



# A professional development framework to support inclusion



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Children with disability face greater barriers than their peers without disability in accessing early childhood education and care (ECEC) services (Baxter & Hand, 2013, p. 36; Productivity Commission, 2014, p. 9). By law, every child has the right to participate in ECEC services: Commonwealth and Queensland anti-discrimination legislation makes it unlawful to refuse a child access to an ECEC service on the basis of their disability.

## Professional knowledge for inclusion

In order to create effective inclusion practices that support children with disability or significant developmental delay to access ECEC services, educators require knowledge and skills. Professional development is therefore an essential element in building inclusion in every ECEC service.

The *National Quality Standard* (NQS) highlights the importance of leadership, professional learning and continuous improvement in ECEC services (ACECQA, 2013). This means that most services will already have approaches to professional learning and development in place to enable educators, service supervisors and management to develop their skills and knowledge to support children's learning and development.

## What is a professional development framework?

A professional development framework is a document that ECEC services can use to identify their learning needs and assess their progress. There is no prescribed format for a professional development framework. It can be designed to best suit the needs of your service and the level or scale of change you are seeking to implement. A professional development framework may be a specific element of your Quality Improvement Plan (QIP).

A professional development framework should specify which training or learning is:

- mandatory for different roles within the service

- optional or recommended for specific staff roles or specialisations

- required at induction and/or within the first six months of employment.

## Empowering and supporting staff

When an ECEC service sets goals or strategic directions to improve the inclusion of children with complex additional needs, they should explicitly recognise that this will involve developing new knowledge, skills and ways of working with children, families and professionals. All ECEC services should have dedicated budgets to support children with disability and complex additional needs.

## Developing more inclusive ECEC services takes a multi-pronged approach

There are many areas of knowledge that fit together to help educators support each child's inclusion in ECEC services, including:

- understanding and meeting your service's legal obligations
- understanding the principles and practices of inclusion of all children with diverse learning needs
- using this information to plan for change, including identifying what needs to change and how change can be achieved.

Building this knowledge helps educators to lead, implement and review change, to create more inclusive ECEC services. Approved providers, service supervisors and management, and educators need support to develop new knowledge and new skills, and to put this knowledge into practice.

## Benefits of a professional development framework

Developing a framework for professional development to support inclusion is critical for leading and managing change. Without a strategic whole-of-service approach to professional development, even the most dedicated and motivated staff can feel a strong sense of being overwhelmed in the face of policy or service delivery adjustments.

Creating a professional development framework to promote inclusion can assist to:

- acknowledge the strengths that educators, service supervisors and management have to build on
- identify the knowledge and skills to be developed for different areas within the service: whole-of-service, leadership team, educator teams, individual staff members
- establish timeframes such as short-term and long-term priorities, in line with the service's strategic plan and/or Disability Action Plan
- address any attitudinal barriers to inclusion in a holistic and respectful way
- determine how new skills and knowledge can be developed (on-the-job training, in-house training, coaching, mentoring, external training or a combination of all)
- enable individual staff and teams to have input into tailoring professional development to meet their needs (both in terms of time and preferred learning styles)
- establish timeframes, methods and routines to practise new skills and apply new knowledge, as well as to seek feedback, undertake critical reflection and ongoing learning
- consider what additional professional development the leadership team may need to lead change, manage risks, resolve conflicts and embed new practices within the service.

## Who is involved in developing the framework?

While all staff should have input into, and ownership of, their professional development goals and plans, a professional development framework may be developed by the approved provider, service supervisors and management, or educators.

## Domains of knowledge and skills development

Each ECEC service will have different priorities for professional development. Professional development to support inclusion may cover particular program content areas, as well as broader issues like professional communication skills.

Knowledge and content areas for professional development may include:

- legal responsibilities
- understanding of specific disabilities and approaches for therapy and support
- working in transdisciplinary teams (collaborative practice)
- consulting with families to develop individual inclusion plans.

Professional communication skills may include:

- negotiation
- managing conflict
- interpersonal relations (understanding self and others)
- team work
- leadership skills.

There are many methods for building each team member's skills and knowledge: face-to-face and online training; mentoring (within the ECEC service and the sector); qualifications-based study; action research projects within the ECEC service; and research projects with external partners, such as universities.

## Tips for creating professional development frameworks

When preparing to create or update your professional development framework, it is important to:

- work collectively and collaboratively with staff to identify professional development priorities
- create a professional development framework that links effectively with induction, supervision and annual review processes



- ☑ allocate sufficient resources and time for structured professional development, considering a mix of individual training and supervision, team meetings or whole-of-service planning days
- ☑ enable staff to participate in setting their own goals and priorities for learning
- ☑ establish reasonable timeframes for learning and development in consultation with staff
- ☑ evaluate the effectiveness of training in delivering on inclusion goals.

## Where to find more information

For assistance in identifying your professional development needs, use this [Self-assessment Tool](#) produced by the Professional Support Coordinators Alliance. Each member of staff will need to conduct an individual skills audit before you begin using the self-assessment tool in your service.

The Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations has produced a fact sheet on [Planning and Evaluating Professional Development](#) (this fact sheet was targeted at ECEC services applying for federal funding, but the advice is applicable to all services).

You can also download a professional development plan template from the [website](#) of Children's Services Central.



Photo: Lime

## References

- Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA). (2013). *Guide to the National Quality Standard*. Sydney, NSW: ACECQA.
- Baxter, J., & Hand, K. (2013). *Access to early childhood education in Australia*. Research report no. 24. Melbourne, VIC: Australian Institute of Family Studies.
- Productivity Commission. (2014). *Childcare and early childhood learning*. Inquiry report no. 73. Canberra, ACT: Productivity Commission.

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