

## Queensland Association of Special Education Leaders

### Early Childhood Development Program Position Statement: August 2018



#### Position Summary:

1. The Queensland Association of Special Education Leaders (QASEL) recommends that the Queensland State Government immediately guarantee the long-term continuation of Early Childhood Development Programs (ECDPs) without an unnecessary review.
2. QASEL recommends that the Department of Education include ECDP in all grants, staffing, facilities and funding methodologies.
3. QASEL recommends that the Department of Education review the classification of all ECDP Heads of Special Education Services (HOSES).
4. QASEL recommends that the Department of Education review all of the resourcing methodologies currently in place for ECDPs.

#### Background:

QASEL is the peak professional association for Special Education Leaders in Queensland.

QASEL is committed to the continuation, growth and development of a range of valued Special Education programs and services that exist across Queensland including Special Education Programs (SEPs), Special Schools and ECDPs.

QASEL acknowledges that early intervention services are the responsibility of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), as agreed by the Council of Australian Governments and under the NDIS (Support for Participants) Rules 2013 (Cth). QASEL acknowledges that the current Queensland Government and the Australian Federal Government have signed a bilateral agreement to support this.

QASEL acknowledges that there are currently transition arrangements in place for early childhood early intervention services in Queensland that ensure ECDPs will continue to operate in Queensland until 2020, funded by the Department of Education.

QASEL understands that the first pilot for centre based Early Childhood Intervention in Queensland began in 1978 at WR Black / Chelmer Children's Home. In 1979 four SEDUs (Special Education Development Units – later to be renamed ECDPs) were established at Acacia Ridge, Barooka Special School (later moved to Kenmore), Mt Gravatt West and Aspley. In 1987, there were 39 SEDU's in Queensland and by 1990 that number had grown to 54. Today there are currently 100 ECDP programs operating across the state.

#### Timeline of significant events:

##### **March 2016:**

- Townsville ECDP parents and caregivers are provided with a handout called *Department of Education and Training (DET) and the NDIS (early launch)* which states, "Under the NDIS Act (2013), early Intervention services, which are currently the responsibility of the department, will gradually transfer to the NDIS'.

- A group of parents and caregivers with children attending ECDPs (later to identify as the *Save the ECDPs Team*) from Brisbane and Townsville start a *Change.org* petition calling for the Minister for Education, Tourism and Major Events, The Honourable Kate Jones, to “*Save our ECDPs*” . The petition quickly exceeds 31 000 signatures.
- The *Save the ECDPs Team* continue to lobby local, state and federal governments. Their advocacy attracts significant and sustained radio and print media attention.
- On Sunday, March 27, 2016, Minister Jones issued a media statement entitled, *Early Childhood Development Programs to remain open until 2020*, which states that:
  - Early Childhood Development Programs will continue to support children with disability until 2020.
  - The Turnbull Government was withdrawing funding to Queensland’s ECDPs as part of the transition to the NDIS.
  - “*We do not want any child with a disability to be further disadvantaged as part of the transition to NDIS.*”
  - “*ECDPs do an incredible job in helping prepare children with disability for life at school.*”
  - “*This will give families an additional 12 months of early intervention services and ensure no child is disadvantaged.*”
  - “*Children will continue to receive support from Early Childhood Development Programs until they transition to school or to new providers under the NDIS.*”
  - “*Ensuring ECDPs remain open until 2020 will provide further certainty for Queenslanders following the signing of the Bilateral Agreement.*”

#### **April 2016:**

- The Queensland Teachers Union (QTU) release a statement strongly supporting the continuation of ECDPs.
- QASEL publish an interim position statement on the *National Disability Insurance Scheme Implementation across Queensland and Implications for ECDPs*. This statement:
  - Advocates for the continuation and enhancement of ECDP programs, valuing the educational programs developed and implemented by teachers with specific disability knowledge and skills, supported by Teacher Aides.
  - Raises concerns about the career and wellbeing impact on teachers and staff currently working in ECDPs.
  - Highlights the work the ECDPs currently do to enhance the successful transition to Prep for young people with disability or suspected disability.
  - Highlights that ECDPs provide a valued service to young people with disability or suspected disability who may not be supported through NDIS.
  - Values the support ECDPs give parents and caregivers at their first entry point to the education system.
- The *Save the ECDPs Team* continue to lobby, and the continuation of ECDPs is raised in state parliament by the Shadow Minister for Education.
- On Wednesday, April 20, 2016, Minister Jones issues a further media statement entitled, *Minister commits to review Queensland’s ECDPs in 2020*, which states that:

- The long-term requirement for Early Childhood Development Programs in Queensland will be reassessed in 2020 after the full roll-out of the NDIS.
- ECDPs would continue to operate as they are now including enrolling new children.
- *“ECDPs have a vital role in preparing young children with disability or developmental delay for life at school.*
- *“ECDPs educate children with the life-skills they need to succeed at school and later life.*
- *“Parents have made it clear to me they do not want to lose this service as a result of the transition to NDIS.*
- *“In 2020 we will be in a better position to reassess how successful the transition to NDIS has been and whether ECDP services are required long term.”*

#### **June 2016:**

- The Queensland Chapter of Early Childhood Intervention Australia (ECIA), host a public forum featuring; Peter De Natris, strategic adviser to the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA), Meg Quinn Director, State Schools - Disability and Inclusion, Trish Hannah ECIA National President and Kevin Bates QTU. Over 200 people attended and hundreds more followed on social media and video.

#### **2018:**

- ECDPs celebrate 40 years of service in Queensland. ECIA QLD host a celebration dinner to mark this achievement, on 24 February 2018.
- The Department of Education’s OnePortal site currently provides the following advice:

#### **Early Childhood Development Programs and NDIS**

(<https://intranet.ged.qld.gov.au/Students/LearningandDisabilitySupport/NDIS>)

The Queensland Government has committed to keeping Early Childhood Development Programs operational until 2020, a year later than the NDIS full implementation. This will provide certainty for families and staff during the NDIS transition. The future arrangements of Early Childhood Development Programs (ECDPs) will be reviewed in 2020. ECDPs will continue to accept new registrations during this time.

The NDIS has developed an early childhood early intervention approach. The details of this approach are available on the NDIS website.

#### **Research:**

The benefits of Early Childhood Intervention is universally recognised and clearly documented in research literature both nationally and internationally.

Hattie, (2009) identifies early interventions as being in the *zone of desired effects*. Stating that *“early intervention programs are more effective if they are structured and intense ... and their effect accrues similarly for students at risk, disabled, and special education students”* (p 58). Critically, Hattie concludes that early interventions are most effective when highly structured and run by well-trained staff, as is the case in ECDPs across Queensland.

The positive impact of early interventions on the development and well-being of vulnerable children in general are well recognised by the international community (World Health Organization & UNICEF, 2012). *'The provision of comprehensive early intervention services and supports for children with established developmental delays continues to be a high priority in virtually all high resource countries throughout the world.'* (Guralnick, 2015).

The Australian Government's Literature review of the impact of early childhood education and care on learning and development (2015) states that:

*Early educational intervention has been shown to have a substantial short-term and long-term effect on cognition, social and emotional development, school progress, antisocial behaviour and even crime. Both Australian and international studies have shown that children's literacy and numeracy skills at age 4–5 are a good predictor of academic achievement in primary school. As a result, policies and programs that focus on the early years can only enhance educational outcomes for children. (p25)*

The review goes on to acknowledge that, children in special needs groups, including those with disability, are not only more likely to be developmentally vulnerable but are also less likely to participate in early childhood education and care. (p 17)

High quality early intervention in the first three years for disadvantaged children leads to benefits for cognitive, language and social development. Low-quality childcare produces either no benefit or negative effects (Baxter & Hand 2013; Melhuish 2004).

Early childhood intervention boosts children's confidence and social skills, which provides a better foundation for success at school. Reviews of research infer that this focus on improved social skills and motivation leads to a reduction in school failure and higher educational achievement. Studies into adulthood indicate that this educational success is followed by increased success in employment, social integration and, sometimes, reduced criminality. The findings on disadvantage are seen elsewhere and are the basis of policy initiatives all over the world (Melhuish 2004; Young & Richardson 2007).

What is not clearly researched and understood, at this point in time, is the impact the NDIS will have upon the quality of early intervention services. Marchbank's, (2017) article on the transition to a *'user pays'* model of early intervention raises concern about the competing priorities of family centred practice in an environment where services are *'commodified'*. Brien, Page and Berman (2017) question the readiness of external early childhood intervention providers to effectively collaborate with both parents / caregivers and mainstream early childhood educators. This collaborative work has been the cornerstone of our ECDPs in Queensland for over 40 years.

The Queensland Government, Department of Education Policy Statement on Inclusive Education sets out the principles that guide the work toward a more inclusive state education system. The policy highlights the importance of strengthening options for parents and caregivers. Not only are ECDPs clearly a valued option for parents and caregivers but they strongly support the key priorities of *effective transitions* and *collaboration with families and community*, set out in the policy.

In summary, it would seem reasonable to conclude from the research examined, that the early intervention provided by ECDPs continues to align with contemporary thinking, policy and research both nationally and internationally. Further, the research suggests that programs, such as those offered in our ECDPs, clearly contribute to the ongoing success of the students who access them and this has a positive long term cost benefit when considering whole of life impact on our learners.

## **Recommendations:**

### **1. QASEL recommends that the Queensland State Government immediately guarantee the long-term continuation of Early Childhood Development Programs (ECDPs) without an unnecessary review.**

QASEL believes that the maintenance of ECDPs will ensure that all current and future children who attend these programs will continue to benefit from the expertise of the specialist, Department of Education, Teachers and Guidance Officers that support them. Investing in ECDPs has a clear long-term cost benefit across government and community sectors and should remain the core business of state schooling.

QASEL believes that it is not an effective use of public funds to review the continuation of ECDPs in Queensland. The parent and caregiver community, QTU and QASEL have clearly articulated the value of ECDPs and this is supported by current research in the field. Any funds set aside for this review could be redirected to supporting enhancements of this valued program.

QASEL believes that valued and current information about the effectiveness of ECDPs across the state is already available from the School Improvement Unit (SIU) as part of the well-established school review process.

QASEL strongly agrees with Minster Jones' previous statements that:

- *“ECDPs have a vital role in preparing young children with disability or developmental delay for life at school.*
- *“ECDPs do an incredible job in helping prepare children with disability for life at school.”*

Queensland is unique in that it is the only state which provides early intervention services from an education perspective, provided by teachers and supported by school guidance officers. While other therapy and medical interventions are valued their purpose and role differ significantly from ECDPs. No other intervention service or external service provider can offer the programs offered in our ECDPs. The Department of Education in Queensland is leading the nation in this field and should invest in continuing to do so.

QASEL believes that an immediate guarantee would also serve to provide certainty to the families of young children with disability across the state. Not only would this prevent future unwanted media attention, which serves only to distract those working in the field and raise anxiety for an already vulnerable parent and caregiver population, but would ensure that parents, caregivers and educators in ECDPs could continue to work in partnership toward providing quality educational programs.

QASEL believes that this immediate guarantee would provide career certainty and job security to Heads of Special Education Services (HOSSES), teachers and teacher-aides currently working in ECDPs. This security would not only alleviate considerable anxiety and support wellbeing but also provide a certain career path for those already working in or considering a career in ECDPs. By providing this clarity, Principals and school leaders could once again focus on building the capacity and capability of staff toward ensuring that every child is succeeding in ECDPs.

### **2. QASEL recommends that the Department of Education include ECDP in all grants, staffing, facilities and funding methodologies.**

Currently ECDP students, and by extension ECDP teachers, are excluded from a range of department appropriations such as: *Investing for Success I4S, IT Support Staff Grant and*

*the ICT Supplementary Grant*. This not only disadvantages ECDPs but also the schools that host them as they have to make up the funding short fall.

QASEL believes that in a truly inclusive system, all students' and children's learning should be equally valued and all resources should be made available to children, students and their teachers.

The *Review of Education for Students with Disability in Queensland State Schools* states that "*Ensuring that every signal that the Department sends to the schooling community is reinforcing of both these minimum standards (DDA and DSE) and expectations that exist to transcend them is critical to the improvement of students outcomes.*" (Deloitte, 2017 p61). QASEL believes that including ECDP children and staff in all appropriations is an opportunity for the department to send a strong signal about inclusion.

### **3. QASEL recommends that the Department of Education review the classification of all ECDP Heads of Special Education Services (HOSES).**

QASEL believes that the current banding and classification of ECDP HOSES fails to recognise the complexity and work value of the position.

Significant complexities that affect the HOSES role include:

- High annual growth and the constant fluidity, as children and families are supported to access inclusive education environments, requires the HOSES to be constantly, actively managing physical and human resources in order to achieve successful learning outcomes for children.
- To support successful transitions in and out of the ECDP, HOSES need to build and maintain numerous community partnerships in the Early Childhood Sector and with local kindergartens, childcare centres, private service providers, primary and special schools.
- Given the ECDP are the first point of contact for many parents and caregivers with children recently diagnosed with disability, a high level of parent and caregiver support and engagement is required to create effective partnerships.

### **4. QASEL recommends that the Department of Education review all of the resourcing methodologies currently in place for ECDPs .**

The current resourcing methodology for ECDPs is based on student data at the August download of the previous school year. Often by the beginning of the next school year enrolment numbers have significantly changed. QASEL believes that this resourcing model is not responsive to the ever-changing needs in ECDPs.

The enrolment patterns of ECDP are far less stable than other programs. Resources calculated from the student numbers in August of the previous school year means that effectively resources for November could be based on data taken 15 months earlier.

QASEL believes that a more responsive and flexible model with several update points during a school year would allow school to make more effective use of available resources.

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