

The Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian

promoting and protecting the rights, interests and wellbeing of all Queenslanders under 18

Advice to: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
Topic: Response to the *Early Years Learning Framework DRAFT November 2008*
Date due: 10 December 2008

Thank you for providing an opportunity for the Queensland Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian (the Commission) to comment on the *Early Years Learning Framework DRAFT November 2008* (the Framework).

The Commission commends the Australian Government for developing the first Australia-wide Framework that formally recognises the importance of the quality of the learning, education and care that young children experience in their very early years.

The vision and direction set out in the Framework, including the emphasis on critical reflection, debate and a high level of professionalism in the field is strongly supported by the Commission. The consistent implementation of this Framework will assist in providing Australian families with high-quality integrated early childhood education and care that supports a successful transition to formal schooling for all children.

Summary of comments and recommendations. The Commission:

1. Supports the philosophical underpinnings and content of the Framework, particularly the emphasis on building responsive relationships, working to achieve social inclusion and improving equity for all children.
2. Recommends that the Framework be accompanied by appropriate support and resource materials specifically designed for early childhood and care staff, related professionals and for the families of young children.
3. Recommends that the Framework be closely aligned with the new Accreditation system, the National Quality Standards and the proposed national curriculum for the early years of compulsory schooling.
4. Recommends the following two additional Learning Outcomes:
 - (i) In the section on 'Languages, literacies and creative expression' the additional outcome is,
To promote rich languages, literacies and creative expression experiences, early childhood settings provide an environment where **young children:**
 - **are engaged in conversations with adults who acknowledge and expand on their thoughts, feelings and understandings.**
 - (ii) In the section on 'Exploration, investigation and thinking' the additional outcome is,
To promote the exploration, investigation and thinking of young children, early childhood settings provide an environment where **young children:**
 - **are challenged to extend their physical abilities and experiences and to practice and master new skills with confidence.**
5. Recommends that the section currently titled 'Assessment' be renamed as this heading does not align with the related paragraphs that appear in this section.

1. The Commission supports the philosophical underpinnings and content of the Framework, particularly the emphasis on building responsive relationships, working to achieve social inclusion and improving equity for all children.

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The Commission is of the view that the Framework appropriately focuses on building respectful, supportive and responsive relationships as the fundamental tenet of teaching and learning in the early years. Such a focus is aligned with current international brain research relating to infants, young children and healthy development as well as research evidence on highly effective early childhood programs.

The three motifs of 'belonging, being and becoming' encapsulate important understandings of childhood that foreground children's capabilities, their current lived experiences and their role as active participants in the teaching and learning process. Further, the Commission welcomes the validation of existing good practice and the emphasis in the Framework on the importance of early childhood educators critically reflecting on their work.

The emphasis on social inclusion in the Framework is strongly supported by the Commission. Creating inclusive learning and caring environments and relationships based on trust and respect for all children and families will be an important element in achieving 'closing the gap' targets for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. A social inclusion framework will also be essential in improving the educational and general well-being outcomes for disadvantaged children.

2. Recommends that the Framework be accompanied by appropriate support and resource materials specifically designed for early childhood staff, related professionals and for the families of young children.

The Framework highlights the important role played by early childhood education and care staff who work with very young children, and reinforces that they are in fact educators, who should be recognised as such. In the Commission's view, the Framework, especially when read in conjunction with the supporting documents on the DEEWR website, is an aspirational document that will provide broad guidance for early childhood education and care professionals.

The Commission notes that the Framework is mainly, though not exclusively, written for early childhood educators and aims to encourage them to engage in reflective, critical and informed conversations about their work. The content and concepts included in the Framework may be new and even challenging for some readers who may not yet be familiar with some of the research it is based upon. However, the Commission welcomes this new direction as it is an important aspect of lifting the quality of all services and improving outcomes for all children.

The Commission envisages that the final document will be accompanied by appropriate printed, web-based and other resource materials that illustrate how the Framework can be implemented. Many staff within the sector will need access to more detailed resources, professional development and mentoring programs that enable them to become familiar with the theoretical concepts, quality research and practices that support the Framework themes.

While the early childhood education and care sector undergoes the necessary reforms to enable it to provide all Australian children and families with high quality integrated

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services, it will be important to provide current and new staff with adequate support and professional development.

Similarly, the Framework will require supporting resources designed specifically to inform, engage and empower parents and families to be genuine partners in formal early education and care settings. The Commission supports the Framework's stated aim of ensuring families are welcomed, feel a sense of belonging and are active, valued contributors. High quality programs cannot be developed or maintained without respectful relationships between families and early childhood education and care staff.

3. Recommends that the Framework be closely aligned with the new Accreditation system, the National Quality Standards and the proposed national curriculum for the early years of compulsory schooling.

If the Framework is to achieve the goal of supporting a national and universally consistent curriculum, close links and common language will need to be forged with the new Quality Improvement and Accreditation system and the new National Standards for Early Childhood Education and Care. Alignment will also be necessary between the Framework and the proposed national curriculum for the early years of compulsory schooling, to create seamless transitions to formal schooling. Teaching programs for all early childhood teaching degrees, TAFEs and any private training providers who educate staff in the field will also need to be updated to reflect this new direction.

4. The Commission recommends the following two additional Learning Outcomes:

(i) In the section on 'Languages, literacies and creative expression' the additional outcome is,

To promote rich languages, literacies and creative expression experiences, early childhood settings provide an environment **where young children: are engaged in conversations with adults who acknowledge and expand on their thoughts, feelings and understandings.**

The Commission is of the view that it is important to explicitly state that the main type of every-day discourse required to promote rich language exchanges is one where adults are responsive to child-initiated communication. Adults who are skilled at listening to very young children and notice the variety of ways they communicate can use these opportunities to create ongoing and meaningful dialogue.

(ii) In the section on 'Exploration, investigation and thinking' the additional outcome is, To promote the exploration, investigation and thinking of young children, early childhood settings provide an environment **where young children:**

are challenged to extend their physical abilities and experiences and to practise and master new skills with confidence.

Even though the Framework refers to physical skills, supportive physical environments and healthy lifestyles throughout the document, the Commission recommends the inclusion of a specific outcome focusing on physical abilities and experiences. Because very young children engage with and learn about the world using all of their senses, there is interconnectedness between all forms of learning and children's physical being. The importance of healthy physical development, knowledge and experiences should also be explicitly highlighted because of trends indicating that larger numbers of children

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and families in Australia require more support and information to develop and maintain healthy lifestyles.

5. The Commission recommends that the section currently titled 'Assessment' be renamed as this heading does not align with the related paragraphs that appear in this section.

The Commission is of the view that the heading and use of the term 'Assessment' should be changed because it is most commonly associated with processes such as testing children. While the Commission views the content of the section titled 'Assessment' as highly appropriate, the heading does not align with the concepts in the text. Acceptable alternative headings could be, for example, 'Documentation of children's learning' or 'Evaluation of the learning environment'.

Please do not hesitate to contact Lesley Penrose, Senior Policy Officer, Strategic Policy and Research (ph: 07 3239 3733; e-mail: Lesley.penrose@ccypcg.qld.gov.au) should any aspect of this response require clarification.