



National Quality Standard Professional Learning Program



Getting ready for the NQS

Setting up for 2012

Welcome to the first e-Newsletter for 2012. The aim this year is to support early childhood educators to further embed the *Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF) (DEEWR, 2009) in their daily practice as a key element in achieving *National Quality Standard* (NQS).

Newsletters will continue to be published fortnightly, but with each two consecutive issues focused on related topics. The idea is that service coordinators and educational leaders in early childhood settings might collect each set and use them for professional learning conversations around those topics.

This year, a talented group of experienced early childhood educators will compile the newsletters. Having a team of seven writers will provide fresh styles and perspectives and broaden the examples of practice that can be showcased.

The team has drafted a schedule of topics to enable educators to plan how they might use the content. Space has been left in the schedule so that the newsletters can respond to issues and concerns that may arise over the year.

Here is a tentative list of the first 10 topics and authors up to May 2012:

- Newsletters 27 and 28: Heather Barnes—Preparing for the NQS and embedding the EYLF in practice; Revising the service philosophy using the guiding principles of the EYLF and the NQS.
- Newsletters 29 and 30: Angela Owens—Health and safety with reference to the EYLF practices and NQS requirements. Judy Radich—The physical environment, including indoor and outdoor spaces.

- Newsletters 31 and 32: Anne Kennedy—Theories and approaches. Judy Radich—Staffing for quality interactions.
- Newsletters 33 and 34: Sandra Cheeseman—Leadership for quality programs and practices; Intentional teaching and responding to children.
- Newsletters 35 and 36: Anne Stonehouse—Relationships with families; Relationships with children.

Luke Touhill and Jenni Connor will be writing newsletters later in the year.

The newsletters are only one of the mechanisms designed to support early childhood educators in meeting the challenges of 2012. Educators are encouraged to use the Forum (www.forums.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au) and Facebook (www.facebook.com/eylfpplp) for questions and comments about ideas raised in the e-Newsletters.

Preparing for the NQS and embedding the EYLF in practice

A new year often means new beginnings and that is particularly true for 2012 as early childhood educators continue to engage with the EYLF and prepare for the introduction of the NQS, both of which are key components of the *National Quality Framework* (NQF). Many of us around the country are thrilled to see the introduction of the NQF as we hope that the key focus on continuous quality improvement will lead to better outcomes for children. Some educators may be feeling a little daunted about how to prepare for the changes, so this first e-Newsletter of 2012 is designed to assist you to make a start—if you haven't already done so.



A significant date —30 April, 2012

From 1 January 2012 most early childhood education and care services will be covered by the NQF. A new national body, the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA), will guide the implementation of the NQF and the Regulatory Authority in each state and territory will be responsible for assessing and monitoring the quality of education and care in their jurisdiction.

Under the Education and Care Services National Regulations (the Regulations) all education and care services to be assessed under the NQS will need to have completed their first Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) by 30 April, 2012.

The QIP does not have to be submitted to the Regulatory Authority by 30 April but it is expected that services will use their QIP to guide their practice between this date and the date of their first Assessment Visit. (Services will be notified by their Regulatory Authority when they need to submit their QIP).

Prior to completing their QIP, services will need to carry out a self-assessment of their current practice against the NQS and the Regulations. This process enables strengths to be affirmed and areas for improvement to be identified. It is important for educators to be critically reflective and honest when undertaking the self-assessment process. The service's self-assessment does not need to be submitted with the QIP, but documentation does need to be available to demonstrate the process used.

The QIP also needs to include the service's statement of philosophy (Regulation 55, p. 56, Draft Education and Care Services National Regulations, October 2011). The next e-Newsletter will focus on revising the service philosophy.

Using the Guide to the National Quality Standard to assist in self-assessment

Before beginning the process of self-assessment, it's essential to get to know the NQS well. The *Guide to the National Quality Standard* (ACECQA, 2011b, the *Guide*) is designed to assist educators and management in understanding the detail of each of the Quality Areas, Standards and Elements. Using the *Guide* will assist in evaluating current practices and highlight the practices that need to be put in place or improved.

A user-friendly Summary Table of the Quality Areas, Standards and Elements is included in the *Guide* on pages 10 and 11. Educators have found this very useful as a way of starting the self-assessment process. By looking at each standard and element, they have been quickly able to determine where quality improvement is needed.

In the *Guide*, each Quality Area has a list of the relevant sections of the National Law and National Regulations that apply to that Quality Area, a description of each Standard and an explanation about how it contributes to quality practice.

There is a list of reflective questions under each Standard for educators to consider when working towards that Standard and its accompanying Elements. Related quotes from the EYLF and *My Time, Our Place: The Framework for School Age Care* are included as an introduction to each Element. The *Guide* also describes how each Element might be put into practice and how the Element may be assessed, with examples of what the assessor may observe, discuss and sight. In some cases there is specific guidance for particular service types or age groups.

A list of resources is included at the end of each Quality Area that may provide further assistance during the self-assessment process.





Embedding the EYLF in practice

Educators in a range of settings across Australia have been exploring the core elements of the EYLF—the Principles, Practice and Learning Outcomes—and are recognising that, together with a focus on children’s learning, these three elements guide our teaching and program decision-making.

An assessor is likely to see evidence of the EYLF within the setting when educators demonstrate that they:

- are adopting holistic practices such as when they regard physical, social, emotional, cognitive and spiritual aspects as connected aspects of a child’s wellbeing
- have formed positive relationships with children and respond to their needs, ideas, questions and conversations
- are setting up environments that show thoughtful planning to support child-initiated learning as well as intentional teaching
- are valuing children’s cultural and social contexts by bringing children’s expertise, traditions and ways of knowing into the program
- are demonstrating that they are providing for continuity of learning and smooth transitions for children as they move between rooms or locations.

The assessor may also see that the planning cycle is evident by looking at whether:

- information about each child is collected in a range of ways
- children’s progress is analysed in relation to the ‘distance travelled’ towards the Learning Outcomes
- planning to support further learning is undertaken and implemented
- reflection and evaluation about the program’s effectiveness is occurring.

Completing a Quality Improvement Plan

ACECQA has also produced a Guide to developing a *Quality Improvement Plan* (ACECQA, 2011a), available online at www.acecqa.gov.au.

The *Guide to developing a QIP* stresses that ‘the most effective improvements to service delivery are initiated from within the service, rather than being imposed from the outside’ (p. 5). It urges services to develop a picture of current practice to confirm their particular strengths as the starting point for improving quality.

It notes (p. 5) that:

While it is important to reflect on practice, policies and procedures against the seven quality areas of the NQS... there is no expectation that all 18 standards and 58 elements will be addressed in the Quality Improvement Plan.

In other words, services are expected to prioritise some areas for improvement, giving urgent attention to meeting regulatory requirements.

The *Guide to developing a Quality Improvement Plan* has many helpful hints for writing the QIP and includes examples of completed QIPs for a range of settings. (Appendix 1, pp. 14–19). It stresses that even if a service believes that they are meeting or exceeding the NQS, they should demonstrate how they are planning for continuous quality improvement.

The QIP template (4b) encourages services to identify the outcome or goal that is being sought in relation to a particular standard and/or element; whether its priority is low, medium or high; the steps or strategies that will be used to achieve the goal; how success will be measured and the target date for achievement. It also includes a column for keeping track of progress.

For example, in relation to Quality Area 6: *Collaborative relationships with families*, a preschool in rural Victoria found that because many children came on buses, educators had little contact with some parents. They began an improvement plan to address the issue by prioritising 6.1: *Respectful supportive relationships with families are developed and maintained* and established the goal that: ‘all parents/families will be contacted personally over a term’.

The service then identified strategies to address the issue:

- an educator could be released to travel on the bus twice a week
- a survey could be sent asking parents for a convenient time to phone and chat
- educators could draw up a schedule for phoning families
- a range of after-hours options for getting together could be circulated and events convened, such as a family barbecue, a sleepover, or a star-gazing evening.

They kept a record of which families had been involved in discussions about their children over a 10-week period and planned to meet, greet and get to know others.

Preparing for the NQS

Services will need to demonstrate consistency of practice across the whole setting.

Below are some ways that everyone can be involved:

- Encourage each team member to read widely about the EYLF. Reading the e-Newsletters published last year, for example, can deepen educators' understanding of the EYLF.
- Encourage each team member to reflect on the ECA *Code of Ethics* as it stimulates thinking about the ethical responsibilities of early childhood professionals.
- Use the language of the EYLF in conversations with each other, with families and in documentation of children's learning.
- Ask each educator to read the summary table of quality areas, standards and elements in the *Guide to the National Quality Standard*.
- Prior to each team meeting or a visit to a family day care home, ask educators to read and reflect on one Quality Area of the NQS. Ask them to think about the reflective questions in the *Guide* and identify what they are currently doing, and what might need to be changed or done differently.
- Display a large sheet of paper to record thinking about the Quality Area and encourage educators, families and children (as appropriate) to add to a section on 'what might we do differently?'
- Ensure that there are regular opportunities to meet, celebrate achievements, share ideas about practice and discuss improvements.
- Participate in professional development opportunities whenever possible. The Professional Support Coordinator in each state or territory will continue to provide training to assist educators in all settings to prepare for the NQS. Consider sending two educators to training as it helps them to share information with each other and then, together, they can inspire the rest of the team.
- Collaborate when developing the QIP, involve the children wherever possible, as well as families, educators, staff members, management and other interested parties, such as those who support the inclusion of children with additional needs.

As we begin to prepare for the NQS, we need to keep focused on why these changes are being implemented. This important early childhood education and care reform is about ensuring that the experience they have in an early childhood environment supports every child's learning and development.

Good luck!

Heather Barnes

Early childhood consultant and trainer



References

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Biography

Heather Barnes is based in Victoria and works as a consultant and trainer. She travels all over the country delivering professional development training sessions to educators. She is a passionate advocate for the *Early Years Learning Framework* and the stronger focus on quality improvement that is a key aspect of the *National Quality Standard*.



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