

Review of the Queensland Family and Child Commission's Impact

July 2022

The Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) provides systemic oversight of the child protection and family support system. To deliver this function the QFCC monitors, reviews and reports on system issues impacting on the safety and wellbeing of Queensland's children and their families. The QFCC has led system reviews at the request of the Queensland Government in response to deaths or serious harm to children and from these system reviews the Commission has made recommendations to government on how to improve safety and prevent critical incidents. Since 2015 the QFCC has delivered 10 System reviews featuring 208 distinct recommendations.

The vision of the QFCC is that **'Every Queensland Child is Loved, respected and has their rights upheld'**. To realise this vision its purpose is: **'to influence change that improves the safety and wellbeing of Queensland's Children'**.

In 2021-22, QFCC arranged for an independent assessment to determine if its reviews and recommendations were contributing to a system improvement, and consequently if the Commission was influencing positive change. Specifically, the review considered:

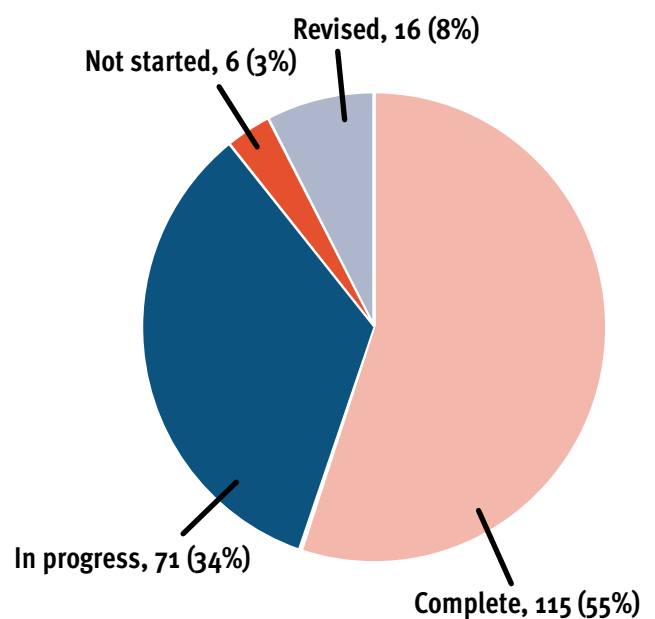
1. if recommendations had improved child and family support systems;
2. the relevance of incomplete recommendations; and
3. how future recommendations could have a greater effect on system change.

QFCC commissioned this review to be transparent about the strengths and gaps in its performance, and to inform how future reviews could be conducted.

Have QFCC Recommendations improved the child and family system?

The review identified ‘*examples where QFCC reviews had led to positive system change*’ and that ‘*the QFCC has played an important role in leading reforms across the system that supports children, young people and families in Queensland*’. The report also made findings on how the QFCC could be more effective regarding the ‘*the process of engagement with agencies and recommendation design*’.

The review noted that, of the 208 recommendations across the 10 QFCC system reviews:



The recurring themes across the feedback collected by the review included:

- The QFCC has played an important role in bringing stakeholders together across agencies and systems to drive sector improvements;
- QFCC recommendations were seen as instrumental in driving reform which enabled some agencies to secure additional funding to address critical systems issues, but generally implementation of the recommendations was expected within existing funding. It is noted that while the QFCC, as an independent statutory agency, should consider resource implications generally, this should not limit its ability to identify and recommend areas for improvement of outcomes for children and young people.
- Recommendations were generally considered to be consistent with other review activities;
- Recommendations generally were aligned to the core issues identified in the system reviews, with some variability between and within reviews;
- Mechanisms exist for responsible agencies to provide feedback on proposed recommendations. Stakeholders noted that feedback was not always acted upon by the QFCC in finalising their reviews. Given the independent statutory authority of the QFCC, it may have been that in these instances, the feedback was not acted upon following objective consideration.

Examples of Impact

Whilst not a formal regulator of the sector, the QFCC plays an important role in promoting compliance and uplifting the quality of services, programs and systems which support the safety and wellbeing of children. The review revealed a range of examples that demonstrate the positive change that the QFCC system reviews and recommendations have achieved. These included:

Case Study: Child Death Review Board

Recommendation 1 of the *A systems review of individual agency responses following the death of a child* report recommended the establishment of the Child Death Review Board. The report found that Queensland's current system of reviewing the deaths of children known to Child Safety was missing a systems-level focus on identifying the changes required to ensure the safety of vulnerable children.

Stakeholders asserted that the new two-tiered Child Death review process that was implemented from this recommendation has supported:

- improved information sharing and collaboration between agencies;
- greater consideration of actions undertaken by agencies in response to the critical incident;
- increased focus on identifying and reducing system-level issues rather than practice level, operational failures; and
- the articulation of clear intent behind resulting recommendations.

Case Study: No Card No Start

The QFCC's *Keeping Queensland's Children more than Safe: Review of the Blue Card System* recommended that the Queensland Government undertake an overarching review of the Working with Children Act, including consideration of a 'no card no start' provision requiring people working in paid employment to be issued with a Blue Card before starting work with children.

The legislation introduced in November 2018 and passed into law in May 2019, provides stronger safeguards and builds on the blue card systems history of mitigating risks to children.

Case Study: When a child is missing

Recommendation 2 of the *When a child is missing: Remembering Tiahleigh* report that was the Government establish a missing children pilot governance model to improve communication between agencies when a child goes missing from out-of-home care.

The result was the Our Child information sharing platform. Our Child allows police and relevant Child Safety departmental staff to gain real-time access to information from Child Safety, Education, Office of the Public Guardian and the Queensland Health Information systems when a child in care has been reported missing.

This has reduced the time it takes for police to gather and share information when investigating the whereabouts of missing children.

One respondent to the review called One Child *'the best project that I've seen in government ever... it delivered a product that was useful and workable'*.

Stakeholder and client feedback

A number of stakeholders with responsibility for implementing recommendations provided feedback designed to improve processes around recommendation development and implementation. Some of their feedback included:

- 37%** agreed that QFCC recommendations *'mostly'* or *'always'* resulted in significant positive change for children and young people. The remaining 63% considered QFCC recommendations *'sometimes'* contributed to positive change.
- 58%** considered they were consulted with during the design phase of recommendations, that is, when recommendations were formed and determined.
- 72%** believed that QFCC recommendations were designed to address the root cause and underlying issues identified in the system reviews and are aligned to a clear outcome
- 45%** did not agree that QFCC recommendations were designed in a way that adapts to changes and allows for flexibility, for example, in response to changing risk and policy landscapes.
- 63%** did not agree that recommendations set by the QFCC are achievable, that is, their organisation had the time, funding and/or resources to implement the recommendation.
- 90%** believed their organisation proactively and effectively monitors progress of recommendation implementation

Opportunities for Improvement: How future recommendations could have a greater effect on system change

Stakeholders asked for increased consultation during the reviews process, particularly during the recommendation design phase. Some agencies felt QFCC did not always take on board concerns when they were raised. They also expressed concern that a lack of consultation during the recommendation design phase could lead to recommendations that did not reflect the full context of the system. Some stakeholders explained that the intent of recommendations was sometimes unclear, and often reflected the circumstances of individual cases rather than systemic matters. Stakeholders also identified that the ability of some agencies to implement agency-wide recommendations was limited by their structure and legislative responsibility.

Stakeholders explained that the development of a framework that includes a series of consistent threshold questions to be answered when developing recommendations, would support a more transparent and evidence-based approach to recommendation design and development. A structured approach to the recommendation design and development would also give regard to the extent to which alternative mechanisms might be used to progress positive change, particularly with parts of the sector where there is already significant reform underway. Having a more consistent and structured approach to the design and development of recommendations would also support agencies and their frontline workers to understand the purpose and objectives of recommendations, facilitate the prioritisation and collective 'buy-in' for actioning recommendations.

The review also considered the effectiveness of monitoring process and identified that the responsibility for monitoring the implementation of recommendations from the QFCC system reviews generally lies with the agencies. These agencies consistently stated that their current mechanisms enable successful monitoring of the implementation of their recommendations. A significant proportion of survey respondents (**83%**) believed that their agency was proactively and effectively monitoring the progress of recommendation implementation. This monitoring was also seen as helpful to assist agencies with coordinating their actions.

Conclusion

The review found that *‘the QFCC has played an important role in leading reforms across the system that supports children, young people, and families in Queensland’* and that *‘There continues to be a role for the QFCC in leading ongoing engagement with agencies and service providers to enhance the oversight of the child and family support system’*.

The review made nine suggestions for improving the influence of QFCC, all of which have been accepted.

- 1** To the extent possible under its functions, the QFCC should be cognisant of potential resourcing implications when making recommendations. When deciding whether to accept recommendations, the Queensland Government should consider a range of factors including the resourcing for implementing recommendations.
- 2** The QFCC should consider options for:
 - Improving the codesign of recommendations
 - Ensuring the socialisation of recommendations and a considered approach to reviewing recommendations with agency stakeholders
 - Building in flexibility to allow agencies to adapt recommendations over time as the policy landscape shifts.
- 3** The QFCC should provide ongoing support for agencies to encourage implementation, accompanied by regular monitoring.
- 4** The QFCC should consider exploring options for agencies that identify superseded recommendations and progress them for closure.
- 5** The QFCC should consider options for partnering with agencies earlier in the review and recommendation development processes. This would enhance understanding of system-wide and operational factors to support clearer linkages between recommendations and intended outcomes.
- 6** The QFCC should consider exploring methodologies that are used by other independent statutory agencies in Queensland and in other jurisdictions to determine if these could be used or adapted to support the QFCC’s system oversight and monitoring functions.
- 7** The QFCC should consider the development of a standardised monitoring and evaluation approach to support effective evaluation of outcomes. This would also assist with determining whether investment from agencies and the QFCC is translating to improvements for children, young people, and their families.
- 8** The QFCC should consider ways for the review process to be simpler, more streamlined and transparent about the key enablers for implementing recommendations (for example, resources for implementation, resources for monitoring and reporting, policies and/or changes to governance).
- 9** The QFCC should explore options to introduce a structured approach to designing recommendations, which describes the threshold questions to be addressed before a new recommendation is made. These threshold questions may consider the extent to which issues are widespread; or time or circumstance specific; and the extent to which there is a clear evidence base for the recommendation. Providing transparency to agencies about this kind of framework would support greater buy-in and accountability about new recommendations.