Organisational capability - Research

Key functions

The Commission's Research Unit analyses, coordinates, conducts and promotes research to inform decisions made and the quality of services provided to children and young people in Queensland. The information obtained and relationships developed from these activities are used to further understand matters which impact on children and young people.

The Research Unit produces papers and reports on a wide range of topics and issues related to children and young people. These are shared with audiences of diverse interests and from a range of geographical locations. The Unit also identifies trends in research, issues, and practices which enable it to provide the Commissioner, as well as other government and non-government organisations and individuals, with quality information and advice.

The Research Unit:

- analyses reports, research and data to identify trends that could impact on the wellbeing of Queensland children and young people
- initiates, identifies and/or promotes networks and alliances in research with academic, non-government and government partners
- where possible, seeks and reports the views of children and young people on a range of issues
- plays an essential role in enabling the Commission to:
 - provide high quality, current and well-informed debate or comment on issues relating to children and young people
 - disseminate information to influence theory, research, and the attitudes, policies and practices of government, service providers, academia and the general community
 - contribute to publications at local, state, national and international levels
 - provide advice to other government and non-government agencies on draft documents, policies or practices relating to children and young people.

Highlights

Focus on Fathering

In March 2003, the Commission released its publication, *Focus on Fathering*. Research Unit staff contributed three chapters to this book and co-ordinated the contributions of other authors. The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) published the book, and its foreword was written by Australian of the Year, Professor Fiona Stanley. The publication, launched by the Premier, aimed to acknowledge and raise the profile of the important role fathers play in their children's lives.

Snapshot 2003

The Research Unit is responsible for researching and writing *Children and Young People in Queensland: A Snapshot 2003*. The report was released in April 2004. This is the second publication in this series, and updates and expands on the data in *Snapshot 2002*. The Snapshot is a comprehensive collection of administrative and other statistical data, primarily from Queensland, with some national comparisons.

This report aims to monitor the status of children and young people in Queensland in a given year. Bringing together a wide range of data from different sources in this way is critical for improving the health and wellbeing of children and young people in this state, as it highlights areas of concern, identifies vulnerable groups in the community and assesses the impact of policies and practices.

A Head Start for Australia: An Early Years Framework

In March 2004, the Commission released *A Head Start for Australia: An Early Years Framework* in collaboration with the NSW Commission for Children and Young People and the National Investment for the Early Years (NIFTeY). This framework aims to promote the importance of the early years of life and advocate for improved outcomes for infants, young children and their families. It provides a tool for stakeholders to consider how their sector contributes to children's wellbeing.



Consultant on the evaluation of Future Families Program

The Research Unit was consultant evaluator on Queensland Health's Future Families Program in 2003-04. The Future Families Program is an initiative of the Child and Youth Mental Health Service of the Royal Children's Hospital. Unit staff provided advice on designing and conducting the evaluation, and carried out focus groups with Queensland Health employees. Queensland Health received a written report on the Commission's findings in March 2004, and the Acting Manager, Research provided an oral presentation in June 2004.

Early Years Advisory Group

The Commission has established an Early Years Advisory Group and a larger Early Years Strategic Network, in recognition of the importance of the early years of life for determining health and wellbeing outcomes over the lifecourse. Organised by the Research Unit, these groups are made up of experts in the areas of child protection, child care, education, health, child development, infant mental health, Indigenous issues, disability, cultural and linguistic diversity, children's rights and family support. The aim of the groups is to support the Commission's role of advocating for the best interests of Queensland children, antenatal to eight years, and their families.

Children's rights SOSE module

The Research Unit began development of a Studies of Society and the Environment (SOSE) educational module on children's rights in 2003-04. Several trials of the draft module have been held in Queensland schools. Children participating in these trials have provided their views on the content and activities, enabling the module to be modified according to their comments and other information obtained during the trial process. The module is expected to be published on the Commission's website with a link from the Queensland Studies Authority's website under the SOSE curriculum area.

WISE Mentoring Program

The Research Unit established a trial Mentoring Program in conjunction with the Volunteers for Isolated Students (VISE) program for young people living out of home who need educational support in high school. Young people at secondary school who need support with their schooling and who come to the attention of a Community Visitor are matched with an appropriately qualified volunteer, or mentor. The mentors are past or current teachers who provide their time free of charge to help the young person in particular subjects. The results of this small pilot program showed that the young people participating completed their education and their school results improved.

Children's involvement with the Commission

The Research Unit has conducted several activities to ensure children and young people are involved in the activities of the Commission. Two very successful examples include the children's discussion workshops, 'Kids' Rights' and 'What's Fair?' at the Ideas Festival at the Powerhouse in August 2003. The 'What's Fair?' workshop used movement, drama and art to elicit children's views on child labour. Artwork by the children was retained by the Commission, and some pieces have been used in the Commission's discussion paper on child labour.

Coordination of whole-of-government issues for the Longitudinal Survey of Australian Children

The Commission is responsible for coordinating Queensland government agencies' responses to the Longitudinal Survey of Australian Children (LSAC). This survey, called Growing Up in Australia, is designed to provide information about the influences on children's developmental pathways. The study will collect data from two different age cohorts of Australian children over eight years. The Commission provides information to and coordinates responses from Queensland departments.

Outcomes and achievements

In the 2003-04 financial year, the Research Unit's key outcomes included:

- 43 speeches/papers written for the Commissioner, the Executive Director and other staff
- 92 internal papers providing advice and briefings on a range of topics for the Commissioner, Executive Director and the Policy and Communications Units
- attending 116 meetings with agencies, groups and individuals in relation to issues associated with children and young people
- providing information for three responses to media queries to the Communications Unit
- writing two major submissions to other agencies, including the Commission's major submission in 2003-04 to the Crime and Misconduct Commission on the Abuse of Children in Foster Care
- continuing membership of 14 interagency groups set up to address issues affecting children and young people.



Outlook

Children and Young People in Queensland: a Snapshot 2004

The success of the Commission's first two Snapshot reports has encouraged the Research Unit to produce an annual Snapshot, as well as using the issues paper series to provide an interim report, or half-yearly update on key statistics. The first Snapshot issues paper is scheduled for release in the first half of 2004-05, with Snapshot 2004 due in for release in early 2005.

The report and the interim issues paper aim to provide a comprehensive view of the health and wellbeing of children and young people in Queensland. The reports will incorporate census and survey data and information from a range of government agencies providing services to children and young people, such as health, safety, education and housing.

Vision and Voice conference

The Research Unit will run a conference in conjunction with the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) on participatory research with young people. The conference, 'Vision and Voice', will be held at QUT's Kelvin Grove campus on Friday 1 October 2004.

The aim is to provide a forum for young people participating in research projects to share their findings and gain recognition for their work. It will also provide an opportunity for youth workers, educators, and other interested parties to share what they have learnt from working with young people as researchers.

Early Years Advisory Group and the Early Years Strategic Network

The Research Unit is negotiating with Good Beginnings and the Centre for Community Child Health, Victoria, to present information on the training package they are developing to the Early Years Advisory Group and the Early Years Strategic Network.

The training is designed to help services work in collaborative, strengths-based ways which focus on prevention, early detection and early intervention. This is expected to take place in early 2005.