Chapter 8

Chapter 8

Workforce development

Working in child protection is challenging and demanding but can also be rewarding. The work is often crisis driven and practitioners are required to manage complex situations in difficult circumstances under high levels of public scrutiny. Practice in this area requires courage, dedication and resilience as well as a diverse mix of skills, knowledge, practical experience and expertise.

The child protection workforce comprises a range of professional and para-professional staff employed in government and non-government agencies. Many government agencies, in particular health, education and police, have a key role to play in protecting children and, as a result, have established designated child protection positions. The non-government sector also delivers a wide range of child protection services.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore issues relating to the frontline workforce in Child Safety. Some of these issues have already been touched on in Chapter 5 (see 5.3) because they have a direct impact on the effectiveness of case management for children and families. The Commission's final report will investigate the challenges that face the broader child protection workforce, including the non-government sector.

This chapter draws on information gathered by the Commission through hearings, departmental responses and submissions from professionals and community groups. The Commission has heard directly from Child Safety staff. Forums were conducted with frontline officers in Mount Isa, Ipswich, Brisbane, Caboolture and Labrador. In addition, in late 2012 a staff survey was distributed to frontline Child Safety staff. This survey generated a response rate of 31 per cent (444 staff responded) and canvassed a wide range of practice issues.

This chapter first describes the current profile of the Child Safety workforce before discussing a number of issues facing the workforce:

- qualifications of frontline staff

- Child Safety staff turnover
- training and professional development
- workloads
- supervision, peer support and counselling
- career progression
- developing a culturally competent workforce
- specific challenges for rural and remote practice.

8.1 Profile of frontline Child Safety service centre staff

The use of the term 'frontline staff' in this chapter accords with the 2012 Public Service Commission definition, which states that a person delivering a frontline service directly delivers this service to the public, for the majority (greater than 75 per cent) of the available working time (Public Service Commission 2012).

The department has advised that, as at 9 September 2012, there were 1,477 full-time equivalent frontline staff employed in 51 Child Safety service centres and satellite offices in Queensland (see Table 6). These centres and offices are distributed across seven regions throughout the state.

As at 30 June 2012, 89.1 per cent of the workforce in frontline roles were female and 10.9 per cent were male.[1] The average age of frontline staff was 38 years.[2] Within Child Safety, in June 2012, 79 staff identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.[3] The percentage of culturally and linguistically diverse staff within Child Safety service centres was 7.24 per cent.[4]

Table 6: Distribution of frontline positions in Child Safety

Position title	Number of positions
Adoption officer	13.80
Child safety officer	885.27
Child safety officer (One Chance at Childhood)	22.00
Child safety officer (After Hours Service)	19.19
Child safety support officer	173.31
Client relations officer	6.50
Coordinator (One Chance at Childhood)	3.60
Coordinator (Out of Home Care)	13.80
Coordinator (One Chance at Childhood)	0.43
Enquiries officer	1.00
Executive director, Policy and Performance	1.00
Family group meeting convenor	35.17
Foster and kinship carer support line worker	1.42
Kinship and foster care coordinator	2.00
Manager	2.70
Manager regional operations	1.00
Principal child safety officer	6.60
Principal complaints and review officer	2.00
Regional director	7.00
Senior adoption officer	4.00
Senior adviser	2.40
Senior complaints and review officer	6.70
Senior practitioner	45.56
Scan team coordinator	14.18
Team leader	203.18
Team leader specified	1.00
Unaccompanied humanitarian minors officer	1.00
Unaccompanied humanitarian refugee minors officer	1.00
Total	**1,476.81**

Source: Provided by the Department of Communities, Child Safety & Disability Services.

The *Child safety practice manual* outlines the key roles of staff, both frontline and non-frontline, in Child Safety service centres. These are summarised in Table 7.

Table 7: Roles of Child Safety service centre staff

Position title	Role
Child Safety service centre manager	The Child Safety service centre manager leads and manages a Child Safety service centre through: • the implementation of quality business and practice systems and standards • ensuring that the child protection services provided comply with relevant legislation, delegations, policies, procedures and quality standards • the establishment of enduring, productive partnerships with approved carers, the community, the public and non-government sectors • the ongoing professional development and management of staff.
Senior practitioner	The senior practitioner supports and monitors the quality of the child protection service provided to children, their families and the community through: • an 'expert' knowledge of child protection practice • mentoring and developing the practice skills and knowledge of child safety officers, child safety support officers and team leaders • monitoring and facilitating the implementation of relevant legislation, delegations, policies, procedures and quality standards • managing the ongoing improvement of child protection practice • participating in, or conducting reviews of, complex or sensitive cases.
Team leader	The team leader: • leads and supervises a team of child safety officers in the delivery of collaborative frontline child protection services to children, their families and communities • provides professional supervision to staff involved in child protection service delivery • ensures that the child protection services delivered comply with legislation, delegations, policies, procedures and quality standards.
Child safety officer	• Child safety officers provide statutory child protection services to children and families through: • undertaking the roles of an authorised officer under the *Child Protection Act 1999* • the application of relevant legislation, delegations, policies, procedures and quality standards • working collaboratively with approved carers, the community and government and non-government service providers.
Child safety support officer	Child safety support officers support the provision of child protection services to children and families through: • assisting child safety officers in their application of relevant legislation, policies and procedures • working collaboratively with approved carers, the community and government and non-government service providers.
Court coordinator	The court coordinator represents the chief executive in court matters by advising and consulting with other child safety officers and promoting a high standard of service to children in relation to court matters and the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal.
SCAN team coordinator	The SCAN team coordinator coordinates the effective functioning of the Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect teams.
Family group meeting convenor	A family group meeting convenor is delegated under the Child Protection Act to convene family group meetings. The family group meeting convenor is to be independent of the case and is not to have decision-making responsibilities for the case. The convenor plans, prepares participants for and facilitates the family group meeting. The convenor also records the case plan developed at a family group meeting.
Administrative staff	Administrative staff provide support services for the staff at the Child Safety service centre. This includes administrative assistance such as reception duties, record keeping and word processing.
Business support officer	The business support officer provides financial, human resource and business support to child safety officers, including specific advice and guidance to the manager about business systems and services.

Source: Provided by Department of Communities, Child Safety & Disability Services.

8.2 Current workforce challenges

8.2.1 Qualifications of frontline staff

Primarily, child safety officers are responsible for performing statutory child protection functions. These include investigating allegations of suspected child abuse and neglect, and determining appropriate interventions in accordance with legislation, policy and practice guidelines.

Broadening child safety officer qualifications

Until late 2008, Queensland Child Safety officers were required to hold a bachelor degree in social work, psychology, arts (with a major in psychology), social science (with a major in human services or counselling) or human services, or a double degree in behavioural science and arts (with a major in criminology or criminal justice). Other degrees that met the requirements were Bachelor of Community Welfare, Bachelor of Behavioural Studies, Bachelor of Arts (Welfare Studies) and Bachelor of Justice – as long as the graduate had completed subjects in human services or psychology.

In late 2008 the range of bachelor degrees was expanded to criminology and criminal justice, education (limited to early childhood, primary and secondary teaching), health science, justice and legal studies (including policing and law), nursing (including paediatrics and mental health), occupational therapy and social studies (including anthropology, sociology and community studies).[5]

The rationale for this expansion was outlined in the department's 2007 workforce consultation document:

> Historically, these degrees [in social work and behavioural sciences] were well aligned with underpinning knowledge required to work in the child protection sector. In all cases they contain material relevant to child and family issues which matched respective roles of CSOs. This role has now changed. The change is not merely been in the form of repositioning the department to a solely statutory child protection focus, but in the specialisation of roles and the sophistication of systems and processes essential to working in a high risk, statutory environment. This sophistication has occurred in the form of increased evidentiary requirements, familiarity with the pseudo [sic] legal discourse, records management, forensic investigation, workload management and other specialisations. (Department of Child Safety 2007)

An initiative was also developed at that time by the Training and Specialist Support Branch of the department to train para-professional staff to become child safety officers. The Child Safety – Vocational Education and Training partnership initiative was developed for skilling para-professional staff within the department, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff from the recognised entities.

The attainment of the Certificate IV Community Services (Protective Care) was the first stage of a proposed broader career path for staff who, having completed it, would go on to complete the Diploma in Community Services (Protective Intervention). Staff who

had attained the diploma could then undertake the child safety officer entry-level training program to become child safety officers. It would appear that this program did not graduate past the pilot stage, but the department reports that, as of August 2012, 15 officers from the pilot were working as child safety officers.[6]

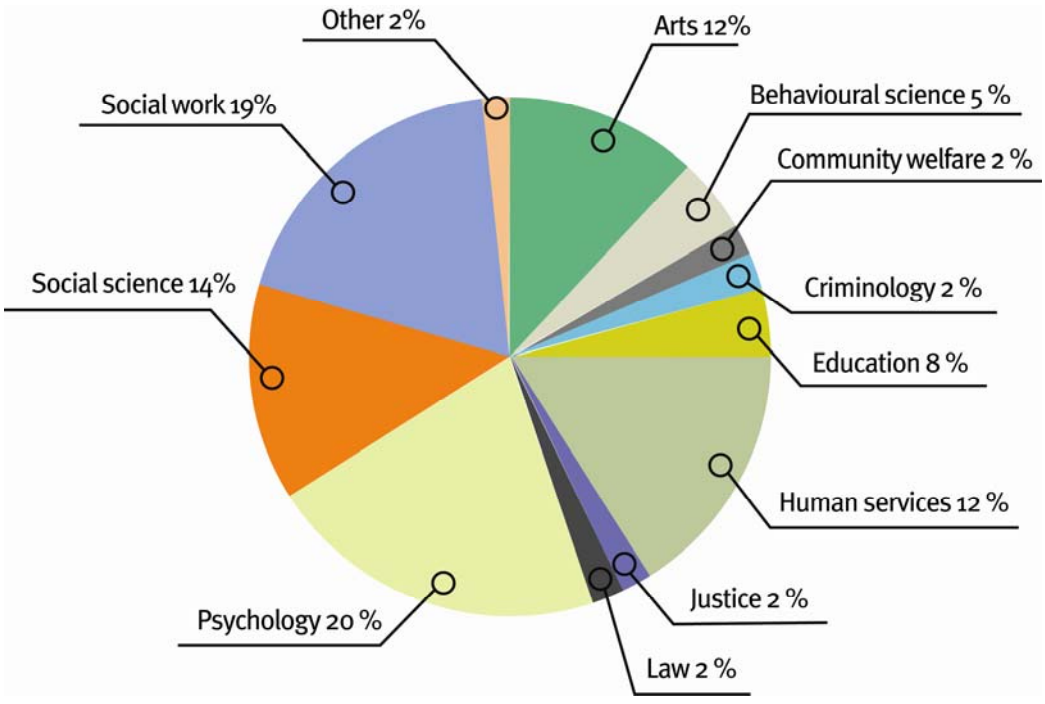
In 2008 the department then introduced the Vocational Graduate Certificate for child safety officer entry-level training. The introduction of the principal child safety officer positions (see 8.2.2) helped the department to embed the Workplace Learning Development model, to enhance compliance with attaining the competencies under the Australian Quality Training Framework (Department of Communities 2008a).

In its submission to the Commission, the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services suggests that it was a need to rapidly increase and diversify the workforce to meet demands that led to the expansion of qualifications. The department further suggests that this strategy has contributed to the development of a broader mix of professional backgrounds within the department and enabled multiple perspectives and disciplines to inform practice.[7]

Current profile of qualifications

In 2009, shortly after the expansion of qualifications, the breakdown of qualifications for staff in frontline child safety officer positions included degrees in psychology (20 per cent), social work (19 per cent), social science (14 per cent) and arts and community services (12 per cent). This is further represented in Figure 22.

Figure 22: Child Safety Service Centre frontline staff by academic discipline of degree, Queensland, 2009



Source: Provided by Department of Communities, Child Safety & Disability Services.

The 2012 frontline Child Safety staff survey conducted by the Commission provides further insight into the current composition of the workforce. As shown in Table 8, the largest numbers of bachelor degree qualifications were in social work, psychology, arts, human services and social science.

Table 8: Respondents to the Commission's frontline workforce survey of Child Safety staff by academic discipline of bachelor qualification, 2012

Academic discipline	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Social work	71	17%
Psychology	62	15%
Arts	58	14%
Human services	57	14%
Social science	52	12%
Behavioural science	37	9%
Education	29	7%
Criminology	23	6%
Community welfare	15	4%
Justice	9	2%
Law	5	1%
Nursing	4	1%
Other	13	3%

Source: Survey conducted by Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry.

Notes: Responses to the question were provided by 418 respondents. As some respondents selected more than one option, the total exceeds 100%.

In its submission to the Commission, the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services advises that the core qualifications of social work, behavioural and social sciences and human services continue to be valued by the department and that these qualifications are held by about 85 per cent of the Child Safety workforce.[8] However, in most other Australian jurisdictions, qualifications for the child protection workforce are more limited to degrees in human services, as illustrated in Table 9 (McArthur & Thomson 2012).

Table 9: Basic qualifications required for a child protection worker, states and territories, April 2012

Jurisdiction	Qualification required	Profile (where available)
Australian Capital Territory	Degree qualification	Currently, about 90% have social work degrees
Western Australia	Specified calling qualifications framework which relates to child protection work. Degree level required.	About 80% of the workforce have a degree: • 40% social work • 12–19% psychology • 6–12% social science • 20–30% other
New South Wales	Degree for people who do not identify as Aboriginal.	
South Australia	Social work degree	All social workers
Tasmania	Degrees and Certificate IV in Community Services	Preferred qualification is social work
Victoria	Preferred (degree or postgraduate) Relevant (degree) Minimum (diploma with field education)	
Northern Territory	Degree in social work, psychology, welfare work or other as appropriate	
Queensland	Degree qualifications in social work, behavioural science (psychology, counselling, family work, human services, community welfare, family studies, child studies, youth studies), criminology or criminal justice, social science (including anthropology, sociology and community studies), justice and legal studies (including policing and law), health science, occupational therapy, nursing, education; any other graduate who holds a Graduate Certificate in Human Services (Child Protection).	See Figure 22 earlier.

Source: McArthur & Thomson 2012.

The debate about qualifications

The Commission has heard from Mr David Bradford, the former director of the Training and Specialist Support Branch in the department, that the broadening of qualifications reflected the need to create a multi-disciplinary workforce (which has been successful in other human services), as well as to respond to the high turnover of staff. He stated:

> What we really went out and said was that we believe child protection is a multi-disciplinary endeavour and in fact there are people from other disciplines who can make a contribution to child protection. We have SCAN teams which actually bring police, teachers, health professionals together to actually work on child protection issues. So if that's the case and we believe these other professions have contact, experience, understanding of children and can make a contribution, then why wouldn't we explore looking at whether or not we can broaden the range of bachelor qualifications that would allow people to enter child safety work.[9]

Mr Bradford went on to suggest that the development of a specific degree in child protection (for example, a bachelor of child protection), would contribute to a highly skilled and professional child protection workforce. However, he faced opposition to this proposal because a specialised bachelor degree in child protection did not offer the same level of skill transferability as a bachelor in social work or human services.[10] Mr Bradford's vision for a bachelor in child protection would also incorporate a pathway for para-professionals to achieve a tertiary degree.

He further suggested that his analysis of high Child Safety turnover rates related to traditional recruiting practices which resulted in a workforce that was not representative of the general community it was servicing. His approach was to draw upon the skills and experiences of other core business partners such as health and police to build the diversity of skills and experience and improve workforce resilience.[11]

However, other submissions and witnesses have criticised this move away from core human services qualifications, suggesting that the capacity of the workforce, and its skills and knowledge in working effectively with vulnerable children and families, have been significantly reduced.[12] Professor Karen Healy, on behalf of the Australian Association of Social Workers, further argues that the diversification of qualifications is not in line with international practice in the child protection sector.[13]

Professor Bob Lonne of the School of Public Health and Social Work, Queensland University of Technology, stated that 'to do this role within the complex tasks of child protection requires high levels of skill and typically requires the right sort of higher education and training'. He commented that the expansion of qualifications for the child safety officer role has been 'seriously counter-productive for the overall quality of the child protection workforce'.[14]

Some members of the Commission's advisory group similarly commented that the broad range of qualifications accepted for the child safety officer's role has significantly reduced the quality of child protection decision making.[15] The advisory group supported a move back to social work, human services and psychology degrees as a means of improving case management, casework, assessments, and working with children, young people, families and carers.

Child Safety staff have raised as an issue the lack of mandatory qualifications for staff employed in leadership roles within the department. In particular, staff have commented that, while team leaders are required to have the same qualifications as child safety officers, mandatory qualifications do not apply to managers because managers are classified under the administrative rather than the professional stream. Staff suggest that this is a problem because managers are responsible for managing relationships with clients and communities and for supervising professionals, including team leaders and the senior practitioner. Given the statutory responsibility of managers and their responsibility for managing operational staff, Child Safety staff have suggested that a tertiary qualification should be a prerequisite for the role of manager.

The New Zealand Government's *White paper for vulnerable children* (New Zealand Government 2012) states that the government plans to introduce a tiered set of competencies and minimum quality standards that reflect the particular requirements of different roles within the core children's workforce. Consideration should be given to adopting this in Queensland; it could be introduced as part of an overarching framework for the child protection workforce.

8.2.2 Staff turnover

How to recruit and retain a skilled child protection workforce is a problem faced by all Australian jurisdictions (Bromfield & Holzer 2008). The *National analysis of workforce trends in statutory child protection* (2012) states that problems with workforce retention are of concern because loss of staff means that children, young people and families do not receive the services they need. In particular, this report notes that numerous child protection inquiries have attributed poor outcomes for children and families to staff shortages and high staff turnover.

Current research into and analysis of workforce trends (Bromfield & Holzer 2008; Healy & Oltedal 2010; Lonne & Thomson 2005; Lonne et al. 2009; Jervis-Tracey et al. 2010) concludes that there are a number of reasons for staff retention problems in this field:

- difficulties in finding the right people for the role
- lack of secure tenure (many roles are temporary)
- lack of experienced staff and inadequate staff levels
- overly burdensome workloads
- the specific demands of urban, but also of regional and remote, practice
- inadequate supervision, support and mentoring
- lack of diversity in the workforce
- lack of opportunities for ongoing professional development
- limitations on career progression for case workers
- competing demands in the duties of the position, with high-level casework requirements often having to be balanced against high administrative and legal accountability.

The literature on resilience in the delivery of human services is also of use in considering staff turnover. Ms Erica Russ and her colleagues have explored the resilience of social workers and suggest that key elements contributing to resilience are:

- a sense of control over their work, professional development and approach to working with families

- a commitment to improving the lives of clients
- acknowledging and managing the challenges of child protection work (Russ, Lonne & Darlington 2009).

The challenges faced by the child protection workforce are not unique to Queensland. Many problems identified here have emerged in other Australian states and territories, and other English-speaking countries, that have adopted largely forensically-driven child protection systems (Cummins, Scott & Scales 2012; Department of Human Services 2011a; Lonne et al. 2009). As identified in the *National analysis of workforce trends in statutory child protection* (McArthur & Thomson 2012), retaining the right people for the job requires effective retention strategies such as incentives, professional development and building a supportive work environment with opportunities for career progression.

The department acknowledges that the attraction and retention of skilled workers in the complex field of child protection remains an ongoing issue.[16] In response, the department has implemented a range of strategies to retain child safety officers. These include:

- improving recruitment of child safety officers by establishing a centralised recruitment process and 'continuous applicant pool'. This includes enhanced screening and interview processes that assess work styles, preferences, attitudes and motivations[17]
- delivering mandatory entry-level training, including foundation studies in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture[18]
- providing access to additional training through the development of advanced practice modules covering areas such as domestic violence, mental health, drug and alcohol problems, cultural diversity and suicide prevention[19]
- establishing an accelerated progression program for child safety officers to facilitate their career progression from PO2 to PO3 level[20]
- introducing a pilot program of seven PO4 principal child safety officers in 2009. The role of these officers is to mentor and support child safety officers as well as manage a caseload of more complex clients. This position also provides a career progression opportunity for experienced child safety officers[21]
- establishing a 'rural and remote incentives scheme'.[22]

The department suggests that these strategies, along with a range of external factors, appear to have contributed to improved retention rates in recent years. Child Safety executive director Mr Brad Swan gave evidence that, in the year April 2011 to March 2012, 15.98 per cent of child safety officers left the department. This represented a clear improvement on the previous years, when the percentage of officers leaving was:

- 17.51 per cent (April 2010 – March 2011)
- 28.5 per cent (April 2009 – March 2010)
- 30.31 per cent (October 2008 – September 2009).

However, the submission to the Commission by the Australian Association of Social Workers (Queensland) has cited international evidence showing that frontline workforce turnover is lowest in countries where the child protection workforce has a standardised qualification base in social work and related disciplines, as this workforce is best prepared for direct practice. In the United Kingdom the child protection workforce turnover is around 11 per cent per annum and in Norway it is about 12 per cent per annum (Healy & Oltedal 2010).

Child Safety staff, through the Commission's staff survey and forums, have identified a range of ongoing problems that impair the stability and capacity of the workforce:

- For some managers, it appears that the centralised recruitment process has hampered their ability to recruit the 'right person' for the role within their Child Safety service centre.
- Child Safety employs a mainly female workforce. Frequently staff are employed on an interim or indefinite basis when 'backfilling' for purposes such as maternity leave. This means that less-experienced workers may be promoted quickly and given complex cases without adequate supports and supervision to enable them to cope with the demands of the job.
- Team leaders and managers do not always have the skills to support and develop their staff, including skills in undertaking difficult conversations with under-performing staff. Staff have suggested that managers and team leaders should have skills in supervision and be able to access leadership training.
- Requirements of the job have become overly bureaucratic and focused on compliance. Staff feel that their professional expertise has become devalued over time and, as a result, they have become increasingly dissatisfied in their roles.
- Most importantly, high staff turnover means a loss of continuity in the management of cases, where children, families, carers and agency staff are regularly required to re-establish relationships with new child protection workers.[23]

8.2.3 Training and professional development

The *National analysis of workforce trends in statutory child protection* (McArthur & Thomson 2012) found that providing the most appropriate professional development opportunities is necessary for organisations to perform their functions and is crucial for retaining staff. Training and professional development is seen as central to building and skilling practitioners, from core training for new recruits to ongoing professional development for more experienced staff.

The skills and abilities of child safety officers have been raised by a number of stakeholders as matters of concern. Laurel Downey from Action Centre for Therapeutic Care comments:

> … in Queensland it also seems that the further from a major city you go, the less qualified and experienced the workforce is. In view of this, it is even more important that government and organisations take seriously the development of practice frameworks and internal training programs for their workers.[24]

A number of submissions more specifically suggest types of training for child protection staff, including training in engaging vulnerable and traumatised young people[25] and how to support young people.[26] The submission from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Legal Service North Queensland makes a number of specific recommendations about training to achieve a culturally competent workforce.[27]
The Australian Qualifications Framework outlines a set of national competencies for statutory child protection workers. In Queensland, South Australia and Victoria, the training is competency based and linked to actual job performance.

The Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services has provided the Commission with extensive detail about the range of options available for training. However, much of this training is delivered online rather than face-to-face and may not be linked to obtaining further qualifications. The department also acknowledges that workloads, competing priorities and discretionary 'backfilling' arrangements affect staff attendance at training.

The Commission's survey of frontline Child Safety staff generated a range of comments in relation to training. When asked to endorse the statement 'Child Safety Services invests in your professional development', 64 per cent of respondents disagreed, and a further 18 per cent were undecided. Staff stated:

> 'Like most things in Child Safety, the onus is primarily placed upon the worker for their advancement. Opportunities to attend workshops and training are subject to workload issues, and rarely will the department offer to pay for staff to attend workshops that could be very beneficial to the Department.'
>
> 'There is a huge focus on throughput, so no one is provided the opportunity to study because it will reduce the team throughput. Also it is expected that you will undertake most of your study on your own time and people have limited spare time, accrued leave or need the income to pay for bills. The department doesn't focus on upskilling staff and this is a serious flaw!'
>
> 'Workload overshadows capacity to attend professional development outside of the Service Centre. More in-house professional development needs to occur.'
>
> 'Limited opportunities exist for professional development (outside the Child Safety Service Centre) and those that exist are generally at the expense of the child safety officer, which is costly.'
>
> 'It's about time, having the time and getting approval to attend professional development opportunities. I don't have time and when we are preparing the memo to

> the Regional Director we have to be very specific and detailed due to budget cuts. There should be more opportunities for staff to attend training without jumping through all the hoops.'
>
> 'I note that there has been a review of the remote learning and development allowance and that this is no longer offered. I have this year made requests to utilise this allowance for a Cert IV to assist in delivering training and assessment to my clients, however this was knocked back as the allowance is no longer offered and the work unit could not afford it.'
>
> 'Consideration [should be] given for remote staff to access training easier. The remote incentive bonus is very difficult to access if you identify any training that you wish to undertake.'
>
> 'Due to high caseloads and not enough staff the option of training is limited.'

Research and evidence to the Commission have also emphasised that training needs to go beyond content knowledge about child protection and the ability to work effectively with vulnerable people to also consider the organisational context. Practice is shaped by the organisation and, just as it is necessary to develop the knowledge and skills to engage with people, high-quality practice requires organisational knowledge and skills. For Child Safety staff, this includes an understanding of the expectations of working in a statutory and hierarchical organisation. For example, Lonne and Thomson (2005) state that programs for staff induction must be staged to properly equip workers, rather than just taking an initial, one-off 'sheep dip' approach.

Associate Professor Janet Ransley further suggests the need for staff to understand their role in connection to other systems:

> Frontline staff will be best equipped when they are able to understand this link [referring to child protection and youth justice] and have the necessary skills and knowledge to operate within their statutory environment, and the broader environment of interlinked social problems.[28]

8.2.4 Workloads

The Crime and Misconduct Commission Inquiry recommended that a reasonable caseload for a child safety officer was one worker to 15 cases. It also recommended that the department adopt an empirically rigorous means of calculating workloads and projecting future staffing numbers. Currently, advice from the department is that the average caseload is 20 cases per child safety officer, although this varies from region to region across the state.[29]

A study by the Social Work Policy Institute in the United States (2010) on the impact of high caseloads on child safety staff turnover found that:

- turnover affects the workload of the workers and supervisors who remain, sometimes resulting in decreased efficiency and burnout, which may lead to additional staff turnover as well as poorer case outcomes
- a comparison of high-turnover and low-turnover counties in New York State found

that low-turnover counties have lower median caseloads than higher-turnover counties

- a comparison of counties in California found that those counties with lower rates of child abuse reports also had the best-paid staff, lowest rates of staff turnover and compliance with recognised practice standards.

The demands of high workloads continue to be a challenge for Child Safety staff. One of the most significant demands on time and resources being expressed to the Commission is creating the correct balance between, on the one hand, administrative and legal tasks and, on the other, working directly with children, young people and families.

In his statement to the Commission, Mr Robert Ryan reports that, when he began working in child protection some years ago, 70 per cent of his time was spent working with families, children and young people. Court processes were also simpler and legislatively there were only two types of child protection orders:

> The implementation of Child Protection Information System and then Integrated Client Management System has had a significant impact on the time child protection staff spend in front of the computer. With the new legislation there are now numerous child protection orders in both the assessment and ongoing intervention phases of child protection.[30]

The department agrees that a major component of the current workload is the significant amount of time workers spend completing court work.[31] In 2010–11, Child Safety focused on a range of projects to investigate workloads for frontline Child Safety staff. One of the key areas identified for reform was the high level of work reported by staff in undertaking court-related tasks. More recently, the department has introduced a new workload management strategy to provide managers and workers with the tools they need to manage workload effectively (McArthur & Thomson 2012).

The Commission has also heard that another significant component of the current workload for frontline staff is related to information management. This is most apparent in work for information coordination meetings, as part of the Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect Team system, in which child safety officers have to complete multiple screens to report one event. Some argue not only that systems of this nature are burdensome, but also that they do not support the holistic thinking required for sound assessment and intervention.

For example, Ms Katina Perren's statement to the Commission concludes that the number of large, cumbersome and repetitive forms is staggering and it seems more time is spent inputting information into the Integrated Client Management System than working with children, young people and families.[32]

Comments made by Child Safety staff in the Commission's survey also include many references to the administrative burden created by these systems:

> 'Case loads should not exceed 15 cases. Anything above this makes maintaining a suitable amount of client contact time impossible due to the amount of administrative work required. The amount of admin work needs to be reduced so focus can be on

working directly with clients and active case work.'

'Caseloads have decreased over time, but the actual amount of work expected has increased dramatically. I spend far more time with admin and paperwork than I do with families. Child Safety Service Centre staff tend to refer families out to services (if you can find one) as opposed to doing direct work with them, as there is simply not enough time.'

'On any given day administrative tasks take precedent over real work with family and children. The drive to fulfil legislative requirements such as court work and case plan can also dominate a significant number of hours that keeps you at your desk, not involved with families.'

'If I could spend more time with clients I could possibly avert some of the crises that happen … I get frustrated doing admin work. I'm not trained in admin and it takes time away from my children and young people – the ones I work for.'

In its submission to the Commission, the Australian Association of Social Workers (Queensland) has recommended that the administrative burden for staff be reduced and that administrative responsibilities for frontline staff should be strictly limited to that which is essential to reporting on their practice.[33]

8.2.5 Supervision, peer support and employee assistance programs

The nature of child protection work means that it is often highly stressful. Frontline staff are exposed to working with involuntary and highly resistant clients, their parents and extended family members who may have experienced extensive trauma in their lives (Encompass Family and Community 2010). Vicarious traumatisation and post-traumatic stress have been widely recognised in social work practice (Gibbons, Murphy & Joseph 2011).

Goddard and Hunt further describe a 'more profound response to a far more severe situation' where child protection workers 'suffer direct, as well as secondary, traumatisation' (Goddard & Hunt 2011, p421). When combined with a high caseload, this can lead to emotional breakdown, depression and burnout.

Supervision

The department's policy outlines that professional supervision is essential for the provision of a transparent, accountable, positive and supportive work environment (Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services 2011a). Supervision also provides an environment for staff to debrief, share ideas, seek guidance, discuss practice, develop achievement and capability plans, and discuss cases and tasks. In the policy, supervision should be provided on a regular basis and have an allocated timeframe.

However, the practice of supervision appears to fall short of this policy. Staff made extensive comments about supervision in the Commission's survey – for example:

'I think supervision should be compulsory and this should be documented. I have

> experienced some team leaders who are excellent supervisors and make time to professionally develop their staff and others who have not prioritised this. Without supervision, you can lack direction, guidance and professional development needed to function as a productive Child Safety Officer.'
>
> 'Having compulsory supervision so that team leaders have to take part in the process and it cannot be rescheduled constantly.'
>
> 'Supervisors have to adhere to the time allocated and not allow other "supposedly" urgent matters to interrupt unless it's a matter of life and death. The supervisor has to value the supervision time and not to "treat" it as a task and be a "taskmaster" to simply allocate and discuss cases but without interest in the welfare of the staff member.'
>
> 'Regular formal supervision and supervision in the field are essential for all child safety officers. More provision for team leaders to do in the field supervision would assist.'

Some survey respondents also suggested that they would like the opportunity to undertake external supervision that is resourced by the department. The department has previously paid for peer support officers to access external supervision through the Employment Assistance Service, but access to external supervision has never been available for all staff (Encompass Family and Community 2010).

Peer support

The Peer Support Program was introduced in Child Safety following a recommendation by the Crime and Misconduct Commission in its 2004 report as a way of responding to critical incidents,[34] which are highly stressful and emotionally taxing. The Crime and Misconduct Commission implementation plan supported the use of trained peers to assist in reducing the stress and associated liabilities for staff. Peer support models are used in other government agencies in Queensland, including ambulance, emergency services and police.

The Peer Support Program involves staff in frontline services being trained to provide support to their colleagues for managing the stresses of a frontline workload. Peer support officers nominate for this role in addition to their usual workload and are given additional training to fulfil the requirements.

In 2010, Staffcare (including the Peer Support Program) was externally reviewed to assess its relevance to staff support needs across the Department of Communities. The review concluded that any whole-of-department staff support strategy should recognise that there are similar needs for staff support across service areas working directly with clients and communities with complex needs including Child Safety, youth justice, disability and community care, housing and homelessness and Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander services. The review also considered the Peer Support Program and found that its overall impact was positive for staff and, in some areas, withdrawal of this service would create a substantial gap in the support available to staff. However, it recommended that the Peer Support Program be overhauled and further evaluated prior to being incorporated into a whole-of department staff support strategy

(Encompass Family and Community 2010).

However, the Commission has received information that the fundamental components of the Peer Support Program may no longer be fully operational. Mr Scott Findlay, director of the Human Resources and Ethical Standards Branch, says in his statement to the Commission that:

> There are some staff trained to deliver the Peer Support Program but there is currently no coordination of this service.[35]

Employee assistance programs

Employee assistance programs seek to improve the health and wellbeing of staff, decrease staff absence and increase retention, as well as contribute to meeting the employer's duty of care to their employees (PPC Worldwide 2012).

Employee assistance programs offer whole-of-staff debriefing when there is a serious incident such as an assault of a staff member or a death of a child known to the department. The programs offer a range of clinical services provided by registered psychologists, such as face-to-face counselling, telephone counselling, triage counselling and after-hours telephone counselling.

Data from providers of the employee assistance services for individual counselling for Child Safety staff show a general decrease in staff usage rates over the last five years. This may reflect a more stabilised workforce, or other factors such as lack of knowledge about how to access the service.

Respondents to the Commission's frontline staff survey commented on their knowledge of and access to the employee assistance service. For example:

> 'No one has actually told me how to access EAS. Perhaps new staff should have a more thorough induction at their office so they know such things.'
>
> 'Workplaces supportive of staff is dependent upon location and capabilities of management teams. I don't find EAS service beneficial – though are encouraged to access.'

8.2.6 Career progression

The Victorian Government has advocated the need to develop a career pathway for those wishing to remain in practice to refine and improve their skills (Department of Human Services 2011a). Child protection agencies can devalue frontline practice in a variety of ways, particularly through inequities in pay, career opportunities and working conditions available to frontline workers compared with those in managerial and administrative streams. To respond to this there is a need to develop initiatives to keep experienced staff working in frontline roles with advancement options and associated pay and conditions comparable to those offered in management and administration.

In the former Department of Communities' *Strategic workforce framework 2008–2012*, the learning and organisational development strategy focused on:

- developing leaders and managers
- developing employees
- quality corporate and local induction
- enabling employees to successfully advance their careers
- fair and ethical conduct
- improving the culture of learning and continuous development (Department of Communities 2008b).

One measure of the value of staff to an organisation and the community is their level of remuneration. Although remuneration levels in Queensland are comparable to those in other jurisdictions, Queensland has the second-lowest pay entry level (see Table 10). In a focus group with frontline staff conducted by the Commission, one staff member commented that 'the pay [was] not adequate enough for the risk and responsibility'.

Table 10: Entry-level salary for child protection workers (government), selected jurisdictions, 2012

State/territory	Position	Salary (including super and leave loading)
Queensland	Child Safety Officer – Po2/Po3	$52,074–$76,459
New South Wales	Case Workers	$59,705–$82,491
Victoria	Entry Level Child Protection Practitioner (CPW2) Advanced Practitioner (CPW3)	$49,173–$60,378 $62,098–$69,850
Western Australia	Child Protection Worker (level 1)	$55,677–$76,337
Northern Territory	Professional 1 Professional 2	$58,426–$75,347 (+ 2 weeks extra Recreation Leave) $77,581–$92,771 (+ 2 weeks extra Recreation Leave)

Source: Compiled by Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry.

8.2.7 Developing a culturally capable workforce

Developing a culturally capable workforce is an important part of addressing the growing over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Queensland's child protection system. It is also part of the Queensland Government's commitment to the *Closing the gap* strategy (Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs 2012a). This long-term national strategy seeks to improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by addressing disadvantage in living standards, education, health and employment.

The *Cultural capability framework* of the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services describes the central cultural considerations in place in the department. This framework requires that all child safety officers undergo mandatory training in foundation studies in culture and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural capability. The two-day training module is designed to build and strengthen child protection services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

The success of the department's approach to training its workforce in cultural competency has been questioned through the results of the Commission's frontline staff survey. Of those responding to the survey, 60 per cent said they felt their training had prepared them well for working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and 84 per cent of respondents reported feeling confident working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. However, of the 23 frontline staff who identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, only 26 per cent agreed that the training received by their colleagues prepared them well to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and only 21 per cent said they felt their colleagues were competent at working with these families. Fewer than half (48 per cent) of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers responding to the survey said they felt their colleagues recognised the importance of applying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child placement principle.

The Commission acknowledges that the cultural competency of frontline child protection workers is an area that requires more emphasis, and will be considering initiatives to build this area of expertise. For example, the Commission will consider if it would be beneficial for the department and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander controlled organisations to develop an exchange program for staff to build relationships, skills and cultural knowledge across their agencies. This has previously been suggested as part of the department's response to the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Safety Taskforce* through the *Blueprint for implementation strategy* (Department of Communities (Child Safety Services) 2010c).

Another way to build the department's cultural competency is by employing additional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, who can share their cultural knowledge with non-Indigenous staff and provide more culturally responsive interventions to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families. The commitment to increasing opportunities in public sector employment was outlined in the former government's *Queensland Government reconciliation action plan 2009–12*, which required each government agency to implement an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment action plan. The plans set targets for recruitment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. However, advice from the current Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Affairs is that the future plans or initiatives in this area are still under consideration by the government.

The department aims to encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to become entry-level child safety officers through the Indigenous Cadetship Support

Program. Cadets are generally students in social work, psychology, human services and other social sciences. Currently the department funds 11 students under the program.[36] Each cadet receives a $300 per week study allowance, paid by the Australian Government, and the department funds 12 weeks (60 days) paid work experience at A02.1 or P01.4. Although the Indigenous Cadetship Support Program is an effective pathway to employment in child protection for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander professionals, there are no designated positions for these cadets once they have graduated. This seems to be counterproductive, given the investment in the program and the identified shortage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander professionals within the department.

Professor Bob Lonne states that he and others have advised that the child protection system needs more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers to address the increasing over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who are now in child protection systems. This over-representation is greater than that of the stolen generation (Lonne, Harries & Lantz 2012). Professor Lonne states: 'we should set a benchmark of at least a third of child protection staff being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people and work steadfastly towards this'. Professor Lonne goes on to say: 'this requires an integrated system of financial and other supports to build the skills and qualifications of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people' (Lonne, Harries & Lantz 2012, p73).

This is consistent with feedback from the Commission's advisory group about the need for an increase to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment targets in both the para-professional and professional streams within the statutory child protection organisation.[37]

The *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce plan* (Department of Communities (Child Safety Services) 2010b) gives a range of strategies to focus on 'finding', 'keeping' and 'growing' the potential of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. Measures and targets are included, but it is unclear if this document has been reviewed and evaluated. Strategies include:

- developing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cadetship and traineeship program
- developing leadership and consultative networks
- prevention of discrimination and harassment
- ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff contribute effectively to service delivery
- providing career counselling.

The Western Australian Government, in particular the Department for Child Protection, has made a strong commitment to attracting and retaining Aboriginal people as a vital part of the workforce. The attraction and retention strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in Western Australia's Department for Child Protection has focused on increasing the Aboriginal employment rate through:

- developing a marketing toolkit to help directorates to attract Aboriginal staff and having additional attraction strategies in areas heavily populated by Aboriginal people (see Table 11)
- ensuring that each service delivery area establishes appropriate targets of Aboriginal staff.

Table 11: Key targets for the attraction and retention of Aboriginal staff in child protection services, Western Australia, 2009–14

Target	Business area
10%	Service delivery support directorates, other districts
20–30%	Accommodation and care services
20–50%	Pilbara, Murchison, and Goldfields
50% and above	Aboriginal engagement and coordination, and the Kimberley

Source: Department for Child Protection 2009.

The Commission acknowledges that demand is growing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers in a range of professional roles, particularly in the human services delivery sectors. Attraction and retention strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers will need to become increasingly cognisant of the competition for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers and must aim to be innovative in achieving their improved representation in the child protection workforce.

8.2.8 Rural and remote practice

Recruitment and retention of human services staff in remote and regional areas is a particularly acute and ongoing problem for government and non-government service providers. The challenge of recruitment and retention of appropriately skilled frontline child protection staff in rural and remote communities has been widely reported in academic research (Lonne & Cheers 1999; Chenoweth & Stehlik 1999; McDonald & Zetlin 2004), public sector reports and studies sponsored by professional organisations.

Recruitment of child protection staff in these areas can be more challenging because of the increased complexity and tension of the role in small communities. This is a problem not just for child protection workers but also for other professionals with statutory responsibilities who exercise their powers in the same small community in which they live. For workers this can require a delicate balance between their professional and personal lives.[38]

Research has indicated that parts of the role of child protection workers, such as removing children from families and the associated reaction of community members, are highly stressful (Chenoweth et al. 2008). The capacity to juggle the statutory

demands of child protection work while living in small communities has been found in research to be a crucial factor influencing the decisions of child protection staff to either remain or leave. Specific strategies are needed to adequately prepare and support child protection workers operating in rural and remote communities.

The department recognises that staff should not be disadvantaged financially when living in these locations, especially in mining towns, where housing and living expenses can be substantial. Incentives are available to support staff both financially and with housing, and to meet their needs in relation to the cost of living in a rural or remote area. These incentives are offered to staff making a three-year commitment. The Commission is learning that, perversely, this may in fact lead to lower retention of staff in these areas, if staff seek to relocate after this period to trigger a new set of incentives. In Western Australia, the Department for Child Protection administers its staff incentives proportionately to the consumer price index figures. It also provides staff and their families with air fares once a year to visit Perth.

It is widely recognised that there is a shortage of skilled staff to fill professional roles in rural and remote communities throughout Australia. The 2012 *National analysis of workforce trends* report found that all jurisdictions identified significant challenges in recruitment for practice in regional and remote areas. Recruitment of local people in rural and remote communities does occur, but these people are generally recruited to administrative roles. The recruitment of staff at remote locations may be more effective by targeting local people, possibly through a cadetship or vocational education and training pathway.

8.3 Proposals for consideration

8.3.1 An overarching workforce strategy

The Commission proposes the establishment of an overarching workforce strategy that encompasses both government and non-government sectors. This strategy would drive a series of industry-wide workforce education and development initiatives. A child protection workforce initiative for recognition of prior learning could also be used as part of this strategy to assist experienced workers with obtaining formal qualifications, and to provide pathways into the workforce for those with appropriate personal attributes but without formal qualifications.

An overarching workforce strategy should include:

- improving qualifications and competencies of the child protection workforce, including child safety officers, team leaders, senior practitioners, managers and court coordinator positions
- partnerships with universities, TAFEs and other external training bodies
- a review of current workloads
- enhancing support initiatives for Child Safety staff

- increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment targets within Queensland's child protection sector
- training and professional development initiatives
- career progression mapping

8.3.2 Qualifications

The Commission seeks feedback on two very different proposals for reform of child safety officer qualifications. These proposals have been put to the Commission in submissions and evidence. The first involves refocusing university qualifications on the traditional core field of human services – mainly social work and psychology. The second involves introducing an alternative TAFE pathway for child safety officers, as piloted by the department in 2008. There could also be a possibility of developing a hybrid of these two models, with an alternative pathway for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.

Arguments for retaining university qualifications and refocusing them on core human services degrees, such as social work and psychology, are set out in 8.2.1 and 8.2.2 above. In addition, it should be noted that the staff shortages that gave rise to the diversification of qualifications as one way to boost staff numbers also occurred at a time when there were only two professional social work programs with about 150 graduates annually. Since that time there has been significant change: there are now five social work programs available in South-East Queensland, with more than 1,500 current enrolments and a cohort of about 500 graduating per year. This does not take into account significant numbers of graduates from human services, psychology and social sciences. Therefore any concerns about a shortage of supply of appropriately qualified entry-level staff should now have been dispelled.

Findings from the department's frontline work analysis and job design project also indicated that there was some concern about decreasing professionalism in the field of child protection, as all jurisdictions regarded university qualifications in social work as the preferred qualification for child welfare professionals (Department of Child Safety 2008).

However, in his evidence to the Commission, Mr David Bradford former director of the Training and Specialist Support Branch in the department, advocated a re-implementation of the model piloted in 2008, whereby a para-professional could become a child safety officer through a combination of on the job training and a vocational certificate.[39] Mr Bradford in his evidence espoused the view that this would attract people with a broad range of life experiences. One of the anecdotal criticisms of child protection workers is that they operate with inappropriate and unrealistic middle class assumptions and values. Broadening the criteria out to a TAFE qualification would widen the net to include those people who had not had access at a young age to the advantages of university, including many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.[40] Mr Bradford's proposal challenges the orthodoxy that university qualifications are

essential for case managing the vulnerable and at-risk clientele.

However, a practical hurdle with this approach was raised during Mr Bradford's evidence. He advised that during the pilot the Sunshine Coast Institute of TAFE partnered with the department to deliver the training, and that the funding had to be sought cohort by cohort: 'to make that process happen we had to actually go and get special assistance from the Department of Education in terms of funding.'[41] He proposed alternatively that the registered training organisation could be in-house. In short, TAFE education costs the state, whereas university education is a cost for the Australian Government (and the individual). If Mr Bradford's suggestions were to be adopted, optimally a way would need to be found to off-set these additional costs.

New South Wales, the Northern Territory and Western Australia have an alternative non-degree pathway for Aboriginal. In the Northern Territory and Western Australia, this alternative pathway is available only for specified Aboriginal child protection officer positions. One possibility for Queensland would be to use the model proposed by Mr Bradford to widen the net for the recruitment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders only and to provide a pathway for promotion to statutory positions based on acquired on the job learning and training. Such a proposal may go some way towards addressing recruitment challenges in remote locations in particular.

The Commission heard proposals through its staff forums and survey that managers of child protection teams should be required to have the same qualifications as frontline staff. Currently there is no mandatory qualification requirement for a service centre manager. The contention is that if the managers had human services capabilities as well as management strengths, they could offer more support and advice to staff in relation to difficult cases. The absence of such a requirement means that people managing the staff may never have had any experience in undertaking the challenging frontline roles themselves.

Finally, it is noted that in Chapter 5 above, a proposal was put forward that, in the long term, multi-disciplinary casework teams could replace the current Child Safety officer workforce. As set out in that chapter, this would mean that case files would be allocated to a team of workers from specified occupations or professions. For example, a team may consist of a human service professional (social work or psychology) with experience in child protection, a child and youth mental health worker, a qualified nurse and a disability worker. If the multi-disciplinary team model were adopted, the discussion above would only have relevance to the position in the team designated as the professional in child protection.

Question 26

Should child safety officers be required to hold tertiary qualifications in social work, psychology or human services?

Question 27

Should there be an alternative Vocational Education and Training pathway for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers to progress towards a child safety officer role to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child safety officers in the workforce? Or should this pathway be available to all workers?

8.3.3 Training and professional development

The Commission has heard that access to ongoing training is an important component of staff development, including competency and skills development. A range of views has been expressed on what should be considered in the development of training for child protection staff.

Bromfield and Ryan (2007) state that the existence of statutory child protection training in all jurisdictions reflects the need for specialist vocational training to prepare incumbents for the role of statutory child protection work. In evidence before the Commission, Mr Robert Ryan stated that to retain more staff there needs to be consistent investment with a learning model staggered over time.[42]

The Action Centre for Therapeutic Care suggests that training needs to take into account current research on evidence-based practice:

> Ideally training should follow the preferred practice framework, with entry level, basic and advanced training modules for workers who develop their practice over a period of time. Training should always be tied to supervision structures, on-the-job learning, coaching, mentoring so that each individual practitioner is held to a learning plan, and taken through their learning in relation to their actual practice.[43]

The Mater Kids in Mind program suggests that a child protection worker competency and capability framework should be developed in conjunction with national and international expertise in the fields of psychology, psychiatry, child development and child welfare. Training and development should then be attached to the competency framework, with career structures linked to achieving demonstrated skills and knowledge.[44]

These comments reflect a need for a deliberate and ongoing approach to training that is linked to other workforce support mechanisms such as professional supervision, coaching, mentoring and individual learning plans.

The Commission considers that there are a range of practice issues that may require specific additional training to improve decision-making and practice. One of these issues is the removal of newborn children. The Commission has heard evidence about practices pertaining to unborn babies and difficult decisions confronting child safety staff. Investigations, assessment and decisions concerning the removal of newborn

babies are very complex, difficult and sensitive, requiring experienced staff to consider the relevant issues.

Question 28

Are there specific areas of practice where training could be improved?

8.3.4 Workloads

The current fiscal environment and the commitment to reduce public debt in Queensland are likely to increase caseloads and workloads. The Commission is aware that there are currently some discretionary 'backfilling' arrangements for frontline child protection roles. However, in some instances, those who take the opportunity for career progression and act at a higher level have to carry their own caseloads and perform the work of both positions.

One option is to consider introducing regional 'backfilling' teams. These teams of experienced workers could fill the gaps when officers take leave, as well as be available to provide short-term assistance for service centres that are struggling to meet demand. It is proposed that such a strategy could retain experienced workers and provide an additional career path. Both the staff survey and staff forums suggested that a 'backfilling' team would be a valuable resource for child safety service centres.

Such a proposal also has the potential to be cost effective. In 2008, the department undertook an exercise to estimate the cost of recruiting a child safety officer, which concluded that the cost for the replacement of one officer was $41,572. Providing additional back-up resources for staff and reducing staff turnover therefore represent a cost saving for the department.

Question 29

Would the introduction of regional backfilling teams be effective in reducing workload demands on child safety officers? If not, what other alternatives should be considered?

8.3.5 Enhancing support initiatives

Feedback from the Child Safety staff survey as well as the staff forums indicates that many officers feel unsupported in their roles. This is of concern, especially given the demanding and complex nature of child protection practice. Many staff members have expressed disappointment with current supervision practices and have called for more

attention to be given to supervision as one aspect of professional development.

The Australian Association of Social Workers (2010) states that supervision of professional staff should include administrative, educational and supportive functions, which all interrelate. Kadushin's model (1976) of professional supervision includes a working alliance between practitioners in which they aim to improve clinical practice to meet ethical, professional and best-practice standards, while providing personal support and encouragement in relation to professional practice covering administrative, educational and supportive elements.

Goddard and Hunt (2011) emphasise the role of supervision in staff retention. They cite Depanfilis and Zlotnik (2008), who state that six organisational factors are the key to staff retention: salary, supervisory support, acceptable workload, co-worker support, advancement opportunities, and valuing of employees. Goddard and Hunt further state that the role of the supervisor is able to influence all of these factors except salaries.

The Commission proposes that the department develop a supervision framework that includes all three administrative, education and supportive elements. This would include reviewing the current supervision policy to emphasise a supportive and educational function and building the capacity of team leaders to deliver supervision of this nature. Resources to support supervision may also need to be developed.

In March 2010, Staffcare, which oversaw the Peer Support Program, commissioned an external review of its work and its relevance to staff support needs across the Department of Communities. The findings of the report noted the needs for staff support for those working directly with clients and communities with complex needs (Encompass Family and Community 2010).

The Commission proposes that Child Safety reconsider the merits and operation of the Peer Support Program and the functions of Staffcare as part of a range of strategies to improve support to staff.

Question 30

How can Child Safety improve the support for staff working directly with clients and communities with complex needs?

8.3.6 Career progression

A consistent theme in the comments from Child Safety staff is their desire to be valued and supported by their organisation, and to be offered opportunities to grow and develop as professionals.

The Commission has been told that the current professional development and career progression processes depend on local supervisors, managers and regional culture. The Commission recognises that training alone has its limitations; staff members must have the desire to learn and improve their practice while navigating the system.

The Commission proposes that, under the workforce strategy, the department should develop a career progression strategy. This strategy should outline career pathways for child protection workers that guide them to make long-term choices for their careers within child protection.

It should encompass opportunities in the non-government sector and also focus on enhancing the leadership potential of all staff, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

8.3.7 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment targets

Consideration should be given to significantly increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment targets within the Queensland child protection sector in both government and non-government agencies. The focus should be on developing the leadership potential of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff while at the same time creating integrated support structures to facilitate learning and development opportunities and maintain retention levels.

It is important that the department and the non-government sector both work to maintain representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff at all levels and in all streams, including working in multi-disciplinary teams that focus on using skills from a variety of professionals with joint management of cases. Consideration should be given to reaching a 10 per cent target in the first year of implementation, 20 per cent in years two to five, and 30 per cent after five years.

The Commission proposes that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment targets be significantly increased across the child protection sector in Queensland. For tertiary child protection, changes should be made to the child safety support officer A04 position to ensure a consistent approach statewide, including changing the name of the position to Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander community worker so as to distinguish the duties of this role from the other non-identified child safety support officer roles (A02, A03) within a child safety service centre. Consideration could be given to the introduction of a number of new positions such as:

- Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander caseworker position (there are similar positions in Western Australia, the Northern Territory and New South Wales)
- Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander community worker (A04, A03, A02 living in the 19 discrete communities – there are similar positions in Western Australia and the Northern Territory)
- Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander practice leader – A06 position (regionally based

positions that are part of a multi-disciplinary team – there is a similar position in Western Australia)

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Diversity Team in Human Resources
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy Coordination.

Question 31

In line with other jurisdictions in Australia and *Closing the gap* initiatives, should there be an increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment targets within Queensland's child protection sector?

[1] Statement of Scott Findlay, 21 September 2012 [p22: para 93].
[2] Statement of Scott Findlay, 21 September 2012 [p22: para 94].
[3] Statement of Scott Findlay, 21 September 2012 [p22: para 98].
[4] Statement of Scott Findlay, 21 September 2012 [p22: para 100].
[5] Exhibit 9, Statement of Brad Swan, 10 August 2012 [p99: para 432].
[6] Exhibit 9, Statement of Brad Swan, 10 August 2012 [p102: para 446].
[7] Submission of Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services, December 2012 [p97].
[8] Submission of the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services, December 2012 [p97].
[9] Transcript, David Bradford, 30 October 2012, Ipswich [p10: line 20].
[10] Transcript, David Bradford, 30 October 2012, Ipswich [p12: line 40].
[11] Statement of David Bradford, 15 October 2012 [p2: para 7–8].
[12] Submission of Australian Association of Social Workers (Queensland), August 2012 [p3].
[13] Transcript, Karen Healy, 29 August 2012, Brisbane [p60: line 25].
[14] Exhibit 42, Statement of Professor Bob Lonne, 16 August 2012 [p7: para 35].
[15] Advisory Group meeting, 2 November 2012.
[16] Submission of Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services, December 2012 [p97].
[17] Exhibit 9, Statement of Brad Swan, 10 August 2012 [p99: para 435].
[18] Exhibit 9, Statement of Brad Swan, 10 August 2012 [p100: para 436, 438].
[19] Exhibit 9, Statement of Brad Swan, 10 August 2012 [p100: para 437].
[20] Exhibit 9, Statement of Brad Swan, 10 August 2012 [p103: para 453].
[21] Exhibit 9, Statement of Brad Swan, 10 August 2012 [p100: para 439–440].
[22] Exhibit 9, Statement of Brad Swan, 10 August 2012 [p103: para 455].
[23] Frontline staff forums, 2012; Frontline staff survey (Child Safety), 2012.
[24] Submission of Action Centre for Therapeutic Care, September 2012 [p17].
[25] Submission of Youth Advocacy Centre, October 2012 [p3].
[26] Submission of Youth Advocacy Centre, October 2012 [p9].
[27] Submission of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Legal Service NQ, October 2012 [p11].
[28] Submission of School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Griffith University, 26 September 2012 [p3].
[29] Transcript, Brad Swan, 13 August 2012, Brisbane [p62: line 30].
[30] Exhibit 104, Statement of Robert Ryan, 31 October 2012 [p3: para 17].
[31] Exhibit 9, Statement of Brad Swan, 10 August 2012 [p 93: para 404].
[32] Exhibit 95, Statement of Katina Perren, 16 October 2012 [p3: para 14].
[33] Submission of Australian Association of Social Workers (Queensland), August 2012 [p5].
[34] A critical incident is any incident of sufficient criticality to require reporting to the Deputy Director-General of the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services, by means of a 'critical incident report' form. Critical incidents may relate to:

- children and young people subject to interventions by the department
- departmental staff and carers
- matters where media attention has occurred or is possible.

[35] Statement of Scott Findlay, 31 August 2012 [p3: para 16].
[36] Statement of Scott Findlay, 21 September 2012 [p19: para 82].
[37] Advisory Group meeting, 2 November 2012.
[38] Exhibit 47, Statement of Professor Lesley Chenoweth, 16 August 2012 [p5: para 19].
[39] Transcript, David Bradford, 30 October 2012, Ipswich [p10: line 20].
[40] Transcript, David Bradford, 30 October, Ipswich [p17: line 40].

[41] Transcript, David Bradford, 30 October, Ipswich [p.24: line 9].
[42] Transcript, Robert Ryan, 31 October 2012, Ipswich [p53: line 22].
[43] Submission of Action Centre for Therapeutic Care, September 2012 [p17].
[44] Submission of Mater Child and Youth Mental Health Service, September 2012 [p2].