

Change Management in Early Childhood Education and Care

Change is an inevitable and necessary part of working in early childhood education and care. Educators will be well equipped to survive change by understanding the process of change, being prepared for change and implementing change in a positive and professional manner.

With the National Quality Reform Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care being phased in over the coming years the sector is facing continuous change which will require strong leadership at all levels to ensure the reforms are implemented successfully. The reforms have been developed in the context of the major changes in relation to the Council of Australian Government (COAG). The Reforms include::

- *the introduction of the national Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and the Framework for School Age Care*
- *a new quality standard in seven areas: educational program and practice; children's wellbeing, health and safety; physical environment; staffing arrangements, including child-to-staff ratios and qualification levels; relationships, collaborative partnerships with families and communities; leadership and service quality*
- *enhanced regulatory arrangements, which propose a new national system that eliminates duplication with states responsible for regulation and quality*
- *a quality rating system with five levels: unsatisfactory, meeting operating level requirements, meets national quality standard, high quality and excellent*

Being prepared for Change

Leaders will need to consider the following:

- Understand that some educators respond differently to change
- Be sensitive to individual reactions to impending change
- Ensure families are aware of the reform requirements and why these have been mandated

Example 1:

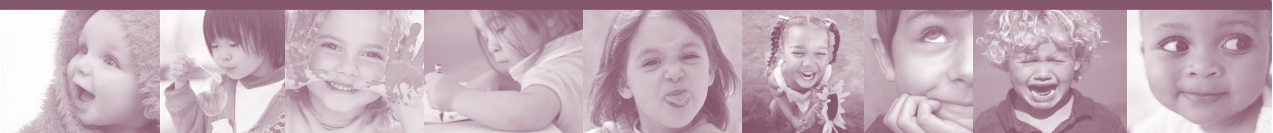
An experienced educator without a formal qualification may be fearful of commencing study to gain a qualification which is a requirement of the National Quality Reform Agenda. In this case, the leader may need to provide support to the educator by seeking training options, any financial support available, providing ongoing mentorship through study groups or 'buddy' system etc.

Example 2:

The cost of care may have alter in order for the changes to be implemented. In this case, the leader will need to ensure that families remain informed about the requirements of the National Quality Reform Agenda and the action undertaken by the service and the positive impact of the changes in respect of the provision of education and care for children. Careful financial planning will be necessary.

Example 3:

Educators may feel the change requirements of the early years learning framework is a reflection on their competence or challenge their professional identity in terms of skills and knowledge. In this case, the leader will need to support educators— acknowledging what they do, build the possibilities of improved outcomes for children and that their efforts will be supported.



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STRATEGIES FOR LEADERS IN PLANNING/MANAGING CHANGE

The leader must:

- Have a good understanding of the changes
- Be able to communicate the change requirements clearly and honestly—oral and written
- Provide educators with copies of documents or summary of the changes required to ensure they become familiar with the changes and the timelines for implementation
- Provide continual concise information to educators using jargon free language
- Develop and portray a positive attitude to change
- Communicate the change as an opportunity to improve outcomes for children
- Deal with resistance to change by allowing educators to express themselves
- Collaborate with educators to develop a plan of action
- Convey confidence in individuals and teams to take on change
- Break down tasks for change into manageable steps to support a sense of achievement
- Involve the stakeholders (educators and families) in developing a change plan to include timelines with roles and responsibilities clearly stated
- Ensure the change process is seamless for the children

Reflective questions to consider within your service

- Does the service leader have a clear understanding of the National Quality Reform Agenda
- Are the changes articulated in a clear manner by the service leader
- Are educators aware and familiar with the National Quality Reform Agenda, if not how is this going to be achieved
- Have families been informed of the National Quality Reform Agenda changes and the rationale for these
- Is the sponsor aware of the impact of the changes on the service in terms of financial management and service provision
- Has the service leader undertaken a scoping exercise to identify the changes necessary—what needs to happen, when it needs to happen and what needs to be done
- Has the service leader used the scoping exercise to develop a change plan which is available to the stakeholders

COMMUNICATION, COMMUNICATION, COMMUNICATION, COMMUNICATION

Ongoing communication is essential to support the development of trusting and supportive relationships between educators. Providing positive feedback and reporting regularly on action undertaken to date and achievements. This builds a 'can do' attitude and minimises any feelings of anxiety.

Opportunities to learn must occur in environments characterized by both trust and challenge because change is as much about the emotions as it is about knowledge and skills. Expectations for change can touch raw nerves of educators take change as reflections of their competence or challenges to their professional identity. If these emotions are ignored, educators may close off to learning and adopt defensive attitudes. All learning activities require the twin elements of trust and challenge. Little professional learning takes place without challenge. Change, however, takes risk; before educators take on that risk, they need to trust that their honest efforts will be supported, not belittled"

