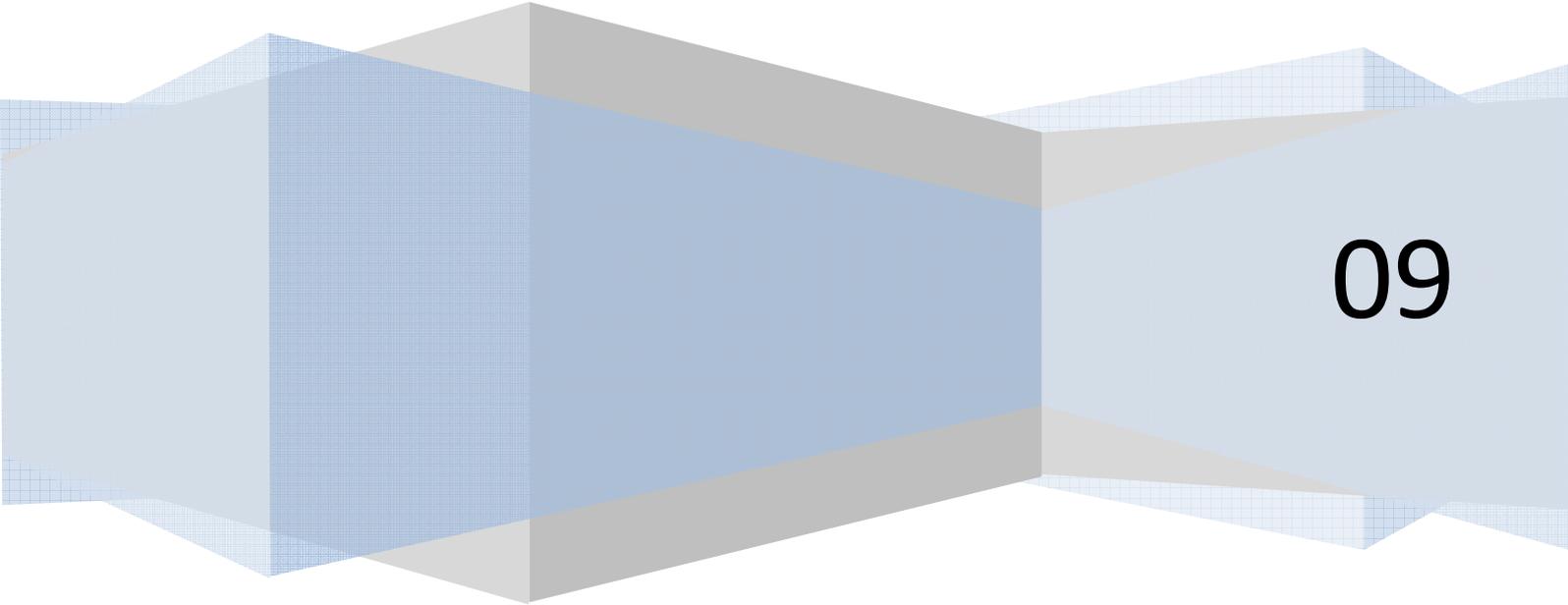**B&J Barrett Enterprises PTY LTD**
Principal Consultant: Jan Barrett

Action Research Report

Role and professional support needs of Inclusion Support facilitators

09

Contents

Executive summary

This four month action research project, undertaken by the Professional Support Coordinators (PSC) Alliance has identified that there is a nationally consistent role of Inclusion Support Facilitators (ISFs) to build child care services' capacity to create a quality care environment inclusive of all children. Furthermore, there are nationally consistent skills and knowledge required to undertake that role.

The findings from this report demonstrate that if ISFs are equipped with their required competencies, they are in a unique position to work practically with eligible child care services to drive change, promote best practice and assist services to identify their professional development needs in relation to inclusion and broader quality and social inclusion reforms.

ISFs need high level competencies that are commensurate with, but not exclusively within, the CHC08 Community Services Training Package. The role requires a thorough knowledge of the underpinning policy and service framework in which child care services operate, knowledge and experience in pedagogy across the life span. ISFs need high level employability skills in communication, problem solving, learning, teamwork and innovation. They need specialist skills in inclusive policy and practice, community development and partnerships. ISFs need to value professional support and take an active role in their own professional development.

In order to achieve these high level competencies, ISFs need a tailored professional support program that is provided through different media and includes opportunities to access theory, discussion, practice, self reflection, peer support and specialist mentoring.

The PSC Alliance, through the PSCs, can lead a new approach that will strengthen professional support to Inclusion Support Facilitators. This is an important, significant project which can be undertaken in a staged, coordinated manner over three to four years. It can commence with a documented agreed policy framework, an ISF specific national webpage and Professional Development (PD) resource sheets that focus on the identified skills and knowledge areas. It can then progress to ISF PD packages that can be provided both directly and online with follow-up discussions, tutoring and mentoring delivered both directly through Inclusion Support Agencies (ISAs) and interactively online. The webpage can also act as a clearing house for international best practice in relation to professional development and inclusion as well as a central coordination point for access to specialist ISF PD providers across Australia. Each PSC, in consultation with the ISAs, can access the centrally coordinated ISF PD resources and build on their agreed systematic ISF PD model to identify, deliver and evaluate ISF professional development in their particular state/territory.

The Department of Education and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) provides the resources for the PSC Alliance to undertake this new approach. It can enable the PSCs and ISAs to provide clearly articulated, accessible and affordable professional development to ISFs across Australia. This includes ISFs who are supporting services in rural, remote regions and in the complex cultures composing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. DEEWR can also ensure professional support around relevant Commonwealth reforms is provided for ISFs nationally.

This report provides eight recommendations with timelines to achieve the new approach. Implementing these recommendations will provide quality, consistent, high level PD opportunities to ISFs. This is fundamental to achieving the competencies required and the outcomes we all want for services, children and their families.

For the purpose of this report the terms "PD", "professional development " and "professional support" are synonymous and "PSC" includes the Professional Support Service Providers (PSSP) that are contracted by the PSC to deliver professional development to inclusion support facilitators.

A. Project overview

The Professional Support Coordinators Alliance (PSCA) is a national alliance of PSCs from each state and territory. PSCs are contracted by the Australian Government under the Inclusion and Professional Support Program (IPSP) to provide a coordinated response to the professional support needs of eligible child care services, including Inclusion Support Facilitators (ISFs).

The PSCA contracted B&J Barrett Enterprises PTY LTD, to undertake a project from September – December 2009 to conduct research into the role, essential skills, competencies and PD needs of ISFs across Australia.

The project requirements were:

A. The identification and articulation of the role and essential skills of an ISF in supporting child care services to provide quality inclusive programs;

B. Mapping the PD needs and skills of ISFs to units of competencies from the CHC08 Community Services Training Package; and

C. Recommendations for nationally consistent PD tools to support ISFs in their role.

B. Summary of findings

Finding 1: The nationally consistent elements of the ISF role:

The role of the ISF is complex, with nationally consistent, agreed elements that can be built on for professional development purposes. That role is:

To use a strengths based approach to work in a practical way with eligible child care services to build the services own capacity to create a quality care environment inclusive of all children. The ISF does this by:

- Identifying policy and practices that facilitate inclusion of children with additional needs in child care settings;
- Assisting child care services to develop, implement and sustain inclusive policies and practices;
- Responding to requests and referrals for inclusion support from child care services, PSCs and Indigenous Professional Support Units (IPSUs);
- Assisting services to develop Service Support Plan (SSPs);
- Assisting services to link with relevant community groups, services and organisations;
- Supporting services to work in partnership with families and local support networks; and
- Assisting services to identify their PD needs and opportunities in conjunction with the PSC and IPSU. *Refer particularly to recommendations 5, 6& 7.*

Finding 2: Nationally consistent skills and knowledge required for the ISF role

There is an extremely high level of skill and knowledge required by ISFs to undertake the identified role effectively which can form the basis of future professional development provision. Those marked with * are linked to the CHC08 Community Services Training Package competencies and those marked ** could not be linked.
Refer particularly to recommendations 5, 6, 7&8.

Knowledge required:
- The underlying principles and practices of inclusion*;
- Broad Commonwealth policy and its underpinning values and evidence base in relation to inclusion, including the National Social Inclusion Agenda, The National Quality Agenda and the Early Years Learning Framework**;
- The Commonwealth Child Care Program – its underlying principles, purpose, what it can provide for families and the services they utilize**;
- The IPSP program – its underlying principles, purpose, what PD is and what it can be, the roles of the various components and the requirements of the ISF role within the IPSP guidelines**;
- Pedagogy –including early childhood and middle childhood development, priority groups, adult learning principles, PD, role modeling, action learning frameworks, strengths based and capacity building approaches, family centred practice, professionalism, cultural competency, reflective practice and high quality service policy and practice*;

- The socio demographic features of their ISA region, in particular of the priority groups within that region**;
- The national, regional and local support system - knowledge of interagency communities and collaboration and principles of partnership*; and
- The eligible child care services within their region, their governance and staffing structures, their inclusive policy and practices and the legal framework in which they operate**.

   Skills required:
- Employability skills* related to:
    - o Communication;
    - o Teamwork;
    - o Problem solving;
    - o Innovation and enterprise;
    - o Planning and organizing;
    - o Self management;
    - o Learning; and
    - o Technology.
- Inclusion support skills related to:
    Inclusive policy and practice*
    - o Cross cultural competency;
    - o Advocating for and promote the rights of and inclusion of young children/their families;
    - o Promotion of evidence to advance high quality policy and practice;
    - o Linking inclusion policy with practice and practice with professional support; and
    - o Foster learning and development in early and middle childhood.
    Community development*
    - o Facilitate workplace change and innovation;
    - o Fostering independence;
    - o Coaching and motivation; and
    - o Providing strategic leadership.
    Partnerships*
    - o Supporting community participation;
    - o Establishing and maintaining cross sectorial partnerships; and
    - o Supporting services to develop relationships across the child care environment.

Finding 3: Professional development for ISFs needs to be coordinated and strengthened

The critical, complex and changing role the ISFs have in supporting services requires high level PD in relation to the ISF role, knowledge and skill areas identified in findings 1 and 2 above. There needs to be an increase in the amount of PD provided to ISFs by both the PSC's and ISAs. It should be allocated consistently across Australia so that ISFs – whether working in rural, remote, regional or metropolitan regions – can have equitable access. There is quality ISF PD provided in some states/territories and for

some particular skill/knowledge areas. This needs to be tapped into and built on to provide a coordinated, staged approach to strengthen ISF PD provision nationally.
Refer recommendations 1-8.

Finding 4:   *Professional support for ISFs needs to be targeted*

ISFs need to access the range of PD available to child care services/professionals to keep them up to date with current service policy and practice. However, in addition, they need targeted ISF PD which can enhance and strengthen their specific role, knowledge and skill development in relation to supporting services. Because of the variation of skills and knowledge across the ISF sector (*Refer Finding 10*), there needs to be a nationally consistent, transparent mechanism for identification of ISF PD support needs in each state and territory. There needs to be particular PD related to the specialist elements of the ISF role, skills and knowledge required to support inclusion for children from the diverse range of clans, beliefs, practices and dialects within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
Refer recommendations 1-8.

Finding 5   *Professional support for ISFs needs to be provided in a range of ways*

ISFs need PD that develops, reinforces and strengthens skills and knowledge in a sustainable way. It therefore needs to be provided as theory, practice, reflection, mentoring and discussion – particularly as it relates to application of the ISF role, knowledge and skills in practice with services. It also needs to be provided through a range of media including online, direct delivery and video conferencing.
Refer particularly to recommendation 1.

Finding 6:   *The role of the ISF, the ISA, PSC and DEEWR in provision of ISF professional support needs to be clarified*

There is a need for clearly agreed roles of the ISF, PSC, ISA (as employers of ISFs) and DEEWR in professional development provision:

- The ISF needs to play an active role in facilitating, identifying, accessing, participating in and reflecting on their own PD support needs;
- The ISA has primary responsibility for the PD of its employees and exclusive responsibility for the development of the identified employability skills. This can include arranging externally provided PD and internally providing staff PD workshops, discussion groups, 1:1 support; mentoring; practice/ feedback sessions. This should be done in partnership with the PSC;
- The PSC can work in partnership with the ISA to provide PD opportunities either as direct PD provision through different media or as referrals/linkages with external professional support agencies; and

- DEEWR facilitates and monitors the provision of ISF PD through PSCs and ISAs that is affordable, accessible, equitable, high quality and relevant to Commonwealth policy.
  Refer particularly to recommendation 1.

Finding 7   There is consistency with some of the competencies outlined in the CHC08 Community Services Training Package

Mapping against the competencies identified that there are many ISF skills and knowledge that relate to the CHCO8 Community Services Training package. The detail of the CHC08 content areas would need further examination as to how they relate specifically to the identified ISF role. Some areas – such as Commonwealth policy and programs and knowledge of the local service, support system and regional demographics could not be adequately identified in the competencies.
Refer particularly to recommendations 5 – 8.

Finding 8   ISFs play a crucial role in Commonwealth policy agenda

This is an exciting time for early childhood and inclusion in Australia. For the first time in the history of child care in Australia, there is alignment of evidenced based early childhood policy and broader social inclusion reforms - at all levels of government. Strategies such as the National Early Childhood Development Strategy and the Australian Social Inclusion Agenda are endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) which represents a policy commitment by Local, State/Territory and Commonwealth Governments.

A priority group for these reforms is children at risk of disadvantage, which includes all the priority groups within the Commonwealth's Inclusion and Professional Support Program. The ISFs play a crucial role in working directly with child care services to support quality inclusive practices.

The Inclusion and Professional Support Program (IPSP), as part of the Commonwealth's child care program, plays a critical role in promoting and supporting the Government's National Quality Agenda and supporting services to be inclusive of all children. The IPSP supports services to understand and work actively to adopt and improve their practice in line with the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF). The IPSP program is charged with the responsibility of using strengths based approach to build capacity and facilitate positive change in child care services in a way that results in inclusive environments and enhancements to the quality of service provision. The ISFs, as part of the IPSP program are in a pivotal position to influence the implementation of Commonwealth reforms at a service level.
Refer recommendations 1-8.

Finding 9: ISFs have a unique role within the Commonwealth Child Care Program

There are a large number of Commonwealth, State, Territory and Non Government organisations that support child care services. However, there are few professionals that are in a position to have direct contact with **all** child care services within the Commonwealth Child Care program. State/Territory licensing officers visit child care services to ensure compliance with State/Territory Regulations. Validators visit child care services as part of the current Commonwealth's Quality Assurance (QA) process. These professionals are effectively undertaking a monitoring role within their respective jurisdictions. ISFs, however, play a different and unique role with child care services. This professional role is essentially a practical and supportive one. It requires the ISF to use a strength based approach to work with eligible child care services to build their own capacity to create a quality care environment inclusive of all children.
Refer to recommendations 1-8.

Finding 10: There are no pre service skills and knowledge required to undertake the ISF role

There is no prescribed qualification for an ISF and consequently ISFs come with a broad range of professional qualifications and/or experience. These include professional child care workers, teachers, social workers, aged care workers, disability workers, therapists and social workers. There was considerable discussion around this issue with the following issues/comments raised:

- As there is no consistent qualification base line from which to build a set of skills and knowledge required to undertake the role – the nationally consistent skills and knowledge identified and the corresponding PD may be more relevant to some ISFs than others.
  Refer particularly to recommendation 1.

Recommendations for nationally consistent support tools: 2010-2013

A. *2010: A Policy framework for ISF professional development*

Recommendation 1:
2010- PSC Alliance undertakes a process to adopt, document and communicate a policy framework for ISF professional development provision that:

a. Provides a definition of PD and an outline of the value of PD;
b. Clearly articulates the role of DEEWR, PSCs, ISAs and ISFs in ISF PD – as outlined in Finding 6;
c. Defines a specific state/territory structure/process that enables identification and evaluation of ISF professional support needs *(E.g. through an ISF PD advisory committee, IPSP Forum etc);*
d. Outlines a staged approach to a nationally coordinated, strengthened and accessible ISF PD program that is commensurate with recommendations 2-8;
e. Is tailored to meet ISF PD needs in each state/territory;
f. Promotes content related to the ISF role, knowledge and skill areas identified in Findings 1&2 *(refer also recommendations 4,5 &6)*; and
g. Provides opportunities for ISFs to access PD through:
    i. theory sessions provided face to face or online;
    ii. tutorials provided face to face or online;
    iii. work based scenarios to practice provided face to face or online;
    iv. reflection sessions provided face to face, online or in the workplace; and
    v. mentoring sessions provided face to face, online and in the workplace.

B. *2010-2012: A national ISF PD resource webpage*

Recommendation 2: Webpage development
PSC Alliance undertakes a project to design a national ISF PD web page that is linked to each PSC website. This would be developed in two stages providing capacity for:

a. Stage 1   2010: Resource links and uploads
b. Stage 2   2011/2012 : Interactive components – discussion threads, online tutorials, online mentoring

Recommendation 3: Webpage content development:
PSC Alliance undertakes a corresponding project to develop, monitor and update relevant content for the web page in consultation with ISAs to include:

> **Stage 1**
> 2010/2011

Resource links – international/national professional development, international best practice research in relation to inclusion, international and national policy resources in relation to inclusion and links to ISF PD provision in each PSC.

2010/2011:

Uploads – the adopted PSC Alliance ISF PD Policy *(refer recommendation 1),* Commonwealth policy updates, links to ISF PD provided by each State/Territory PSC; suitably qualified and experienced ISF professional support providers; ISF resource sheets as they are developed**.**

Stage 2

2011/2012:

Uploads – ISF online PD packages as they are developed *(recommendation 7).*

2012:

Interactive components – appropriate protocols, discussion threads for ISFs to share best practice in relation to PD resource sheets, online tutorials in relation to PD packages as they are developed, online mentoring in relation to professional development packages as they are developed

(Refer also recommendations 4-8)

Notes to recommendation 3: A national ISF PD webpage could be the initial commitment to strengthening ISF PD support. It can form the springboard for coordinated, high level ISF PD which links ISFs to current international and national policy, practice and research in relation to professional development broadly and more specifically to inclusion. It can commence in a basic but high quality format and expand to include ISF resource sheets and then ISF PD packages as they are developed. It can progress to providing access for peer discussions, professional tutorials and mentoring as part of the policy commitment to providing accessible PD that strengthens skills and knowledge in a sustainable way. It can be used by PSCs and ISAs to access professional support providers and to deliver the ISF PD identified for their particular state/territory. There are numerous organisations and websites that focus on PD in general. This includes DEEWR, State/Territory Departments of Education and Training, Australian Flexible Learning Community and the International PD Association. These organisations could be initially sourced and updated annually. There are existing professional support providers - expert in ISF PD. These could be shared nationally and built on initially, then annually updated to assist national access to quality, relevant PD. Research organisations such as the National Centre for Child Care Inclusion (Canada) and the Centre for Community Child Health (Victoria) and other international best practice organisations can provide a range of resources and supports relevant for high quality PD for ISFs. These could be initially sourced and updated annually. Relevant policy such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Child Friendly Cities, Commonwealth and COAG Reforms - the Social Inclusion Agenda, National Early Childhood Development Strategy could be sourced, summarized as they relate to inclusion and updated annually.

C. Tailored ISF professional development in a staged approach

Recommendation 4:

2010 - PSC Alliance undertakes a project to develop national ISF PD resource sheets related to relevant role, skills and knowledge. *(See Findings 1&2).* Table 1 at the end of the recommendations identifies content areas for the resource sheets.

Notes to recommendation 4: The development of ISF specific PD resource sheets is the first step in tailored, coordinated ISF PD. These can form the basis for guiding best practice, peer discussion and discussion threads (established online). Existing PSC ISF PD packages, CTIS training material, Commonwealth policy and inclusion resources can be sourced for these resource sheets.

Recommendation 5:

2010-2011 - PSC Alliance undertakes a project to map existing quality PD packages already provided by PSCs/RTOs against the identified ISF role, skills and knowledge *(See Findings 1&2).*

Notes to recommendation 5: Examination of existing ISF PD packages can identify gaps, overlap and relevance of existing ISF PD packages to the identified skill/knowledge areas and delivery requirements as per the adopted policy outlined in recommendation 1.

Recommendation 6:

2011-2013 - PSC Alliance undertakes a subsequent project to systematically develop national ISF PD packages related to the role, skills and knowledge. *(See Findings 1&2).* These packages are to be developed and delivered according to the adopted policy *(as outlined in Recommendation 1).* The packages should include:

a. New ISFs/refresher packages on the role of the ISF;
b. Generic skills and knowledge packages linked to CHCO8 competencies; and
c. Specialist ISF skills and knowledge – not linked to CHC08 competencies.

Table 1 at the end of the recommendations provides proposed content areas for the PD packages.

Notes to recommendation 6: modifying existing and developing new ISF PD packages can be undertaken in a staged process. They will be developed in a consistent format commensurate with the policy outlined in recommendation 1. They can be loaded onto the ISF PD webpage as they become available.

Recommendation 7:

2011-2012- PSC Alliance facilitates links and referrals so that ISAs can provide appropriate PD related to employability skills *(See Finding 2).*

Notes to recommendation 7: there are numerous online and direct PD sources through RTOs that already provide PD modules that can be accessed by ISAs to support PD of ISFs in employability skills.

Recommendation 8:

2010-2011 - PSC Alliance undertakes a specific project in conjunction with the IPSUs that identifies the

specialist elements of the ISF role, skills and knowledge required to support inclusion for children from the diverse range of clans, beliefs, practices and dialects within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and recommends the best way to provide PD to support that role. (See Section F "Project Limitations).

Notes to recommendation 8: specific attention to the professional support needs of ISFs working within Aboriginal communities should be seen as a priority as part of the Commonwealth Government's commitment to indigenous reforms.

Table 1 – Recommended PD Packages

PD package	Suggested lead agency	Content areas to be included	Link to CHCO8	Suggested mode of delivery
1. Working as an ISF - induction and refresher	ISA	To cover all aspects of role as identified in Finding 1	No	Resource sheets then Online
2. Theory of inclusion	PSC	Current principles and practice of inclusion	Yes as per Appendix 2	Resource sheets then Online & web page
3. Understanding Commonwealth policy	PSC	National Social Inclusion Agenda, National Quality Agenda, EYLF	No	Resource sheet then web page policy updates
4. IPSP program	PSC	Principles, purpose, evidence base	No	Online and web page
5. Pedagogy theory for an ISF	PSC	Early childhood, middle childhood development, adult learning principles, role modelling, action learning frameworks, strengths based and capacity building approaches, family/community centered practice, reflective practice, high quality service policy and practice	Yes as per Appendix 2	Online
6. Our local ISA Region	ISA	Local socio demographics, Municipal early childhood profiles, AEDI index, priority groups data	No	Resource sheet guideline for ISAs then ISA delivers face to face

PD package	Suggested lead agency	Content areas to be included	Link to CHCO8	Suggested mode of delivery
7. Our local service system	ISA	Eligible child care services in region, their governance and staffing structures, their inclusive policies and practices, their legal framework in which they operate	No	Resource sheet guideline for ISAs then ISAs deliver face to face
8. The national, regional and local support system	ISA	National support agencies, state/regional support agencies, local support agencies	No	Resource sheet guideline for ISAs then ISAs deliver face to face
9. Inclusion skills for an ISF	PSC	Cross cultural competency Advocating and supporting inclusion Linking inclusion policy with practice The inclusion continuum	Yes as per Appendix 2	Resource sheets then all modes as per recommendation 1F
10. Community development skills for an ISF	PSC	Facilitating workplace change and innovation Fostering independence Coaching and motivation Providing strategic leadership	Yes as per Appendix 2	Resource sheets then all modes as per recommendation 1F
11. Partnership skills for an ISF	PSC	Supporting and facilitating services to link with community agencies Establishing and maintaining cross sectorial partnerships Supporting services to develop relationships across the child care environment	Yes as per Appendix 2	Resource sheets then all modes as per recommendation 1F

12. Employability skills for an ISF	ISA	Communication, teamwork, problem solving, planning and organizing, self management, learning, technology, initiative and enterprise	Yes as per Appendix 2	Link with relevant training as per recommendation 8

C. Project methodology

Literature Search	
Commonwealth policy and information	Industry policy and information

Consultation	
DEEWR	PSCs/ISA/ISFs

Analysis		
Role of ISFs	Skills/knowledge	professional support gaps/overlap

Mapping against competencies

Recommendations for professional support tools
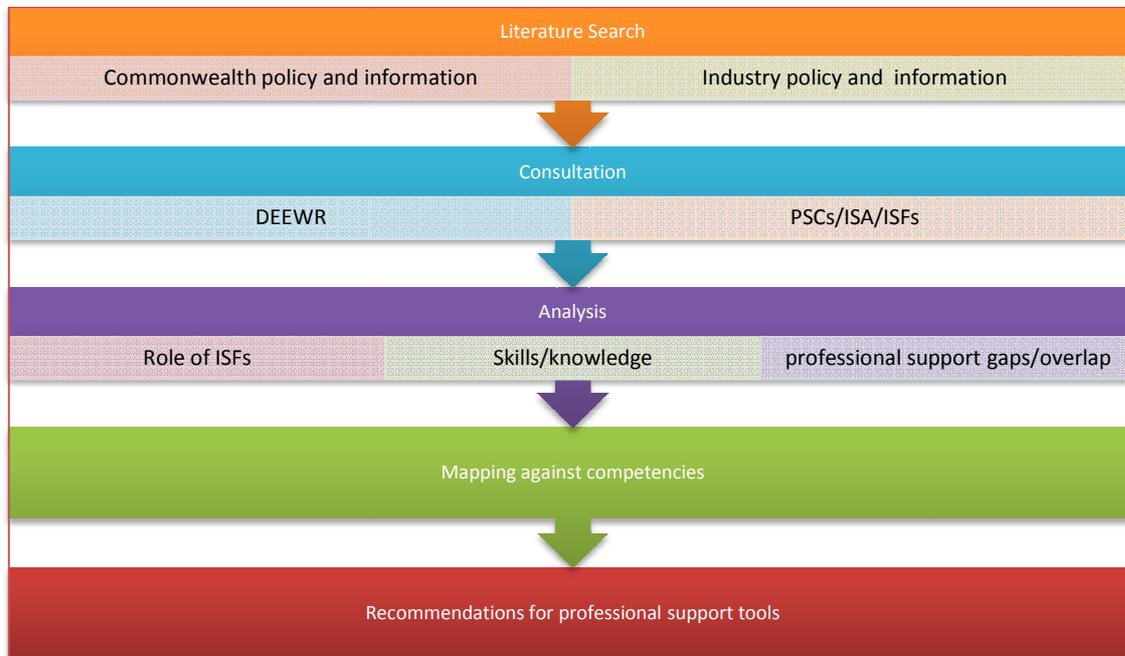
This is a four month project which has/will undertake the following methodology:

A. Literature search including examination of current relevant Commonwealth early childhood and education policy and service agreements, and industry material:
   a. Program Guidelines 2009 – 2012 IPSP
   b. National Quality Agenda including the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia
   c. The Council of Australian Government's early Childhood commitment
   d. Indigenous Early Childhood National Partnership
   e. National Early Childhood Development Strategy
   f. Early Childhood Education – Universal Access
   g. Early Childhood Workforce Strategy
   h. Tertiary Education Reform Agenda
   i. Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council CHCO8 Community Services Training Package
   j. Sample position descriptions and regional plans voluntarily provided to consultant from ISAs for research purposes – provided from Northern Territory, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia

B. Consultation with key stakeholders including:

     a. Focus group meetings in every state and territory with the professional support Coordinator and professional support Service Provider (PSSP) representatives

     b. Focus group meetings in every state and territory with ISA and ISF representatives, including teleconferencing with rural remote ISA regions

     c. Consultation interview with DEEWR National Office

     d. Telephone interviews with representatives from each DEEWR state/territory office

     e. Informal discussions with PSSPs, ISAs and ISFs

C. Analysis of Literature review and consultation material to identify key nationally consistent ISF roles, essential skills and knowledge. Further analysis to identify any gaps in professional support needs

D. A mapping exercise to link the professional support needs and skills of the ISFs to units of competencies from the CHC08 Community Services Training Package which may include competencies identified in community services and development work, children and youth services work, client services, community sector coordination/management work, advanced practice work

E. Development of recommendations for nationally consistent support tools to support ISFs in their role

D. Project limitations

1. The research uses a strengths based approach. It does not focus on identifying weaknesses or gaps but examines key elements of the ISF role, skills, knowledge and PD needs that can be built on to support ISFs in their role in supporting services to be inclusive of all children;

2. Time constraints – the limited time for this project has meant that there have been tight timelines and consequently the literature review, consultation and mapping phases have been short but focused;

3. Consultation constraints – the project attempted to ensure that consultation occurred with a representative sample of ISAs and ISFs from metropolitan, regional, rural and remote (where appropriate). It was not envisaged that all ISAs or ISFs would be able to be included in the consultation;

4. The project has not attempted to detail any differences in ISF role and skill/knowledge within each state/territory or between state/territories. Rather, it has focused on identifying key nationally consistent elements in the ISF role, essential skills and knowledge and any nationally consistent PD gaps that could be addressed through PD tools;

5. Policy constraints – whilst Commonwealth early year's policy has been examined in detail, state and territory policy has not. This is because the IPSP forms part of the Australian Government's Child care Services Support Program, and also because the most relevant Commonwealth policies are part of COAG and are therefore consistent with the policy agendas across the states and territories;

6. The research project is not intended to be a qualification analysis which would be undertaken as part of an industry training development process. Nor does it attempt to map skills and knowledge against any other industry or qualification framework than the CHC08 Training package; and

7. The IPSP guidelines identify one of the priority groups for inclusion as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The project identified that there are specialist elements of the ISF role, skills and knowledge required to support inclusion for children from the diverse range of clans, beliefs, practices and dialects within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. These have not been adequately identified and addressed within this research project. However, there is willingness and commitment by the relevant PSCs to further address this issue.

E. Nationally consistent definition of the ISF role

Whilst the environments in which the ISF work may be quite different from one state/territory to another, there was national consistency in relation to the core functions of the ISF role. The brainstorming sessions in all the ISA/ISF, PSC focus groups and DEEWR consultations uniformly identified common elements of the role such as "change agent", "coach", "mentor", "critical friend", "partnership" and "facilitator". It also identified that there has been significant change over recent years of the ISF role – that has taken it from a child/room/direct support focus to a service/environment/empowerment focus.

In unpacking what that means in relation to working with services, there was consistent agreement that the role as outlined in the IPSP Guidelines adequately reflects the ISF role.

To use strengths based approach to work in a practical way with eligible child care services to build the services own capacity to create a quality care environment inclusive of all children. The ISF does this by:

- Identifying policy and practices that facilitate inclusion of children with additional needs in childcare settings;
- Assisting child care services to develop, implement and sustain inclusive policies and practices;
- Responding to requests and referrals for inclusion support from child care services, PSCs and IPSUs;
- Assisting services to develop SSPs;
- Assisting services to link with relevant community groups, services and organisations;
- Supporting services to work in partnership with families and local support networks; and
- Assisting services to identify their PD needs and opportunities in conjunction with the PSC and IPSU.

The following roles were identified by one or two states and territories, but have not been included in the definition as there was not consistent identification:

- Supporting basic skills required of child care workers in services;
- The term "quality" needs to be included in the role definition;
- Monitoring and managing additional inclusion support resources in line with IPSP guidelines; and
- Working directly with local community agencies to build their capacity to support local childcare services in relation to inclusion.

F. Nationally consistent skills and knowledge required to undertake the ISF role

Although there was variation in the terminology used across the literature search and consultations to describe the essential knowledge needed to undertake the agreed ISF, there is national consistency in the level of and knowledge content required to undertake the agreed ISF role.

- ISFs need to have a thorough level knowledge of:
  - The underlying principles and practices of inclusion;
  - Broad Commonwealth policy and its underpinning values and evidence base in relation to inclusion, including the National Social Inclusion Agenda, the National Quality Agenda and the Early Years Learning Framework;
  - The Commonwealth Child Care Program – its underlying principles, purpose, what it can provide for families and the services they utilise;
  - The IPSP program – its underlying principles, purpose, what PD is and what it can be, the roles of the various components and the requirements of the ISF role within the IPSP guidelines;
  - Pedagogy – including early childhood and middle childhood development, priority groups, adult learning principles, PD, role modeling, action learning frameworks, strengths based and capacity building approaches, family centred practice, professionalism, cultural competency, reflective practice and high quality service policy and practice;
  - The socio demographic features of their ISA region, in particular of the priority groups within that region;
  - The national, regional and local support system - knowledge of interagency communities and collaboration and principles of partnership; and
  - The eligible child care services within their region, their governance and staffing structures, their inclusive policy and practices and the legal framework in which they operate.

Again, the process to date has revealed national consistency in the identification of the skills needed by the ISF in undertaking the role. It has been agreed that the role of the ISF is complex and that there is an extremely high level of skill required to put the above knowledge areas into practice and undertake the identified role effectively.

The nationally consistent skills identified to date include highly developed:

- Employability skills related to:
  - Communication;
  - Teamwork;
  - Problem solving;
  - Innovation and enterprise;
  - Planning and organizing;

- o Self management;
- o Learning; and
- o Technology.
- Inclusion support skills related to:
  Inclusive policy and practice
  - o Cross cultural competency;
  - o Advocating for and promote the rights of and inclusion of young children /their families;
  - o Promotion of evidence to advance high quality policy and practice;
  - o Linking inclusion policy with practice and practice with professional support; and
  - o Foster learning and development in early and middle childhood.
  Community development
  - o Facilitate workplace change and innovation;
  - o Fostering independence;
  - o Coaching and motivation; and
  - o Providing strategic leadership.
  Partnerships
  - o Supporting community participation;
  - o Establishing and maintaining cross sectorial partnerships; and
  - o Supporting services to develop relationships across the child care environment.

G. Mapping against the competencies

The[1] broad concept of industry competency concerns the ability to perform particular tasks and duties to the standard of performance expected in the workplace. Competency requires the application of specified skills, knowledge and attitudes relevant to effective participation in an industry, sector or enterprise.

Competency covers all aspects of workplace performance and involves performing individual tasks; managing a range of different tasks; responding to contingencies or breakdowns; and, dealing with the responsibility of the workplace, including working with others. Workplace competency requires the ability to apply relevant skills, knowledge and attitudes, consistently over time and in the required workplace situations and environments.

The CHC08 competency standards focus on what is expected of a competent individual in the workplace as an outcome of learning, rather than focusing on the learning process itself.

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[1] Australian Government, DEEWR, CHC08 Training Package Volume 1 of 3, Training Package Overview and Assessment Guidelines, February 2009

It is evident that the role, skills and knowledge ISFs require to competently undertake their identified role encompasses, but is not limited to a range of qualifications within the CHC08 Community Services Training Package:

1. CHC50608   Diploma of Community Services Work
2. CHC52208   Diploma of Community Services Coordination
3. CHC50708   Diploma of Community Development
4. CHC60208   Advanced Diploma of Children's Services
5. CHC51308   Diploma of Education Support

In addition, there are a number of units of competency related to the role that are part of the CHC08 Training Package but have been imported from the BSB07 Business Services, PSP04 Public Sector, LGA04 Local Government, SRC04 Recreation Industry, and TAA Training Assessment Training Packages.

In mapping against the competencies, the knowledge and skills that have been identified through the research have been mapped against appropriate units of competencies. The term "competencies not identified", refers to those knowledge/skill areas unable to be mapped.

Given that there was not national consistency regarding the need to have in-depth knowledge of early and middle childhood development – these competencies (CHCFC502 – 508A and CHCFC512-515A) have not been included in the mapping. However, broader competencies related to lifespan development and fostering development have been mapped.

Given that there are a range of qualifications and experience across the ISF sector, and no prescribed qualification, ISFs will have acquired different competencies, and different levels within these competencies. This project does not attempt to assess the competency levels of individual ISFS, or whether the required competencies go beyond those identified in the training package.

The mapping exercise has enabled the translation of many of the ISF knowledge and skill areas to be related to recognized industry competencies. This could form the basis in the future for the development of a Skill Set for ISFs in their identified role. This would enable ISFs to broaden their skill base. It would also enable qualified workers to move into the ISF role as identified.

The mapping exercise is detailed at Attachment 2 at the end of this document.

H. Findings from the Literature Review

Relevant literature was examined and subsequently analysed to identify the ISF role, skills/knowledge and professional support needs.

Commonwealth Early Childhood Policy

The Australian Government's agenda for early childhood education and child care focuses on providing Australian families with high quality, accessible, affordable, integrated early childhood education and care. The COAG endorsed National Early Childhood Development Strategy sets out a vision that by 2020 all children can have the best possible start in life to create a better future for them and for the nation. The COAG reforms have also enabled alignment at the state/territory policy, which complements and enhances the national policy direction. The Government's policy agenda includes a number of key reforms that impact directly on the role of the ISFs across Australia:

- National Early Childhood workforce reforms (that complement current/emerging state/territory workforce reforms) that will improve the recruitment and retention of the early childhood education and child care work force develop pathways that reward and support the best workers and raise the level of qualifications. This will lead to better skilled and capable staff employed in the services ISFs are working with and potential opportunities for TAFE and university training for ISFs in the future;
- National Quality Agenda – in particular the Early Years Framework (EYLF) for Australia (which complements current/emerging State/territory early years frameworks), that will assist educators to provide children with opportunities to maximize their potential and develop a foundation for future success in learning. It provides a nationally consistent approach to learning outcomes for children, along with principles and practice to support children's learning through viewing children's lives as characterized by belonging, being and becoming. For the first time there is a national framework for promoting children's learning that can be taken up across all services that ISFs work with;
- Within this policy agenda, the Inclusion and Professional Support Program (IPSP) plays a critical role in promoting and supporting the Government's National Quality Agenda and supporting services to be inclusive of all children. The IPSP supports services to understand and work actively to adopt and improve their practice in line with the EYLF. The IPSPs are charged with the responsibility of using a strengths based approach to build capacity and facilitate positive change in child care services in a way that results in inclusive environments and enhancements to the quality of service provision; and
- The ISAs provide child care services with the practical support they need to build this capacity. This includes providing advice to services on policies and practices that facilitate inclusion, providing onsite support for Service Support Plans, Specialist Equipment, General Resources Library, professional support, funding through Flexible Support Funds or Inclusion Support Subsidy and Bicultural Support. ISFs provide this support directly to eligible services on request to the ISA.

ISF Role in relation to Commonwealth policy

The role of the ISFs is entering a new phase. ISFs can look towards operating with better skilled child care staff who will be working consistently across Australia towards agreed outcomes for children and their families. Inclusion is a fundamental component of the new EYLF and will be seen as an integral part of eligible child care services policy and practice.

ISFs as partners in the reform process

There will be an increased need for, and benefits from, ISFs, (through their ISAs), working in partnership with state/territory funded partners – at the service level – as part of the reform process. This partnership approach will build capacity at all levels of the service system. Families, services, ISFs, ISAs, IPSP program and government will be moving in the same direction with similar aspirations and working principles and practice. The ISFs, working within the Child care Services Support program, will be part of this broader team approach and their role can be strengthened and enhanced through these collaborative efforts.

ISFs as promoting the EYLF – particularly in relation to inclusion

The role of the ISFs is essentially a practical one – to assist services to build the knowledge and confidence they need to offer a quality, inclusive child care environment to children with additional needs. Inclusion is integral to the EYLF. Thus promoting services to work with the EYLF supports all equal opportunities for children to "belong, be and become" – so that they[2]:

- Have a strong sense of identity;
- Are connected with and contribute to their world;
- Have a strong sense of well-being;
- Are confident and involved learners; and
- Are effective communicators.

ISFs implementing the IPSP Guidelines

The IPSP Guidelines have a specific section for the ISAs to undertake the requirements as per their agreements with DEEWR as part of the Inclusion and Professional Support Program. The guidelines have clear objectives for the ISAs and roles and responsibilities in relation to:

- Support to child care services;
- Assistance to the National Inclusion Support Subsidy Provider in relation to ISS;
- Management and administration of Flexible Support Finding (FSF); and
- Employment of ISFs.

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[2] EYLF five learning outcomes, "Belonging, Being and Becoming, The early Years learning Framework for Australia", Australian Government DEEWR, 2009

They also provide guidelines on planning and coordination, networking and collaboration, participation in IPSP Forums and the ISA Alliance, budget and performance monitoring and progress reporting.

The ISFs play an important role in working with services to meet these guidelines. These roles may vary from ISA, as the ISAs are responsible for the employment and management of the ISFs. The fundamental role that is undertaken by the ISFs (through their ISA) is to provide practical advice and access to support that assists services create a quality inclusive environment. Specific ISF roles include:

- Identify policy and practices that facilitate inclusion of children with additional needs in child care settings;
- Assist child care services to develop, implement and sustain inclusive policies and practices;
- Respond to requests and referrals for inclusion support from child care services, PSCs and IPSUs;
- Assist services to develop SSPs;
- Assist services to link with relevant community groups, services and organisations;
- Support services to work in partnership with families and local support networks; and
- Assist services to identify their PD needs and opportunities in conjunction with the PSC and IPSU.

Knowledge and skills of ISFs in relation to Commonwealth policy

In order to take up an enhanced partnership approach to their role, to promote the EYLF with services, and undertake the roles identified under IPSP Guidelines ISFs will need:

- A knowledge of the principles of partnership and skills in practicing partnership at the local level;
- A thorough knowledge of Commonwealth early years policy , particularly in relationship to the NQA and the EYLF as it relates to inclusion and the skills to implement this knowledge to build service capacity in relation to inclusion;
- A thorough knowledge of the IPSP program, its policy base and guidelines;
- A knowledge of the PD that are being implemented as part of the EYLF/NQA and networking, collaboration and referral skills to create linkages and supports for services;
- A knowledge of the national workforce reforms as they relate to the child care services they work with;
- A knowledge of early childhood, middle childhood development and inclusive practice and the skills to apply that knowledge when working with services;
- A knowledge of children with additional needs – including children with ongoing high support needs including children with a disability, children from CALD backgrounds including refugee children and Australian South Sea Islander children and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and the skills to use that knowledge when working with services;
- A knowledge of strengths based and capacity building approaches and the skills to use that knowledge to build the services capacity in relation to inclusion;
- A knowledge of the child care services eligible for support through the ISAs – nationally, regionally and locally and an understanding of the key characteristics of the different service types;

- A knowledge of the IPSP guidelines as they relate to the ISF role and the skills to use these guidelines when working with eligible child care services;
- A knowledge of the principles of inclusion, how they relate to policy and practice at the service level;
- A knowledge of the practical supports available to services – through the IPSP program and through other Commonwealth and State funded programs;
- A knowledge of local support networks and services to support child care services; and
- Knowledge and skills in guiding change in child care services, adult learning principles, reflective practice, interdisciplinary team work and interagency collaboration, family centered practice, cross cultural competence and coaching and mentoring.

Regional plans

The regional plans document and guide what and how inclusion support is delivered to eligible child care services in the ISA region. The Region Plans provide information on:

- Region demographics;
- Overview of needs;
- Existing services and service delivery networks;
- Issues that are likely to impact on the delivery of inclusion support;
- Key priorities for the region;
- An Action Plan for program management and coordination, service delivery, communication and marketing, reporting; and
- A risk management plan.

ISF Role in relation to Regional Plans

The ISA Region Plans examined reflect similar ISF roles as outlined in the Commonwealth Policy Section above, so those roles are not repeated in this section but all are considered relevant for implementation of the Region Plan. The plans also provide a more regional focus for ISF roles – such as targeted information to particular service types (such as FDC), services that provide child care to a significant number of refugee children or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island children, or new services in the region. Region plans identify actions which would require ISFs to:

- Respond to referrals for inclusion support in a timely and appropriate manner;
- Assist child care services to build their capacity;
- Assist child care services to develop monitor and evaluate Service Support Plans (SSPs); and
- Assist child care services to access other support such as Inclusion Support Subsidy, Flexible Support Funds, Bicultural support, Specialist equipment and the General Resources Library.

It is anticipated that the following broader roles are facilitated and managed by the ISA, with input by the ISFs. The extent to which the following responsibilities are a major component of the ISFs role will be further investigated through the consultation process.

- Provision of regional demographics and service mapping;
- Identification of issues that impact on the delivery of inclusion support regionally;
- Identification of short and long term priorities for the region;
- Communication and marketing of the range of ISA services and supports available to eligible child care services;
- Providing information to inform the DEEWR six monthly progress reports;
- Consultation as part of the regional needs analysis;
- Developing and implementing a client satisfaction strategy; and
- Develop and implement a stakeholder management strategy.

Knowledge and skills of ISFs in relation to Region Plans

The region plans examined reflect similar knowledge and skills as identified in the Commonwealth Policy Section above, so the knowledge and skills are not repeated in this section but all are considered relevant for implementation of the Region Plan. In addition, to undertake their role as per the region plan, ISFs will need:

- A knowledge of the socio demographic features of their region, in particular a regional profile of children with additional needs – including children with ongoing high support needs including children with a disability, children from CALD backgrounds including refugee children and Australian South Sea Islander children and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and the skills to use that knowledge when working with services;
- A thorough knowledge of the eligible childcare services within the region;
- Skills in identifying the PD needs of individual childcare services in relation to inclusion;
- A thorough knowledge of the role of the PSC in providing PD to eligible childcare services in the region and the skills to work collaboratively with PSC agencies locally to support services;
- A thorough knowledge of the local community support system and a collaborative working partnership with local agencies; and
- A thorough knowledge of current inclusion support tools (such as SSPs, AIRs) and the skills to facilitate the use of such tools by eligible child care services.

ISFs will also need knowledge and skills to contribute to the broader roles of the ISA such as:

- Knowledge of local service inclusion issues and the skills to interpret that information for regional analysis by the ISA; and
- Knowledge of the range of communication and marketing processes and the skills to contribute to the development and implementation of the ISA region communication strategy.

ISF position descriptions

A number of position descriptions, kindly shared by ISAs across Australia were examined in relation to identifying the role of the ISF, and required skills and knowledge.

ISF Role in relation to Position Descriptions

There were nationally consistent elements of the ISF role identified in all position descriptions. These included:

- Respond to referrals for inclusion support;
- Coaching and mentoring services in inclusive practice;
- Assist childcare services to build their capacity;
- Assist childcare services to develop, monitor and evaluate Service Support Plans (SSPs); and
- Assist childcare services to access other support such as Inclusion Support Subsidy, Flexible Support Funds, Bicultural support, Specialist Equipment and the General Resources Library.

There was also some variation in the position descriptions (i.e. in some but not others). Variations included:

- Working directly with children in child care settings (modeling best practice);
- Working 1:1 with service staff in rooms;
- Working directly with families; and
- Working directly with agencies on behalf of children and their families.

ISF skills and knowledge identified in position descriptions

The nationally consistent skills and knowledge of the position descriptions included:

- Knowledge and understanding in relation to inclusion;
- Knowledge and experience of the child care environment
- Qualifications and/or experience in child development;
- Communication, interpersonal and networking skills;
- Organisational skills;
- Teamwork skills;

There were also some variation of skills and knowledge in position descriptions. Variations included:

- Coaching, mentoring skills;
- Community development skills;
- Tertiary qualification in early childhood or associated discipline; and
- Knowledge of professional supports available to support services.

I. Findings from the consultations

Consultation with DEEWR National Office

Discussions with DEEWR National Offices were analysed to identify the following roles, essential skills and knowledge needed by the ISFs to undertake their role:

1. The ISF role is crucial in working with services to support inclusion and promote the broader Commonwealth Government policy objectives as they relate to inclusion;
2. ISFs need high level coaching, mentoring and community development skills to drive change in services;
3. ISFs need skills in identifying the appropriate levels of support services need in relation to Commonwealth funded resources such as ISS, FSF, PD etc;
4. The significance of the ISF role is understated and needs to have a greater profile; and
5. The outcomes (deliverables) of the ISF role in need to be identified and promoted.

Consultation with DEEWR State/Territory Offices

Discussions with DEEWR State and Territory offices were analysed to identify the following roles, essential skills and knowledge needed by the ISFs to undertake their role:

1. Guiding change in child care services – particularly around the National Quality Agenda, the Early Years Learning Framework and the Closing the Gap reforms with the skills to work in partnership with the PSCs and IPSUs to identify appropriate PD to services in relation to inclusion;
2. Fostering inclusive practice in services, in particular cross cultural competency;
3. Coaching and mentoring services to build service capacity in relation to inclusion;
4. Undertaking a partnership role – particularly across the PSCs, IPSUs and ISAs – in supporting services to build service capacity in relation to inclusion;
5. Knowledge and understanding of the partnership approach between Commonwealth, State, Local Government, the PSCs and IPSUs to support services to move forward within the EYLF, COAG reform agendas and the social inclusion agenda;
6. Knowledge and skills in identifying the specific elements of these reforms that relate to inclusion;
7. Knowledge and skills in interpreting the appropriate role for ISFs in guiding change in child care services; and
8. Knowledge and understanding of the impacts of the reform process on child care services.

Consultation with PSCs and PSSPs

The findings of the consultations are detailed further in Section 6 of this report. The PSCs showed a genuine commitment to enhancing professional support for ISFs. There were a number of consistent findings identified:

- The ISF role requires high level competencies;
- Driving change, community development (coaching, mentoring, networking and strengths based approaches) are fundamental, ongoing PD needs;
- The principles underpinning inclusion and child development and how they relate to current Commonwealth policy were important components of ISF PD;
- There are models of engagement regarding ISF PD that are unique to each State/Territory that can be further strengthened;
- ISA/ISF networks, PD advisory committees, training needs surveys, referrals, PD subsidies and word of mouth are all ways that some PSCs work with ISAs/ISFs to identify, deliver and evaluate ISF PD;
- PD roles and responsibilities of ISAs and PSCs need to be clearly articulated and communicated;
- ISF PD could be strengthened, streamlined and more diversely delivered; and
- Recognition and communication of the value of PD is critical in both building the capacity of ISFS and the services they work with.

Consultation with ISAs and ISFs

The findings of the consultations are detailed further in Section 6 of this report. There was a genuine interest in strengthening the skills and knowledge required for ISFs to undertake their role and willingness by many ISFs to take up responsibility for their own learning. There were a number of consistent findings identified:

- There is agreement in the identified role, skills and knowledge as identified through the research;
- The role of ISFs is complex, high level and has changed significantly over recent years – moving from a child focus to a service/child care environment focus;
- ISFs play a critical role in supporting services in relation to inclusion and broader quality reforms;
- PD around knowledge and skills of inclusion, lifelong learning, coaching, mentoring, driving change and strengths based approaches need to be enhanced and continually reinforced;
- Strengthened PD is required for new ISFs, experienced ISFs and for the diverse range of qualifications and experience that make up the ISF workforce;
- ISF PD is needed around the underpinning principles and values that relate to broad Commonwealth policy and its relationship to inclusion and the ISF role;
- There needs to be clearly communicated roles of DEEWR in enabling, and the PSCs, IPSU, ISAs in providing ISF PD;

- PD needs to be delivered through a range of media – including e-based learning, face to face training, discussion groups, online tutorials, peer and specialist mentoring. Most importantly there needs to be high level theory provided, with opportunities for discussion, practice, reflection and ongoing support in applying newly learned skills;
- Opportunities to access international best practice and "lifting the bar" would be welcomed;
- ISFs need to be able to access PD related to child care services with follow-up discussion on the role of ISFs in relation to supporting inclusion; and
- ISFs need specific, targeted professional support that relates to the complex role and enables the high level ISF competencies required to be developed.

APPENDIX 1   Focus Group Consultations

Focus groups were held in each State and Territory and included ISF, ISA, PSC and sometimes ISSP representation. The key findings nationally have been drawn out in the body of the report from the details as outlined for each State and Territory below. The following summarises the major issues discussed at each forum. Whilst the focus group followed the same line of questions, some areas were discussed in greater detail than others.

Queensland PSC

1. Representation

The focus group had representation from PSCQ, PSSP and Noah's Ark.

2. Role of the ISAs – discussion

The following roles key were identified as part of the brainstorming session on role identification in relation to supporting child care services to provide quality, inclusive programs:

- Undertaking the first point of contact - in a frontline with services;
- Act as a change agent and capacity builder;
- Undertaking a supporting, mentoring and coaching role with services; and
- Undertaking facilitation and strengths based approach to provide guidance to services.

3. Skills and Knowledge Required – discussion

In relation to the above identified roles – the following key knowledge and skills were identified in relation to supporting child care services to provide quality, inclusive programs:

- Thorough knowledge of local services and their capacity in relation to inclusion;
- Thorough knowledge of the evidence and policy base behind the EYLF;
- In-depth knowledge of the EYLF from an early childhood development, service provider and professional support provider perspective;
- Thorough knowledge of the EYLF in relation to supporting child care services to provide quality inclusive programs;
- Knowledge of early childhood education and practice; and
- Ability to develop new skills and knowledge where applicable. For example obtaining early childhood education skills and knowledge if moving from aged care to ISF role.

4. Professional Support Needs of ISFs

The PSCQ has developed a model for professional support provision in Queensland. It has facilitated the development of (1) a representative group from child care services and (2) a representative group from ISAs – the Staff Development Working Party.

The purpose of the Staff Development Working Party is to communicate the professional support needs on behalf of ISFs to PSCQ. PSCQ then respond to these identified needs through a range of professional support.
It was identified that the representative group would need:
- A clear understanding of their role in relation to representing and communicating the professional support needs of ISFs;
- Skills to identify and communicate ISFs professional support needs to the PSC; and
- Knowledge of what professional support is and what it can provide for ISFs.

Queensland ISF/ISA Focus Group

1. Representation

The focus group participants represented ISAs and ISFs from remote, rural and metropolitan Queensland.

2. Role of ISFs – general discussion

The following roles key were identified as part of the brainstorming session on role identification in relation to supporting child care services to provide quality, inclusive programs:

- Undertaking a mentoring and coaching role with services to support inclusion;
- Acting as a change agent to build capacity in services in relation to inclusion;
- Ensure inclusion support is delivered in accordance with guidelines;
- Undertake the role of a "critical friend" to services in relation to inclusion;
- Acting as reflective practitioners with services;
- Acting as the "middle man" between services, families and the guidelines; and
- Supporting basic skills required of child care workers in services.

3. Skills and Knowledge – general discussion

In relation to the above identified roles – the following key knowledge and skills were identified in relation to supporting child care services to provide quality, inclusive programs:

- Knowledge of IPSP guidelines;
- Knowledge of EYLF;
- Knowledge of the range of additional needs and priority groups;
- Knowledge of adult learning principles;
- Knowledge of interagency communities;
- Knowledge of the underpinning theories of inclusive practice;
- Knowledge of cultural competency;
- Knowledge of strengths based practice;
- Knowledge of reflective practice;
- Listening skills;
- Communication skills;
- Questioning skills;
- Administration skills;
- Time management skills; and
- Teamwork skills.

4. Discussion of the Role of the ISF as Identified Through the Research to Date

It was agreed that the seven roles identified to date through the research does reflect the roles expressed in the discussions. The following knowledge, skills and professional support needs were identified as part of the discussion about each role:

I. Identify policy and practices that facilitate inclusion of children with additional needs in child care settings:

- Building relationships;
- Being able to observe child care environments;
- Being able to reflect on the impact of priority groups on that environment; and
- Listening to the child care service story and being able to reframe it into inclusive policy.

II. Assist child care services to develop, implement and sustain inclusive policies and practices:

- Highly developed communication skills;
- Ability to use a strengths based approach with services;
- Encouraging services to meet their goals;
- Knowledge and application of reflective practice;
- Knowledge of priority groups – particularly for new ISFs;
- Ability to relate well with services – build up trust;
- Ability to provide mentoring support to services;
- Ability to role model with services; and
- Assist services to source PSC professional support.

What is beyond the ISF role?

- Services that do not want to change/learn;
- PSCQ non-membership limits access by some services;
- Corporate resistance to inclusion;
- High staff turnover; and
- Geographical isolation of services.

What are the professional support professional support needs for this role?

- Enhancing negotiation skills;
- Induction for new ISFs;
- Adult learning principles;
- Current child care industry information; and
- Increasing motivation of child care services – in particular child care service directors/team leaders/coordinators.

III.   Respond to referrals and requests for inclusion support from services, PSC and IPSUs:

- Knowledge of the range of service types and priority groups;
- Time management skills;
- Technology skills;
- Documentation, report writing and other administrative skills;
- Time management skills;
- Prioritising workload skills; and
- Teamwork.

What is beyond the scope of the ISFs in this role?

- Increasing numbers of services; and
- Ad hoc nature of referrals.

What are the professional support needs of this role?

- Workload management.

IV.   Assist services to develop SSPs:

- Utilising an action learning framework;
- Supporting change in child care services;
- Observation and listening skills;
- Highly developed communication skills;
- Ability to use a strengths based approach with services;
- Knowledge and application of reflective practice; and
- Supporting services to have difficult conversations.

What is beyond the scope of ISFs in this role?

- Format of SSPs.

What are the professional support needs of this role?

- Implementing strengths based approaches; and
- Applying principles of EYLF.

V.   Assist services to link with relevant community services, groups and organisations:

What are the professional support needs of this role?

- Knowledge and familiarization of local state and national support organisations; and
- Promoting ISF role in relation to inclusion support with these organisations.

VI.   Support services to work in partnership with families and local support networks:

- Interdisciplinary teamwork; and
- Thorough knowledge of local service system.

What are the professional support needs of this role?

- Family centered practice.

VII.   Assist services to identify their professional support needs and opportunities in conjunction with the PSC and IPU:
- This role was not discussed due to time factors.

5. Professional Support – the Role of the PSC in Providing Professional Support to ISFs

It was generally agreed that the role of the PSC was to provide professional support in partnership with the ISA related to the role of the ISFs as defined by the Commonwealth IPSP Guidelines, and that generalist employment skills be provided by the ISF employers. In particular, professional support identified included:

- Professional support tailored to ISFs;
- Professional support to ISFs to follow on from child care service specific training to reinforce the role of the ISFs in relation to supporting services in relation to inclusion;
- Professional support to ISFs that has a workplace application and follow-up;
- Professional support to be developed in partnership with the ISFs; and
- Professional support for ISFs that supports strengths based approaches.

Tasmania PSC

1. Representation

The focus group represented the PSC Tasmania which supports 3 ISA Regions.

2. Role of the ISAs – general discussion

The following key roles were identified as part of the brainstorming session on role identification in relation to supporting child care services to provide quality, inclusive programs:

- Undertaking a support role so that services are empowered to solve their own problems;
- Acting as a positive role model, mentor and coach;
- Supporting services to shift from focus on inclusion of individual children to providing an inclusive environment for all children;
- Supporting services to try new ways and be confident in innovative thinking; and
- Providing another, objective pair of eyes to services in relation to inclusive practices.

3. Skills and Knowledge Required – discussion

In relation to the above identified roles – the following key knowledge and skills were identified in relation to supporting child care services to provide quality, inclusive programs:

- High level knowledge of early childhood education and practice;
- An ability to forge strong relationships with services, community supports and agencies; and
- Having a thorough knowledge of the local services, their child care environment and their community.

4. Professional Support Needs of ISFs

The PSC has developed a model for professional support provision in Tasmania. It relies on the close, collaborative partnership that has been built up between the PSC and the 3 ISA regions – which has a dedicated ISA coordinator to support professional support. There is continual feedback and evaluation of professional support needs of ISFs with the flexibility to respond in a timely manner to ISF professional support needs.

Tasmania ISF/ISA Focus Group

1. Representation

The focus group participants represented the three ISA regions in Tasmania

2. Role of ISFs – general discussion

The following roles key were identified as part of the brainstorming session on role identification in relation to supporting child care services to provide quality, inclusive programs:

- Facilitating change and modeling best practice;
- Building trust and relationships with services;
- Providing information to services;
- Acting as a mentor for services in relation to inclusion;
- Acting as a sounding board for services;
- Supporting every area of child care service provision, including but not only inclusion;
- Acting as a liaison officer between the service and specialists/therapists; and
- Acting as an advocate for children.

3. Skills and Knowledge – general discussion

In relation to the above identified roles – the following key knowledge and skills were identified in relation to supporting child care services to provide quality, inclusive programs:

- Interpersonal skills;
- Confidence;
- High level communication skills;
- Tact and diplomacy;
- Listening skills;
- Skills in seeing a situation from different perspectives;
- Skills to see inclusion as a staged process – "chipping away at the barriers";
- Knowledge of the child care environment – the child, the room, parent and service as a whole;
- Knowledge of and skills in facilitating reflective practice;
- Knowledge of the big picture related to inclusion e.g. bias and underpinning principles;
- Knowledge of inclusion;
- Knowledge of the legal framework in which services operate;
- Knowledge of child development – early and middle childhood, and programming; and
- Knowledge of adult learning principles.

4. Discussion of the Role of the ISF as Identified Through the Research to Date

It was agreed that the seven roles identified to date through the research does reflect the roles expressed in the discussions. The following knowledge, skills and professional support needs were identified as part of the discussion about each role:

I. Identify policy and practices that facilitate inclusion of children with additional needs in child care settings:
  - Thorough knowledge of the EYLF.

II. Assist child care services to develop, implement and sustain inclusive policies and practices:
  - Good listening skills;
  - Being able to manage paperwork;
  - Knowledge of service policy development;
  - Ability to identify good written policies in relation to inclusion;
  - Thorough understanding of QA;
  - Ability to recognize non inclusive practice; and
  - Ability to link EYLF to service practice in relation to inclusion.

  What is beyond the ISF role?

  - Nothing identified.

III. Respond to referrals and requests for inclusion support from services, PSC and IPSUs:
  - This was seen as the crux of the ISF role. ISFs identified that they can do this in a timely, effective manner and do not have any specific professional support needs that have not already been mentioned.

IV. Assist services to develop SSPs:
  - ISFs are doing the new SSP and preparing to move this across to services in a change management manner.

  What is beyond the scope of the ISFs?

  - Time constraints related to new SSP format.

  What are the professional support needs of this role?

  - Training/practical work in conjunction with NISSP with opportunities for practice and feedback; and
  - Thorough knowledge of the SSP.

V. Assist services to link with relevant community services, groups and organisations:

  What are the professional support needs of this role?

- Orientation for new ISFs.

VI.   Support services to work in partnership with families and local support networks
- Orientation for new ISFs.

VII.   Assist services to identify their professional support needs and opportunities in conjunction with the PSC and IPSU:
- Thorough understanding of the PSC role in relation to professional support to services.

5.   **Professional Support – the Role of the PSC in Providing Professional Support to ISFs**

It was generally agreed that the role of the PSC was to provide professional support in partnership with the ISA related to the role of the ISFs as defined by the Commonwealth IPSP Guidelines, and that generalist employment skills be provided by the ISF employers. In particular, professional support identified included customised training, follow-up training from child care training, online training and mentoring/coaching around:

- All knowledge/skill areas identified that are related to IPSP guidelines;
- Building up relationships when services don't identify the need for ISF support;
- Facilitating practical, ongoing training around SSPs;
- Facilitating orientation for new ISFs;
- Culturally sensitive practice;
- Resolving conflict; and
- Collaborating with ISAs/ISFs as equal partners to identify professional support needs of ISFs.

ACT PSC

1. Representation

The focus group represented the ISA and PSC from the one region in ACT.

2. Role of ISFs – general discussion

The following roles key were identified as part of the brainstorming session on role identification in relation to supporting child care services to provide quality, inclusive programs:

- Supporting children's services to provide inclusive policy and practice;
- Supporting services to provide quality care;
- Acting as an advocate for professional support;
- Identifying the service's professional support needs;
- Supporting services to engage in reflective practice; and
- Taking up the role of accidental counseling where and when appropriate.

3. Skills and Knowledge – general discussion

In relation to the above identified roles – the following key knowledge and skills were identified in relation to supporting child care services to provide quality, inclusive programs:

- Time management skills;
- Family centered practice;
- Mentoring skills;
- Leadership skills; and
- Good communication and conversation skills.

4. Professional Support Needs of ISFs

The ACT PSC, as the ISA manager, is closely connected to the provision of professional support needs for the ISFs. They have an annual action research project to support the professional support of ISFs. These include a professional support model of ongoing reflective practice, access to the annual training calendar, linkages with a panel of professional agencies and 4 connection hubs which enhance the professional referral, networking and collaboration roles of the ISFs to support services.

ACT ISF/ISA Focus Group

1. Representation

The focus group participants represented the majority of ISFs in the ACT ISA Region.

2. Role of ISFs – general discussion

The following roles key were identified as part of the brainstorming session on role identification in relation to supporting child care services to provide quality, inclusive programs:

- Acting as a mentor to services around inclusion;
- Linking services to the supports they need;
- Building the capacity of services to engage with families at different levels; and
- Building relationships with services.

3. Skills and Knowledge – general discussion

In relation to the above identified roles – the following key knowledge and skills were identified in relation to supporting child care services to provide quality, inclusive programs:

- Knowledge of professional boundaries;
- Knowledge of the governance structures of services;
- Thorough knowledge of the service and its local environment;
- Knowledge of working ethically within a workplace;
- Knowledge of diversity and difference;
- Emotional intelligence;
- Balance of your own personal/professional needs;
- High level listening and communication skills;
- Skills in mentoring and coaching services regarding inclusion; and
- Skills in empowering services to manage their own problems.

4. Discussion of the role of the ISF as identified through the research to date:

It was agreed that the seven roles identified to date through the research does reflect the roles expressed in the discussions. The following knowledge, skills and professional support needs were identified as part of the discussion about each role:

I. Identify policy and practices that facilitate inclusion of children with additional needs in child care settings:
- Thorough knowledge of the EYLF.

II. Assist child care services to develop, implement and sustain inclusive policies and practices:
- Good listening skills;
- Being able to manage paperwork;
- Knowledge of service policy development;

- Ability to identify good written policies in relation to inclusion;
- Thorough understanding of QA;
- Ability to recognize non inclusive practice; and
- Ability to link EYLF to service practice in relation to inclusion.

What is beyond the ISF role?

- High staff turnover;
- Different skill level within services; and
- Attitudes to inclusion.

III. Respond to referrals and requests for inclusion support from services, PSC and IPSUs:
- Knowledge of the local community;
- Knowledge of accreditation;
- Skills in using a strengths based approaches with services;
- Being able to "sell our services";
- Highly developed working relationships with services; and
- Skills in assertive communication.

IV. Assist services to develop SSPs:
- ISFs are doing the new SSP and sharing their practice with each other to refine process.

V. Assist services to link with relevant community services, groups and organisations:

What are the professional support needs of this role?

- Orientation for new ISFs; and
- Keeping up to date with support networks and agencies.

VI. Support services to work in partnership with families and local support networks:
- Orientation for new ISFs.

VII. Assist services to identify their professional support needs and opportunities in conjunction with the PSC and IPSU:
- Communicating the PSC role in relation to professional support to services.

5. Professional Support – the Role of the PSC in Providing Professional Support to ISFs

In particular, professional support identified included continuation of the action research approach including mentoring/coaching around:

- Looking after yourself as a professional;

- Teamwork;
- Networking;
- Roles of PSC/ISF/IPSU; and
- Broad policy in relation to inclusion.

Victoria PSC

1. Representation

The focus group had representation from PSC and three PSSPs.

2. Role of the ISAs – discussion

The following key roles were identified as part of the brainstorming session on role identification in relation to supporting child care services to provide quality, inclusive programs:

- Capacity building with services to identify and practice inclusion;
- Provision of information to services in relation to inclusion; and
- Mentoring services in relation to inclusion.

3. Skills and Knowledge Required – discussion

In relation to the above identified roles – the following key knowledge and skills were identified in relation to supporting child care services to provide quality, inclusive programs:

- High level knowledge of early childhood and middle childhood development and programming; and
- Critical reflection – skills for themselves and to support services to reflect on their practice.

4. Professional Support Needs of ISFs

The PSC in Victoria has developed a model for professional support provision in Victoria. It has facilitated the development of 7 ISF networks across the state, facilitated by a PSSP. Professional support needs are identified and provided through these networks. ISFs have access to a range of professional support training, and follow-up mentoring is provided by another PSSP to ISFs on request. Areas to build on were identified as follows:

- Knowledge of what professional support is and what it can provide for ISFs; and
- Coaching, mentoring and opportunities for practice and discussion at a high level in regards to inclusion, the principles underlying inclusion and the EYLF, Commonwealth policy and the evidence behind its direction, reflective practice, and cultural diversity – as it all relates to the role of the ISF in relation to working with service.

Victoria - ISF/ISA Focus Group

1. Representation

The focus group participants represented ISAs and ISFs from rural, regional and metropolitan Victoria.

2. Role of ISFs – general discussion

The following roles key were identified as part of the brainstorming session on role identification in relation to supporting child care services to provide quality, inclusive programs:

- Building respectful and trusting relationships with services in relation to inclusion;
- Support services to access the community/government supports they need;
- Act as a change agent for services in relation to inclusion;
- Disseminate information to services in relation to inclusion;
- Working with services to be self sufficient;
- Convey quality, inclusive programming and practice knowledge to services; and
- Undertake an accidental counseling role with services in relation to inclusion.

3. Skills and Knowledge – general discussion

In relation to the above identified roles – the following key knowledge and skills were identified in relation to supporting child care services to provide quality, inclusive programs:

- Thorough knowledge of all tools available to support services e.g. FSF, SSPs, bicultural support, specialist equipment;
- Knowledge of early childhood development;
- Knowledge of professional support and how it can support services;
- Knowledge of the range of additional needs and priority groups;
- Knowledge of up to date government policies and requirements;
- Knowledge in and the skills to apply strengths based approaches when working with services;
- Listening skills;
- Maturity;
- Skills in utilizing reflective practice; and
- Ability to step back and not provide all the answers.

4. Discussion of the Role of the ISF as Identified Through the Research to Date

It was agreed that the seven roles identified to date through the research does reflect the roles expressed in the discussions. The following knowledge, skills and professional support needs were identified as part of the discussion about each role:

I. Identify policy and practices that facilitate inclusion of children with additional needs in child care settings:

- Knowledge of the "big picture' in relation to inclusion and how it relates to services; and
- Understanding the role of the ISA in feeding down (osmosis) to ISFs all aspects of the big picture and how it relates to the ISF role.

II. Assist child care services to develop, implement and sustain inclusive policies and practices:
- Knowledge of what high level policy is at a service level;
- Role modeling best practice with services;
- Working more closely with services about policy;
- Referring services on when there are policy issues e.g. to PSC;
- Assist services to lift the bar in terms of service policy and practice; and
- Assist services to source PSC professional support.

What is beyond the ISF role?

- Time constraints; and
- Rejection from service management/proprietors.

What are the professional support needs for this role?

- High level professional support around what is good service policy.

III. Respond to referrals and requests for inclusion support from services, PSC and IPSUs:
- Knowledge of and skills in utilising strengths based approaches;
- Positive psychology;
- Promotional material about the role of ISF, ISA, PSC and PSSPs;
- Networking skills; and
- Building strong relationships with the coordinator/director – they are the doorkeeper to the service.

What is beyond the scope of the ISFs in this role?

- Increasing numbers of services;
- Limitation in funding which constrains the number of ISFs ;
- ISAs have to resort to waiting lists for services referrals; and
- Inability to build relationships with services due to funding constraints – priority goes to ISS applicants.

What are the professional support needs of this role?

- Promotional kits on IPSP roles.

IV. Assist services to develop SSPs
- Ability to use a strengths based approach with services;

- Knowledge and application of reflective practice; and
- Supporting services to have difficult conversations.

What are the professional support needs of this role?

- Familiarity with SSPs; and
- Implementing strengths based approaches.

V. Assist services to link with relevant community services, groups and organisations:

What are the professional support needs of this role?

- Knowledge and familiarisation of local state and national support organisations; and
- Promoting ISF role in relation to inclusion support with these organisations.

VI. Support services to work in partnership with families and local support networks:
- Thorough knowledge of local service system.

What are the professional support needs of this role?

- Family centered practice.

VII. Assist services to identify their professional support needs and opportunities in conjunction with the PSC and IPU:
- This role was not discussed due to time factors.

5. Professional Support – the Role of the PSC in Providing Professional Support to ISFs

It was generally agreed that the role of the PSC was to provide professional support in partnership with the ISA related to the role of the ISFs as defined by the Commonwealth IPSP Guidelines, and that generalist employment skills be provided by the ISF employers. In particular, professional support identified included:

- Tip Sheets on quality practice in relation to coaching, mentoring, strengths based approaches, empowerment;
- Website with links to broad, high level policy and practice – State, National and International;
- Clear understanding of the role of networks, PSCs and PSSP in relation to professional support; and
- Recognition of the high level and the different level of the role and skills/knowledge required of the ISFs in relation to supporting services and providing access to really high level professional support opportunities including online learning, discussion groups, tip sheets, mentoring and coaching targeting ISFs.

South Australia PSC

1. Representation

The focus group had representation PSC and three PSSPs.

2. Role of the ISFs - discussion

The following roles key were identified as part of the brainstorming session on role identification in relation to supporting child care services to provide quality, inclusive programs:

- Role modeling best practice in relation to inclusion;
- Fostering reflective practice in services;
- Facilitating access to professional support;
- Acting as a critical friend to services in relation to inclusion; and
- Mentoring services in relation to inclusion.

3. Skills and knowledge required –discussion

In relation to the above identified roles – the following key knowledge and skills were identified in relation to supporting child care services to provide quality, inclusive programs:

- Knowledge of the role of the PSC in professional support provision;
- Skills in building strong relationships with services at a room level and service level;
- Strengths based approaches;
- Thorough knowledge of the different service types;
- Knowledge of attachment and relationships;
- High level, up-to-date knowledge of good practice in relation to children and the rights of children;
- Knowledge of child centered, family centered, community centered practice;
- Knowledge about best practice in relation to inclusive practices – not what they know but how they work;
- Knowledge of the local service system;
- Skills to take up a leadership role with services in relation to the EYLF and inclusion; and
- Development of strong links with agencies.

4. Professional Support Needs of ISFs

The PSC in SA has developed a model for professional support provision in South Australia. It conducts an annual needs analysis, two network meetings annually and works closely with its two ISA managers across the 5 regions to identify the ISF professional support needs. It supports ISFs to attend conferences and links ISFs to professional support.
Areas to build on were identified as follows:

- Clarification of the role of professional support, the role of the PSC and the ISF in relation to professional support to services;
- Supporting services to identify and access PSC professional support opportunities;
- Assisting services to build a scaffold in relation to inclusion and identifying where they are within the inclusion continuum and how to provide relevant support to meet their different support needs along that journey;
- Educational change model;
- Cutting edge best policy and practice in relation to inclusion; and
- Ability to recognize different quality settings in relation to inclusion.

South Australia - ISF/ISA Focus Group

1. Representation

The focus group participants represented ISAs and ISFs from the five regions in SA including rural, regional and metropolitan SA.

2. Role of ISFs – general discussion

The following roles key were identified as part of the brainstorming session on role identification in relation to supporting child care services to provide quality, inclusive programs:

- Playing a support role with services;
- Building relationships between services, staff and families;
- Acting as a mentor with services;
- Support services to stop, reflect and empower services to facilitate inclusion;
- Role modeling best practice in relation to inclusion;

3. Skills and Knowledge – general discussion

In relation to the above identified roles – the following key knowledge and skills were identified in relation to supporting child care services to provide quality, inclusive programs:

- Knowledge of the child care environment;
- Knowledge of adult learning principles;
- Knowledge of child development;
- Knowledge of professional relationships;
- Active listening;
- Good organisational skills;
- Resilience;
- Expertise around priority groups;
- Knowledge of the child care system;
- Knowledge of the expertise around early intervention; and
- Knowledge of CALD and aboriginal cultures.

4. Discussion of the Role of the ISF as Identified Through the Research to Date

It was agreed that the seven roles identified to date through the research does reflect the roles expressed in the discussions. In addition to the seven roles identified by the research, it was also identified that the ISF have a key role in working directly with community support agencies so that they can respond to inclusion support needs. In addition, it was identified that as ISFs are often the only visiting friendly support people, there is often a need for ISFs to support the general practice of services providing quality child care practice.

The following knowledge, skills and professional support needs were identified as part of the discussion about each role:

I. Identify policy and practices that facilitate inclusion of children with additional needs in child care settings:

- Knowledge of the broad government policy in relation to inclusion and how it relates to services.

What is beyond the scope of the ISFs?

- Time constraints – unable to afford the luxury of familiarisation with policy – too busy on the ground with services.

What professional support needs do you need to help?

- Familiarization of big picture policy such as EYL;
- Opportunities to participate in EYLF professional support with services; and
- Opportunities to have discussions, critical analysis and break down broad policy principles, theory and values as it relates to child care services and the ISF capacity building role with services in relation to inclusion.

II. Assist services to develop SSPs:

- Ability to promote different conversations; and
- Thorough knowledge and understanding of the SSPs - their value, underpinning principles and capacity building strengths.

What are the professional support needs of this role?

- Lots more professional support needed around SSPs – they are the primary tool for inclusion;
- Tease out the SSP, understand its purpose and strength in supporting inclusion;
- Lots of sharing opportunities for successful/best practice approaches between ISFs – peer mentoring; and
- Examples of sharing best practice – case studies where an SSP has worked really well for a service.

III. Support services to work in partnership with families and local support networks:

- Thorough knowledge of local service system; and
- ISFs facilitate professional support with PSC.

What are the professional support needs of this role?

- Strengths based practice;
- Empowering services to develop links;
- How to identify where services are along the continuum of support and provide relevant support; and
- How to facilitate.

What is beyond the scope of the ISF?

- Families not buying in; and
- Services resisting local linkages.

IV. Assist services to identify their professional support needs and opportunities in conjunction with the PSC and IPU:
    - ISFs are a conduit to information and knowledge; and
    - Need to keep up to date with professional support opportunities for services.

5. Professional Support – the Role of the PSC in Providing Professional Support to ISFs

It was generally agreed that the role of the PSC was to provide professional support in partnership with the ISAs related to the role of the ISFs as defined by the Commonwealth IPSP Guidelines, and that generalist employment skills be provided by the ISF employers. In particular, professional support identified included working in partnership with ISAs to provide:

- Professional support around the underpinning principles and values around broad government policy as it relates to inclusion;
- Professional support around the EYLF with services, followed up by targeted ISF training, workshops, discussions and reflective/critical analysis opportunities related to the EYLF and what it means in relation to the ISF role in supporting inclusive practices at a service level;
- Professional support around the underpinning principles and values of the SSPs, their purpose and role in empowering services and how ISFs can plan to use SSPs effectively with services; and
- Opportunities to unpack skills such as facilitation, strengths based approaches, empowering services.

Western Australian PSC

1. Representation

The focus group had representation from the PSC

2. Role of the ISAs – discussion

The following roles key were identified as part of the brainstorming session on role identification in relation to supporting child care services to provide quality, inclusive programs:

- Capacity building of services;
- Eyes and ears for PSC in relation to professional support;
- Change agent for services; and
- Supporting services with SSPs in a similar way to as they supported AIR Plans.

3. Skills and Knowledge Required – discussion

In relation to the above identified roles – the following key knowledge and skills were identified in relation to supporting child care services to provide quality, inclusive programs:

- Cultural competency;
- Thorough knowledge of EYLF; and
- Understanding of the role of the PSC in relation to professional support and what it is able to provide to ISFs and services.

4. Professional Support Needs of ISFs

The PSC in WA has a close relationship with the ISAs and ISFs and work closely with them to identify the ISF professional support needs. It supports the ISA Alliance, supports ISFs to attend conferences, links ISFs to relevant professional support and buddies with PSCs to visit services. The PSC is planning to enhance their partnerships with the State Government to strengthen the 21 Hub groups across the State – initially through the EYLF rollout will provide the opportunity for a coordinated support response to services, and professional support needs of ISFs. Areas to build on were identified as follows:
- Orientation of the role of the ISF;
- Supporting services to identify and access PSC professional support opportunities; and
- Ability to recognize different quality settings in relation to inclusion.

Western Australia - ISF/ISA Focus Group

1. Representation

The focus group participants represented ISAs and ISFs from all the regions in WA including rural, regional and metropolitan WA.

2. Role of ISFs – general discussion

The following roles key were identified as part of the brainstorming session on role identification in relation to supporting child care services to provide quality, inclusive programs:

- Support services to stop, reflect and empower services to facilitate inclusion;
- Undertake a coaching role with services;
- Act on referrals and refer services on to additional supports;
- Link services with knowledge they need at a higher level – both for inclusion and more generally around quality practice;
- Promote the whole range of the IPSP with services and with support networks;
- Develop relationships with services;
- Mentor services in relation to inclusive policy and practice;
- Advocate for inclusion of children – with services and with agencies;
- Link with services and support networks at a local/regional level;
- Clarify the role of the PC, IPSU,ISA and ISF; and
- Inform/advocate for the broader child care program – particularly with therapists and support agencies.

3. Skills and Knowledge – general discussion

In relation to the above identified roles – the following key knowledge and skills were identified in relation to supporting child care services to provide quality, inclusive programs:

- Knowledge of child development;
- Knowledge of current policy and best practice in relation to inclusion;
- Knowledge of adult learning principles;
- Knowledge of cultural competency and the skills to support services to practice cultural competency;
- Ability to support services at different levels; and
- Good presentation skills.

4. Discussion of the Role of the ISF as Identified Through the Research to Date

It was agreed that the seven roles identified to date through the research does reflect the roles expressed in the discussions. The following knowledge, skills and professional support needs were identified as part of the discussion about each role:

I.   Identify policy and practices that facilitate inclusion of children with additional needs in child care settings:

- Research policy; and
- Promote self learning.

What is beyond the scope of the ISFs?

- Time constraints.

What professional support needs do you need to help?

- Professional support re policy developments;
- Time management;
- Research skills;
- Computer skills; and
- Discussions regarding policy at network meetings and staff meetings.

II.   Assist child care services to develop, implement and sustain inclusive policies and practices:

- Ability to step back, assist services to reflect and solve problems;
- Undertake promotional visits to explain role of ISFs;
- Prioritise services with high support needs;
- Recognise where services are at in relation to the inclusion continuum;
- Delegate, link services to other supports; and
- Ability to deal with crises situations.

What is beyond the scope of the ISF?

- "Caseload"; and
- Revolving door industry.

Professional support needs:

- Ongoing opportunities to understand, practice and evaluate reflective practice;
- Utilizing different support approaches to meet different inclusion skill levels of services; and
- Working strategically with services.

III.   Assist services to develop SSPs:

- Allocate time to go thoroughly through an SSP.

5. Professional Support – the Role of the PSC in Providing Professional Support to ISFs

It was generally agreed that the role of the PSC was to provide professional support in partnership with the ISAs related to the role of the ISFs as defined by the Commonwealth IPSP Guidelines, and that generalist employment skills be provided by the ISF employers. In particular, professional support identified included working in partnership with ISAs to provide:

- Opportunity to access additional professional support around core skill and knowledge areas identified in this focus group discussion – particularly around coaching, mentoring, reflective practice and empowerment;
- Follow that up with real opportunities to share best practice, mistakes and learnings at a peer level and through newsletters, tip sheets and online learning modules; and
- Greater access to international and national best practice as it relates to inclusion.

NSW PSC

1. Representation

The focus group had representation from the PSC and PSSP that provides professional support to ISFs.

2. Role of the ISAs – discussion

The following roles key were identified as part of the brainstorming session on role identification in relation to supporting child care services to provide quality, inclusive programs:

- Facilitating positive change with services;
- Acting as a coach and mentor with services;
- Assisting services to articulate and work towards a vision in relation to inclusion; and
- Coach and mentor services.

3. Skills and Knowledge Required – discussion

In relation to the above identified roles – the following key knowledge and skills were identified in relation to supporting child care services to provide quality, inclusive programs:

- Knowledge of the underpinning evidence base behind coaching and mentoring – coaching psychology, strengths based training;
- Undertaking research in relation to own professional support;
- Understanding of the theory of change; and
- Coaching and mentoring techniques.

4. Professional Support Needs of ISFs

The PSC in NSW has contracted one PSSP to provide professional support to ISFs. The PSSP has a close relationship with the ISAs and ISFs, undertakes training analysis and evaluations and provides "response to need" professional support to common needs (such as EYLF) as well as to individual/groups of ISAs. The PSC is planning to provide increased opportunities to ISFs to access professional support provided to services on the basis of undertaking analysis as to the implications of this professional support on their role as ISFs. Professional support needs identified included:

- Orientation of the role of the ISF as part of the IPSP;
- Knowledge of the priority groups;
- Collaborative role of the PSC and ISA in relation to professional support of ISFs; and
- Critical reflection of an individual ISF in their role with supporting services.

NSW - ISF/ISA Focus Group

1. Representation

The focus group participants represented ISAs and ISFs from remote, rural, regional and metropolitan ISFs/ISAs.

2. Role of ISFs – general discussion

The following roles key were identified as part of the brainstorming session on role identification in relation to supporting child care services to provide quality, inclusive programs:

- ISFs are the knowledge link for services;
- ISFs need to be able to filter information so that it is relevant to the services needs in relation to inclusion;
- ISFs act as a mirror to services to reflect on their practice;
- ISFs build a positive relationship with services which is fundamental to their work in relation to inclusion support;
- Act as a critical friend to services;
- Act as a negotiator, coach and mentor;
- Facilitate change/act as a change agent with services;
- Encourage creativity and innovation in relations to inclusion;
- Inspire confidence in the service in relation to inclusion; and
- Act as a neutral person with services.

3. Skills and knowledge – general discussion

In relation to the above identified roles – the following key knowledge and skills were identified in relation to supporting child care services to provide quality, inclusive programs:

- Knowledge of and skills in reflective practice;
- Local area knowledge;
- Knowledge of the demographics of the region;
- Confidence in your own knowledge and skills;
- Ability to take responsibility for your own learning and professional support;
- Good listener, strategic questioner, communicator;
- Ability to reflect on your own practice and life skills;
- Analyse information and filter it appropriately for service support;
- Ability to diffuse emotional situations and translate the inclusion issues back to services in a positive, objective manner;
- Thorough knowledge of the child care sector; and
- Ability to identify what you don't know and follow-up to provide services with information they may need.

4. Discussion of the Role of the ISF as Identified Through the Research to Date

It was agreed that the seven roles identified to date through the research do reflect the roles expressed in the discussions. However, it was emphasised that the word "quality" needed to be included in the role statements and that an additional role was monitoring and managing additional inclusion support resources in line with IPSP guidelines. The following knowledge, skills and professional support needs were identified as part of the discussion about each role:

I.   Identify policy and practices that facilitate inclusion of children with additional needs in child care settings:
   - Responsibility for self learning;
   - Having an education base in relation to learning; and
   - Accessing relevant broad policy and evidence in relation to inclusion.

   What is beyond the scope of the ISFs?

   - Inconsistent access to the 'big picture' policy/evidence base.

   What professional support needs do you need to help?

   - Policy developments.

II.   Assist child care services to develop, implement and sustain inclusive policies and practices
   - Ability to step back, assist services to reflect and solve problems;
   - Have realistic expectations of change and support, endorse services in their positive small steps along the way; and
   - Utilise the SSP as a tool for opening up discussion and supporting services to sustain inclusion progress.

   Professional support needs:

   - Utilising the SSP as a tool to support inclusive practices; and
   - Accessing and understanding what best practice inclusive service policy can look like.

III.   Assist services to develop SSPs:
   - Assist services to link policy and practice;
   - Build a dynamic link between the SSP and the services policy and practices in relation to inclusion; and
   - Valuing, communicating and championing the role of the SSP in facilitating inclusion within services.

   What is beyond the scope of the ISF?

- SSP should be a measurable indicator in QA.

What are the professional support needs?

- Opportunity to share skills, experience and best practice in relation to utilizing SSPs with services;
- Global education on the value of SSPs with services, ISFs and all support agencies; and
- Opportunities to self reflect on how ISFs are working with SSPs.

5. Professional Support – the Role of the PSC in Providing Professional Support to ISFs

It was generally agreed that the role of the PSC was to provide professional support in partnership with the ISAs related to the role of the ISFs as defined by the Commonwealth IPSP Guidelines, and that generalist employment skills be provided by the ISF employers. In particular, professional support identified included working in partnership with ISAs to provide:

- Opportunity to access additional professional support around core skill and knowledge areas identified in this focus group discussion – particularly around coaching, mentoring, reflective practice and empowerment; and
- Follow that up with real opportunities to share best practice, mistakes and learnings at a peer level and through newsletters, tip sheets and online learning modules; and
- Greater access to international and national best practice as it relates to inclusion.

NT ISF/ISA/PSC Focus Group

1. Representation

The focus group participants represented the NT PSC, ISAs and ISFs from remote, rural, regional and metropolitan ISFs/ISAs that make up the two ISA NT Regions.

The PSC for NT is Child Australia which is the PSC for WA and NT. The PSC works closely with the two ISAs – Early Childhood Australia (Nth) and Children's Services Support (Sth) to identify, provide and evaluate professional support for ISFs across NT.

2. Role of ISFs – general discussion

The following roles key were identified as part of the brainstorming session on role identification in relation to supporting child care services to provide quality, inclusive programs:

- ISFs are negotiators, coaches and mentors;
- ISFs need to be solutions focused;
- ISFs work within the QA framework which is fundamental to inclusion;
- OSFs empower services to initiate contact with families in relation to inclusion; and
- ISFs build relationships between parents, support networks, support agencies, other services, service coordinators and directors and the people on the floor with children.

3. Skills and knowledge – general discussion

In relation to the above identified roles – the following key knowledge and skills were identified in relation to supporting child care services to provide quality, inclusive programs:

- ISFs need cross cultural knowledge – there is a huge range of customs, beliefs and cultures across the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. ISFs need to listen, learn and respect this diversity and then support services to promote inclusion. There are many basic practices that provide challenges for inclusion for services in these communities;
- ISFs need to practice and promote reflective practice;
- ISFs need to sell and promote inclusion; and
- ISFs need opportunities for peer support and team building.

4. Discussion of the role of the ISF as identified through the research to date:

It was agreed that the seven roles identified to date through the research do reflect the roles expressed in the discussions. However, it was also seen as important that ISFs work directly with local support networks that can provide ongoing local resources and support to services in relation to inclusion. ISFs have limited ability to visit services directly, and need to assist in building the local support system around services.

The following knowledge, skills and professional support needs were identified as part of the discussion one key role:

    I.   Assist services to develop, implement and sustain inclusive policy and practices:

- Inclusion awareness and understanding – what does inclusion look like in different settings?
- Cross cultural competency;
- Observation skills – the child care environment;
- Being able to read between the lines;
- Identify triggers to understand where services are at in relation to inclusion;
- Reflective practice;
- Confidence; and
- Community development understanding and skills.

What is beyond the scope of the ISFs?

- The cultural differences with a community.

What professional support needs do you need to help?

- High level, continuous accessible professional support on the principles, values and theories behind inclusion, Commonwealth policy and the ISF role;
- High level, continuous, accessible professional support on the theories behind the skills and knowledge that are needed to work effectively as ISFs;
- Opportunities to access a broad range of follow-up each professional support theoretical session;
- Follow-up needs to include discussion, coaching, peer mentoring, specialist mentoring and reflective practice;
- Opportunities to access to specialist knowledge and understanding of the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in relation to inclusion;
- Opportunities to access international and national best practice in relation to inclusion; and
- Opportunities to access high quality experienced PSSPs and other agencies that specialise in professional support to ISFs across Australia.

5.   Professional Support – the Role of the PSC in Providing Professional Support to ISFs

It was generally agreed that the primary responsibility of the ISAs is to provide professional support to ISFs as employees and that generalist employment skills should be provided by the ISAs. The PSCs should work in partnership with the ISAs to develop a suite of PD that is accessible and appropriate to

meet local ISF needs, and provide greater access to international and national best practice and professional support expertise as it relates to inclusion.

APPENDIX 2 Competency mapping

IDENTIFIED SKILL/KNOWLEDGE AREAS AS PER RESEARCH PROCESS	CHC08 Title	CHCO8 Code
FUNDAMENTAL KNOWLEDGE AREAS		
Knowledge in the underlying principles and practices of inclusion	Advocate for the rights of and needs of children and young people Support community participation and inclusion Assess competence	CHCCN520C CHCDIS410A TAAASS402C
Broad Commonwealth policy and its underpinning values and evidence base in relation to inclusion, including the National Social Inclusion Agenda, The National Quality Agenda and the Early Years Learning Framework	**Not identified**	
The Commonwealth Child Care Program – its underlying principles, purpose, what it can provide for families and the services they utilise	**Not identified**	
The IPSP program – its underlying principles, purpose, what professional support is and what it can be, the roles of the various components and the requirements of the ISF role within the IPSP guidelines	**Not identified**	
Pedagogy –including early childhood and middle childhood development, priority groups, adult learning principles, professional support, role modeling, action learning frameworks, strengths based and capacity building approaches, family centered practice, professionalism, cultural competency, reflective practice and high quality service policy and practice	Analyse and apply education and training information Support behavior of children and young people Recognise stages of lifespan development	CHCCDP403B CHCCCHILD301A CHCLD315A

The socio demographic features of their ISA region, in particular of the priority groups within that region	**Not identified**	
The national, regional and local support system - knowledge of interagency communities and collaboration and principles of partnership	**Refer partnership section below**	
Eligible child care services within the region, their governance & staffing structures, their inclusive policy and practices and the legal framework in which they operate.	**Not identified**	
INCLUSION		
Cross cultural competency	Facilitate the inclusion of children with additional needs Value diversity Manage diversity	CHCSD611C PSPGOV408A PSPMNGT605B
Advocating for and promote the rights of and inclusion of young children /their families	Work within a child inclusive framework Support the development of children Promote the ethical understandings of children Support inclusive practice in the workplace Promote the safety, well being and welfare of children, young people and their families Advocate for the rights and needs of children and young people Promote ethical understanding of children	CHCFAM802A CHCFC301A CHCFC520C CHCCS310A CHCCHILD403B CHCCN520C CHCFC520C
Promotion of evidence to advance high quality policy and	Support the development of children	CHCFC301A

practice	Contribute to effective governance in the community sector	CHCMGT601A
Linking inclusion policy with practice and practice with professional support	Operate referral procedures	CHCCS407B
	Work effectively with carers /families in complex situations	CHCCM705A
	Support inclusive practice in the workplace	CHCCS310A
	Implement and promote inclusive policies and practices in children's services	CHCIC511A
	Participate in policy development	CHCPOL301B
	Contribute to policy development	CHCPOL402B
	Access evidence and apply in practice	CHCPIL501B
	Use research evidence to advance policy and practice	CHCPOLL701A
Foster learning and development in early and middle childhood.	Support the development of children	CHCFC301A
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT		
Facilitate workplace change and innovation	Facilitate workplace change and innovation	CHCORG501A
	Work within a community development framework	CHCCD412A
	Develop and implement community development strategies	CHCCD615A
	Support community action	
	Work within organization and government structures to enable community development outcomes	CHCCD509C

	Work effectively in an education team	CHCCD516A
	Act as a resource to other services	CHCED314A
	Coordinate and facilitate a change process	CHCORG621C
Fostering independence	Facilitate skill development and maintenance	CHCDIS405A
Coaching and motivation	Identify and use strengths based practice	CHCFAM417B
	Provide coaching and motivation	CHCORG529B
	Act as a resource to workers	CHCSD512C
	Facilitate work – based learning	TAADEL404B
	Foster and promote an inclusive learning culture	TAADENV402B
Providing strategic leadership	Provide strategic leadership	CHCMGT803A
	Facilitate and monitor contact	CHCCONS402B
	Develop a service delivery strategy	CHCCS512B
	Lead and develop others in a community sector workplace	CHCORG611A
	Manage Risk	PSPMNG T608B
PARTNERSHIP		
Support and facilitate services to link with community agencies	Support community participation	CHCCD401D
	Support community resources	CHCCD307C
	Work effectively within the community sector	CHCCS411A

Establish and maintain cross sectorial partnerships	Use targeted communication skills to build relationships	
	Participate in networks	CHCNET301D
	Establish and maintain effective networks	CHCNET404A
	Facilitate links with other services	CHCNET404A
	Develop new networks	CHCNET503A
	Work effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people	HEALTHIR404B
	Work effectively with culturally and linguistically diverse clients and co workers	HEALTHIR403B
Supporting services to develop relationships across the child care environment	Support community participation and inclusion	CHCDIS322A
EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS	**Facets identified**	**Equivalent Qualification summary**
Communication	• Listening to and understanding complex service needs • Reading and interpreting workplace related documentation • Writing to address audience needs	

	• Interpreting the needs of services by analysis of information provided through assessment • Applying numeracy skills to workplace requirements • Establishing and using networks with a broad range of specialist services • Sharing information and knowledge as a senior practitioner with other colleagues and specialist services • Negotiating responsively with services , colleagues and specialist services • Persuading effectively with service providers • Being appropriately assertive • Empathising with services	
Teamwork	• Working as an individual and team member • Working with diverse individuals and groups • Applying knowledge of own role as part of a team • Applying teamwork skills to a range of situations • Identifying and utilizing the strengths of other team members • Giving feedback, coaching and mentoring	
Problem solving	• Developing practical and creative solutions to workplace problems • Showing initiative and independence in identifying problems • Solving problems individually or in teams • Applying a range of strategies in problem solving • Using numeracy skills such as time management to solve problems • Testing assumptions and taking context into account	

Planning and organizing	• Collecting, analyzing and organizing information • Using basic business systems for planning and organizing • Being appropriately resourceful with internal and external agencies/supports) • Participate in continuous improvement and planning processes • Working within and establishing clear work goals and deliverables • Managing time and priorities • Adapting resource allocations to cope with contingencies	
Self management	• Being self motivated • Articulating own ideas and vision • Balancing own ideas and values and vision with workplace values and requirements • Monitoring and evaluating own performance • Taking responsibility at the appropriate level	
Learning	• Being open to learning, ideas and techniques • Learning in a range of settings including informal learning • Participating in ongoing learning • Learning in order to accommodate change • Learning new emerging skills and techniques • Taking responsibility for own learning • Contributing to the learning of others • Applying a range of learning approaches • Developing own learning pathways • Developing own learning plans	
Technology	• Using technology and related workplace equipment	

	• Using basic technology skills to organize data • Adapting to new technology skill requirements • Applying OHS knowledge	
Initiative and enterprise	• Adapting to new situations • Being creative in response to workplace challenges • Identifying opportunities that might not be obvious to others • Generating a range of options in relation to workplace matters • Translating ideas into action • Developing innovative solutions • 'Developing a strategic, creative, long term vision	