Joint Workforce Development and Training Briefing Paper

1. Introduction

The Joint Workforce Development and Training initiative is aimed at developing and implementing an integrated workforce development and training strategy across major program areas of the child and family services sector in NSW.

The overall purpose of an integrated workforce development and training strategy is to improve the effectiveness of services and programs offered to children and their families in key program areas. Some weaknesses have been identified in the current situation, including fragmented training delivery, high costs and a lack of portability across the sector.

The importance of a joint workforce development and training strategy for those currently in employment would include:

- Providing clarity in relation to the required core skills, knowledge and attributes that workers must demonstrate to perform a suite of roles that are common across the sector.
- Making sure that staff who hold these common roles, receive core training and related skill development (including supervision, reflective practice and coaching in adult capacity building) that is deemed essential to performing their responsibilities.
- Achieving greater consistency in relation to both the content and quality of training on offer to the child and family services sector.
- Increased portability of training and other workforce development activities across the sector, and the related benefit of minimising the need for the re-training of staff who transfer from one organisation to another within the sector. (On this issue, the project will also closely examine the scope for building core competencies that have broad application across other community services industry areas – for example, in the disability sector).
- An efficient and integrated workforce development and training operating environment that:
    - at the systems level, provides for the continuous refinement and enhancement of workforce development activities, based on a planned and evidence-based approach to the professional development of the workforce; and
    - for individual workers, establishes an efficient and effective framework for embedding learning into their practice, as part of providing workers with ongoing support for their professional development.
- A more efficient and targeted use of the resources dedicated to training across the child and family services sector.

- Career and academic pathways through AQF framework and CYF sector, including progression into leadership roles.
- COVID workforce recovery.
- Integration of National initiatives in terms of Federal and State funding and other State/Territory programs (particularly for agencies with cross-border responsibilities).
- Better tailored pre and post employment training generally.

In addition, regardless of whether students are undertaking pre or post employment training, it is vitally important that, as far as possible, the courses that they are undertaking are tailored to well equip them with the core skills, knowledge and attributes of the roles that they are performing or are seeking to perform.

Against this background, an important part of this initiative will also include examining the scope to improve the courses in the market to better equip those already in, as well as those seeking to join, the sector. On a related note, this initiative also provides an opportunity to explore the adequacy of current strategies for attracting individuals into the sector from diverse backgrounds, including the availability of traineeships for those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

2. Developing the blueprint

What's in scope?

Prior to commencing work on an integrated workforce development and training strategy, there is the need to address the threshold issue of what service delivery program areas will be the major - although not necessarily the sole - focus of this initiative.

On this issue, at the initial consultation with NGO agencies on the 7th October, a number of providers felt that this initiative should largely focus its attention on workforce development and training activities that support the effective implementation of the Permanency Support Program (PSP) and the Targeted Earlier Intervention Program (TEI). In addition, it is acknowledged that it will be appropriate for AbSec to take an important leadership role in decisions about delivering training associated with the Aboriginal Child and Family Strategy. Absec has made the point that this should include, but not be limited to, any relevant recommendations from the Family is Culture Report. For example, Recommendations 58, 59 and 73 all refer to specific required areas of training for either Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal workers.

At the meeting with NGO stakeholders on the 7th October, the potential inclusion of carers in this initiative was also seen as important, particularly in relation to areas of shared practice. This issue requires further discussion.

Therefore, this threshold issue of what's in scope, requires further discussion between agencies within the NGO sector and between the NGO sector and DCJ.

What would success look like?

1. Identifying the knowledge and skills that are needed in different key job roles (including key management and frontline worker roles).

2. The delivery of related training and workforce development initiatives in a way that aligns with the evidence relating to the best way of providing the required training/skills.

3. The finalisation of a workforce development and training blueprint that successfully meets the objectives referred to in paragraphs 1 and 2 above.

4. Embedding a future governance and business operating model that ensures there is an ongoing, and evidence based review of workforce development and training needs, together with related ongoing adjustments to the blueprint (as needs change and the evidence evolves regarding what constitutes best practice specific to meeting each identified knowledge and skill requirement).

5. An enhancement in pre and post employment training provided by universities and the tertiary education sector more broadly (including RTOs).

6. All of the above activities will be carried out in accordance with robust and effective co-design principles and practices.

7. More broadly, by delivering this project as a joint AbSec, ACWA and DCJ initiative, it is intended that, in this critical area of workforce development and training, our sector will be provided with **better targeted** and more **consistent and higher quality products** and a more efficient system for meeting the core workforce development and training needs of those workers performing critical operational and management roles.

Detailed design work

Consultations have noted that a first step in formulating a workforce development and training blueprint, is the need to ensure that all of the subject areas that ought to be covered in the blueprint are systematically identified. There have been a range of historical workforce development and training activities in NSW and across Australia during the last decade. It is important that any design work leverages off existing resources and learning in this area to reduce duplication and to ensure maximum impact. A number of topics and areas of skill development have been raised and this information can be fed into the blueprint development process once it has commenced.

Once each of these areas have been identified, the intended target group for each subject area would need to be determined, along with the knowledge and skills that need to be acquired and the best workforce development/training approach that should be employed for each area. Making sound assessments in relation to these critical issues might include undertaking a stocktake of comparable interstate or overseas workforce initiatives that have been successful. It will also be important to review the evidence base for a range of workforce development and training delivery models; for example, the evidence base for coaching, training, self-paced and instructor-led models in the context of the intended workforce development objectives.

Relevant to determining the target group for each subject area, will be the identification of common job roles in these program areas – this would include frontline caseworker roles through to manager and senior executive positions. In respect of each role, it will also be important to identify key competency and subject matter expertise requirements (standards).

This work on developing a detailed blueprint should also carefully consider what is currently offered in the market and the role that each offering might play – either in its existing form or via an enhanced mode of delivery – in contributing to one overarching, evidence-based, workforce development/training plan for the whole of the sector. Some of the very significant workforce development and training activities that will need to be closely examined include (but are not limited to) those delivered by:

- Universities and other tertiary institutions.
- AbSec and ACWA - both are required to be RTOs for the sector as part of our contractual obligations.
- DCJ, particularly through the work of the OSP.
- Curijo that is continuing to develop The PSP Learning Hub, to help equip the PSP caseworker workforce.
- The many service providers that undertake important workforce development and training initiatives.
- The Australian Services Union.
- The Parenting Research Centre.
- Other RTOs and other relevant organisations that work in partnership with service providers on workforce development and training initiatives.

3. Future proofing: Developing the right governance arrangements and operating and implementation system

The second element of this work is the identification and establishment of the best operating system for guaranteeing that the most efficient, integrated and high quality

workforce development and training is provided to the sector. This work will need to also include embedding effective governance arrangements that provide ongoing and rigorous review of the workforce development and training blueprint, based on the changing needs of the sector over time. The blueprint will also need to be amended to take into account the evolving evidence base relating to what constitutes best practice in the workforce development and training sphere. Furthermore, any ongoing approach needs to be viable from a funding perspective and demonstrate a return on investment in terms of the attraction of new staff, staff capability and development to achieve outcomes and retention of staff across the sector into the future.

4. Governance and funding issues

Co-design governance and working arrangements

This Briefing Paper has received formal agreement from AbSec and feedback from DCJ is pending.

Governance of this program, to develop and guide the implementation of this initiative, will involve the establishment of a Steering Committee, including senior representation from DCJ, ACWA, AbSec (and possibly other peaks), Curijo, the ASU, service providers and other key experts.

There also needs to be an opportunity for carers, children, young people and families to have an ongoing voice in the process.

We have noted the very strong interest expressed by many member agencies to actively participate in this initiative. Not only will member agencies play an important leadership role in relation to the Steering Committee that will be established, an integral component of this initiative will be the active leadership role that member representatives will play via their participation in the various working groups that will need to be set up.

In relation to both developing the blueprint and the framework for the right governance arrangements and operating system (see Items 2 and 3 above), ACWA believes that this critical piece of work needs to be carried out by a project team of experts who would be contracted to deliver what is required. In terms of its work with the sector on developing the blueprint, and on proposing the right governance arrangements/operating system, the project team would need to be particularly mindful of the need for high quality and affordable training products to be consistently available to the market.

To support this team, ACWA is willing to guarantee a funding commitment of $250,000 from the non-government sector.

Agencies are welcome to nominate as a major investor at $50,000+, primary investor $20,000 or smaller investor at $5,000+. Subject to commitment by agencies and investment funds received, further discussions may occur to secure funds for this project. You can indicate your interest in investing in this initiative by emailing **Steve Kinmond** via steve@acwa.asn.au

5. Next Steps

Agencies can still express interest in being an investor, being part of the Stakeholder Governing Group or being on a Working Party by emailing **Linda Watson** via linda@acwa.asn.au. Please indicate any specific areas of interest or expertise that you may have.

In early 2021 we will be releasing an invitation to respond to a tender to undertake this work. The governance arrangements to manage this process are:

Step 1 - bids go to a meeting of the full Steering Committee for discussion. Parties submitting a bid will be advised of a modification to the usual 'commercial in confidence' arrangements regarding tenders, in that steering committee members will be provided with the documentation relating to their bid. However, all Steering Committee members will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement requiring them not to disclose any information relating to any bid documentation outside of discussions during the Steering Committee referred to at Step 2.

Step 2 - Following the closure date of the tender application process, there will be a full Steering Committee meeting at which all parties submitting a bid will be invited to attend and have the right to participate in a discussion on the pros and cons of all bids made, including answering any questions asked of them. Also present at this Steering Committee meeting, will be the representatives of AbSec, DCJ, ACWA (and possible other relevant peaks) who will constitute the selection panel, who will be responsible for choosing the successful tender bid for the project.

At the end of the Steering Committee meeting, there will be an 'in camera' discussion with all members of the Steering Committee and the selection panel. However, this discussion will exclude all those who have made a tender bid. This will allow any issues to be canvassed that members of the Steering Committee did not wish to raise when those who had made a tender bid were present.

Step 3 - Following on from this Steering Committee meeting, the selection panel will decide which tender should be awarded the contract to deliver the project.

Tender documents are currently being developed based on this Project Brief.

Acknowledgement

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