



Conversations about research and evaluation

Building a research and evaluation strategy

Creche and Kindergarten Association (C&K)

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and Business Development and Strategy*

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Vision

C&K Vision

To maximise children's life outcomes and guide their learning journey

C&K Research and Evaluation Vision

Great ideas, new knowledge and partnerships from inquiry, research and evaluation that take the views of children seriously, within families and communities; and create opportunities for better evidence-informed practice and policy analysis as a catalyst for change.

Why conduct research and evaluation

Established in 1907, C&K has a long history of innovation, high quality services and research activities which have led and informed C&K's priorities and best practice reforms.

Research and evaluation are essential functions for any organisation committed to investing in:-

- New knowledge generation and acquisition
- Gathering evidence of the effectiveness of programs to strengthen strategic decision making and practice improvements
- Knowledge sharing with research partners to make the greatest collective impact for children, families and communities.

At C&K we are most interested in research that:-

- Provides core information to justify C&K's outputs, impact and the relevancy of what we do, both within the organisation and within communities, thus making us accountable to our service recipients, funders, other stakeholders and partners
- Assists us in learning how to improve our strategies and activities which lead to better ways of doing things
- Promotes sharing of learning and contributes to the collective impact of research in the early childhood education and care sector.

Scope of research and evaluation

C&K conducts its own internal research and evaluation and has research partnership arrangements with external groups, including government, universities, industry peak bodies and networks, other early childhood providers, parents and advocacy groups. These connections assist in leading and understanding how best to support a dynamic early childhood education and care sector.

C&K's research program intersects with C&K's social policy analysis and these two areas work closely together informing each other. Social policy is the conduit for using internal and external research and evaluation findings and recommendations to advocate for change.

C&K's research and evaluation program is grouped under research and evaluation outcome areas:-

Key research and evaluation outcome areas*	Types of indicative research and evaluation topics covered
1. Metrics to inform and support strategic decision making	Key early childhood statistics
2. Children's environments are nurturing, culturally-appropriate and safe	Child safe environments, peer relationships, racism/cultural appropriateness, child abuse and neglect, family violence
3. Children have the knowledge and skills for life and learning	Early learning, transition to school, social and emotional wellbeing
4. Children are engaged in and benefiting from educational opportunities	Literacy, numeracy, children's rights and participation in learning and play, and research; pedagogical or internal flexibility of early learning programs, innovative programming, using technology
5. Families are confident and have the capability to support their children's development	Family and community capacity building, family participation and engagement
6. Quality early childhood development services that support the choices of families	Quality of early childhood education and care services, accessibility of early childhood education and care services, workforce participation, broader family support needs
7. Early childhood education and care workforce is skilled, competent and supported	Recruitment and retention, managing stress, staff empowered to perform
8. Influencing policy and advocating for beneficial industry change	Responses to inquiries, industry hearings and other submissions submitted

*Outcome areas 2 – 6 adapted from Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2014. National outcome measures for early childhood development – phase 2: scoping paper. Cat. No. PHE 184. Canberra: AIHW.

The range of outcome areas allows for C&K to pursue a comprehensive research and evaluation agenda, spread across outcome areas.

Current research and evaluation projects

C&K employs multiple research and evaluation methodologies and methods dependent on the project purpose, context, partners and participants involved and project requirements.

C&K employs evidence reviews, formative and summative program and service evaluations, action learning strategies, reflective practice cycles, monitoring and performance measurement, and many other specific research projects and evaluative techniques and processes.

Setting the forward calendar of research and evaluation activities is informed through a range of consultation processes both internally and externally. The majority of research topics are planned, however the research and evaluation program also accommodates issues that may arise.

Some examples of C&K's current commitment to research and evaluation projects includes:-

Action learning projects

- Listening and recording children's voices on '*what is safe*' in the Logan community for the Logan Child Friendly Community Consortium via the Children's Consultation Action Group
- Learning from the implementation of the '*Read It Again Pilot Program*' involving two C&K kindergartens in southern Brisbane/Logan, the usefulness of the program and educator experiences of implementation

Evidence-informed approaches

- C&K's '*Building waterfalls*' curriculum is based on available evidence regarding the benefits of a play-based learning approach. C&K also closely follows the emerging research highlighting the benefits of high levels of intentional teaching in daily early childhood programs. The review of the '*Building waterfalls*' curriculum due to commence in 2015-2016 will provide the opportunity to incorporate new evidence, as C&K engages in continuous improvement strategies.

Partnership research projects

- C&K is a Linkage Projects partner with QUT, Charles Sturt University, Department of Education Training and Employment (DETE) and Goodstart Early Learning on a three year Australian Research Council (ARC) project '*Identifying effective strategies to grow and sustain a professional early years workforce study*'
- C&K has partnered with QUT under a 2014 Engagement Innovation grant on '*Health Promoting Early Childhood Education -health promotion strategies that best promote holistic health in early childhood*'
- A trial implementation and evaluation of Parents' Evaluation of Developmental Status (PEDS) is occurring across Gold Coast C&K services. The initiative is led by Gold Coast Gr8 Start Alliance funded through Medicare Local (Gold Coast)

- C&K is facilitating children and parents participation in a two ARC projects led by QUT to '*Investigate mobile technologies in young children's everyday worlds*' and '*Interacting with knowledge, interacting with people: Web searching in early childhood*'
- C&K Mt Warren Park Community Kindergarten is involved in the Phase 3 Brain Filing Enrichment Program Study with Griffith University. This program examines neuroscience based enrichment programs for enhanced learning in the early years
- C&K has facilitated our Director's participation in the '*Continuity and Change in Curriculum and Pedagogies as children start school*' study being conducted by Charles Sturt University.

Partnerships have also been formed through the appointment of the Manager, Research and Evaluation as an Adjunct Associate Professor at the School of Human Services and Social Work, Griffith University. Additionally the Manager has been appointed for a two-year term to QUT's University Human Research Ethics Committee.

Commissioned research

- C&K was recently commissioned by DETE to conduct the *Inclusive Practices Project examining children with complex emotional and social behaviours*. The findings have informed the forthcoming DETE Workforce Action Plan.

Social Policy

Developing a social and economic policy platform including systemic advocacy is a valued activity in C&K. Research and evaluation has a role in feeding the development of policy which in turn, is used to influence early childhood education and care agendas. Recent policy developed by C&K which has been informed by research includes:-

- C&K's *Response to National Quality Framework (NQF) Regulation Impact Statement (RIS)* January 2015
- C&K's *Response to the Forrest Review: Creating Parity*, 14 September 2014
- *Response to the Productivity Commission's Draft Report into Childcare and Early Learning*, Creche and Kindergarten Association Limited C&K, 5 September 2014
- C&K's *Election Platform Kindergarten is at risk A Call to Action*, January 2015

Research Governance

Research and Evaluation Committee

Established in 2015, the Research and Evaluation Committee comprises members from the early childhood education area, research, social policy and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. The Committee guides research priorities and provides advice on the ethical conduct of research and methodology choices, and monitors the overall research program. The Committee meets quarterly, subject to research applications received.

The Terms of Reference for the committee are to:-

- Provide advice on C&K's research priorities and research methodology
- Review existing ethical clearance approvals and other considerations regarding the ethical conduct of research

- Ensure compliance with legislation, standards and other research requirements, including monitoring of completed reports on research conducted
- Undertake an annual review of research projects conducted against relevant criteria.

Action Research Team (ART)

ART is an internal working group, comprised of educators and researchers, whose role is to:-

- Identify gaps in knowledge and evidence related to C&K's practice
- Give advice on current action learning strategies occurring across C&K, which is of particular assistance to educators in improving methodology and methods
- Use an appropriate learning cycle model to discuss and analyse the findings of action research projects
- Provide feedback on tools developed to support research and evaluation processes
- Assist with the development of C&K's program logic model/theory of change.

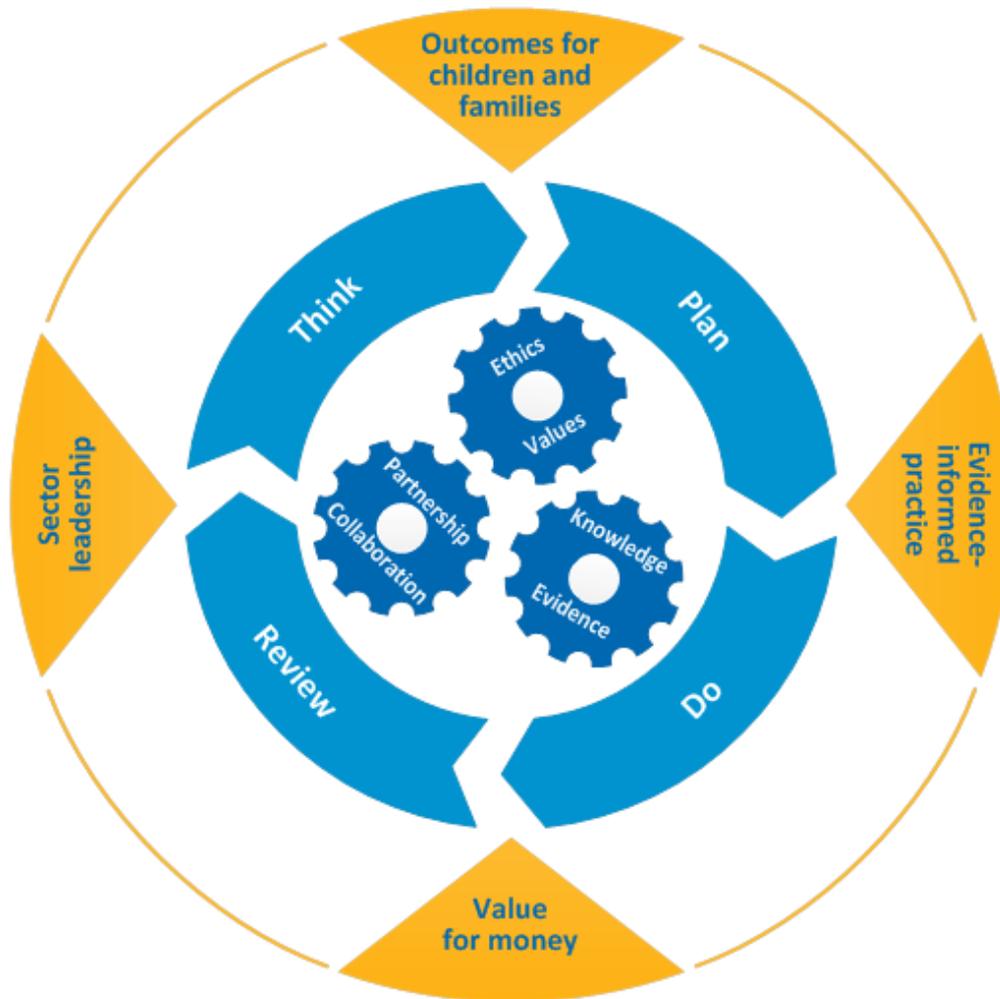
This network will be invaluable in informing and guiding future research agendas, based on front-line educator knowledge and evidence informed-practice experience.

Research and Policy Development Cycle

At C&K a research and policy development cycle is used to inform both the research strategy and policy development agenda.

The diagram below shows the components, phase and aims of C&K's research and evaluation and policy development approach and how the elements come together.

Research and Policy Development Cycle



Components: partnership, collaboration, ethics, values, knowledge and evidence are applied consistently through research and policy development.



Phases: The four phases of 'Think', 'Plan', 'Do' and 'Review' structure the research and policy development cycle.



Aims: Outcomes for children and families, evidence-informed practices, sector leadership and value for money are the objectives of research and policy development, and are supported and strengthened by the components and phases.

The six core components (Partnership and Collaboration, Ethics and Values, Knowledge and Evidence) are located in the middle of the diagram and represent continuous parts of the research and policy development cycle. They are essential components of each research process and policy development phase and are designed to - bring new insight and resources into the research process and policy development; highest standards of integrity

and; to ensure that research and policy development is an iterative process, continually reflecting and adapting as it progresses.

The four phases (Think, Plan, Do and Review) are discrete and sequenced and involve more specific activities, as outlined in the table below. It must be appreciated that there is likely to be some overlap between the phases at times, both for research and policy development.

	Think	Plan	Do	Review
RESEARCH PROCESS	We articulate the research concept and strategic fit with C&K's priorities, approach research partners, outline the logic schema, cost the project accurately and apply 'Value for Money' criteria, complete necessary submissions.	We select the best research methodology and design research methods and questions, develop a research management plan and seek research funding, seek appropriate ethical clearance.	We identify existing evidence, administer research tools, collect and analyse data, test data validity, draw research findings and recommendation, finalise and publish reports for various audiences, communicate new knowledge and evidence.	We explore research findings for implementation (readiness, capacity, fit, need, evidence, resources).
POLICY DEVELOPMENT	We identify social policy issues (the broadest social issues impacting children, families and educators) by consulting internally and externally. More objectively our thinking is informed by our research and evaluation findings (above).	We develop 'program logic' to plan strategies to deliver positive change. Strategies could include organisational & workforce development policy/practices, advocacy, funding submissions, partnership work etc. Planning includes priority setting.	We design the chosen strategies and models, potentially trialling them in the first instance, and move to implementation. Pre-evaluation processes are inbuilt.	We evaluate the impact of the strategies on the identified issue. The social policy cycle is iterative with action learning approaches, continual identification of issues, and documented application of evaluation findings.

The four aims around the outside of the circle are the objectives of C&K's research and policy development processes. They are reinforced by the core components and can be used to focus on the long-term, systemic impact of this research and policy development approach.

These four aims are mutually reinforcing, outcomes for children are informed by evidence-informed policy and practice; research and policy development is tested for value for money and aligned with the Strategic Plan priorities; and evidence and outcomes confirm C&K's position as a sector leader in kindergartens and other education and care services.

Research strategy

C&K has developed a research strategy to assist in guiding research and evaluation projects in 2015, going forward.

5C's

The five key activities in building C&K's Research Strategy are:-

Culture	embed a research and evaluation culture
Capacity	build research and evaluation knowledge and skills
Communicate	get evidence and research and evaluation findings and key messages out to diverse audiences
Collaborate	exchange ideas, knowledge and other key messages to research partners and other key stakeholders
Change	be a catalyst for better policy and practice outcomes in the early childhood education and care sector

Culture

A key goal of this research strategy is to embed a culture supportive of research across C&K. A strong culture of research is one where:-

- Everyone across C&K believes in, supports, and participates in and shares the results and findings from research and evaluation projects, no matter how small
- C&K practice can clearly demonstrate that it is informed by research and evaluation evidence
- C&K has a common language and logic for how programs bring about change for recipients
- Research structures, processes, people and tools are accessible and useful
- Significant research milestones are celebrated.

C&K will audit its current research culture to establish a baseline from which to improve and grow.

Capacity

Building capacity is a significant research strategy activity which will:-

- Develop a series of 'Capacity Building' tools and resources for educators to conduct research and evaluation projects

- Develop a series of papers ‘Conversations about Research and Evaluation’ on specific outcomes of reviews of evidence, research undertaken at C&K and other related issues
- Conduct in-service training for educators on identified research priorities or other research topics
- Provide mentoring and advice for C&K staff in children’s services regarding current research activities.

Communicate

C&K’s intranet and website are places where staff and the public can go to connect and communicate regarding policy, research and evaluation.

Getting messages out to the various audiences is a key to successful research and the communication method chosen needs to suit the audience, as the approaches demonstrate in the table below.

Approaches to getting key research and policy messages to audiences

	Email – alerts, messages, news distribution such as eNews & Round-up, alerts	Media releases	Dashboard reports	Parent Portal	In-service training & College	C&K Intranet	Committees & networks such as Research & Evaluation Committee & Action Research Team	C&K’s capacity building series and other internal publications such as ‘Cascades’	C&K Website	C&K publically released reports and publications (research, evaluation, responses to inquiries, policy and advocacy)	C&K Annual Conference	Journal articles and conference papers	Presentations at inquiries, public forums and other industry events
C&K Board members		✓	✓			✓				✓			✓
Research and Evaluation Committee								✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Executive Leadership Team	✓	✓	✓			✓			✓	✓			✓
Children’s Services staff	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Corporate staff	✓					✓							
All C&K staff	✓					✓							
Parents and families		✓		✓					✓				
Government funding bodies		✓					✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
Other service providers		✓			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		
Research partners (universities)							✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
ECEC industry		✓							✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Other funding donors		✓	✓						✓	✓			✓

Media		✓							✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Community		✓							✓				

Collaborate

A major strategy for collaboration is the C&K Early Childhood Conference, held annually. This conference brings together C&K staff, academics, government and other providers from across the industry.

The Research and Evaluation Committee, Action Research Team, membership of peak bodies and other ECEC networks, appointments to working groups and committees and the diverse relationships held with families and communities assists C&K to develop and share knowledge on areas of interest and innovation.

The current partnerships and research projects also offer key mechanisms for collaborating.

Change

Change is constant both in research and evaluation approaches and methods, and in ECEC policy and practice.

Research and evaluation will contribute to change as new and creative approaches to measuring and solving complex social issues and the use of previously untested practices or models occurs. At the same time, research and evaluation is no longer an isolated activity, it is inclusive, multi-disciplinary and involves participants in new and exciting ways. Practitioners are engaged in their own ‘improvement research’, designing and testing effective interventions while generating information about how, for whom, and under what conditions those interventions work (Bryk et al in Gopalakrishnan et al 2013:2) or ‘*learning through doing*’. These new generation research and evaluation trends, combined with changes to policy and practice, are intended to intersect for the benefit of children and families in meeting educational participation as well as other family support needs.

Measuring success

The Research Strategy will measure its success against the indicators identified in C&K’s Business Plan including engagement of new research partners, number and type of research proposals considered by the Research and Evaluation Committee and number of papers published, and conference papers delivered.

Attachment 1 – Key research and evaluation outcome areas and relationship to National Quality Framework

Key research and evaluation outcome areas*	Connection with National Quality Framework – quality areas and elements**
Metrics to inform and support strategic decision making	Not applicable
Children’s environments are nurturing, culturally-appropriate and safe	<p><u>QA1 – Educational program and practice</u> 1.1 An approved learning framework informs the development of a curriculum that enhances each child’s learning and development 1.2 Educators and co-ordinators are focused, active and reflective in designing and delivering the program for each child</p> <p><u>QA2 – Children’s health and safety</u> 8.1 Each child’s health is promoted 8.2 Healthy eating and physical activity are embedded in the program for children. Each child is protected.</p>
Children have the knowledge and skills for life and learning	<p><u>QA1 – Educational program and practice</u> 1.1 An approved learning framework informs the development of a curriculum that enhances each child’s learning and development 1.2 Educators and co-ordinators are focused, active and reflective in designing and delivering the program for each child</p> <p><u>QA6 – Collaborative partnerships with families and communities</u> 6.1 Respectful supportive relationships with families are developed and maintained 6.2 Families are supported in their parenting role and their values and beliefs about child rearing are respected The service collaborates with other organisations and service providers to enhance children’s learning and wellbeing.</p>
Children are engaged in and benefiting from educational opportunities	<p><u>QA1 – Educational program and practice</u> 1.1 An approved learning framework informs the development of a curriculum that enhances each child’s learning and development Educators and co-ordinators are focused, active and reflective in designing and delivering the program for each child.</p>
Families are confident and have the capability to support their children’s development	<p><u>QA6 – Collaborative partnerships with families and communities</u> 6.1 Respectful supportive relationships with families are developed and maintained 6.2 Families are supported in their parenting role and their values and beliefs about child rearing are respected The service collaborates with other organisations and service providers to enhance children’s learning and wellbeing.</p>
Quality early childhood development services that support the choices of families	<p><u>QA1 – Educational program and practice</u> 1.1 An approved learning framework informs the development of a curriculum that enhances each child’s learning and development 1.2 Educators and co-ordinators are focused, active and reflective in designing and delivering the program for each child.</p> <p><u>QA2 – Children’s health and safety</u> 2.1 Each child’s health is promoted 2.2 Healthy eating and physical activity are embedded in the program for children.</p>

	<p>2.3 Each child is protected.</p> <p><u>QA3 Physical environment</u></p> <p>3.1 The design and location of the premises is appropriate for the operation of a service</p> <p>3.2 The environment is inclusive, promotes competence, independent exploration and learning through play</p> <p>3.3 The service takes an active role in caring for its environment and contributes to a sustainable future.</p> <p><u>QA4 Staffing arrangements</u></p> <p>4.1 Staffing arrangements enhance children’s learning and development and ensure their safety and wellbeing</p> <p>4.2 Educators, co-ordinators and staff members are respectful and ethical</p> <p><u>QA5 Relationships with children</u></p> <p>5.1 Respectful and equitable relationships are developed and maintained with each child</p> <p>5.2 Each child is supported to build and maintain sensitive and responsive relationships with other children and adults.</p> <p><u>QA6 – Collaborative partnerships with families and communities</u></p> <p>8.3 Respectful supportive relationships with families are developed and maintained</p> <p>8.4 Families are supported in their parenting role and their values and beliefs about child rearing are respected</p> <p>8.5 The service collaborates with other organisations and service providers to enhance children’s learning and wellbeing.</p> <p><u>QA7 Leadership and service management</u></p> <p>7.1 Effective leadership promotes a positive organisational culture and builds a professional learning community</p> <p>7.2 There is a commitment to continuous improvement</p> <p>7.3 Administrative systems enable the effective management of a quality service.</p>
Early childhood education and care workforce is skilled, competent and supported	<p><u>QA4 Staffing arrangements</u></p> <p>8.6 Staffing arrangements enhance children’s learning and development and ensure their safety and wellbeing</p> <p>8.7 Educators, co-ordinators and staff members are respectful and ethical</p>
Influencing policy and advocating for beneficial industry change	Not applicable

** Summary table of quality areas, standards and elements, Three – Guide to the National Quality Standards, ACECQA, updated September 2013.

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