

Latest News

Welcome to the last edition of the Regulation and Quality Assessment Update for 2016. It has been a very busy time for early childhood services with the change to educator-to-child ratios for centre-based services, the introduction of the Child Safe Standards and the No Jab, No Play legislation coming into effect earlier this year. The review of the National Quality Framework (NQF) has also been progressing with Victoria actively contributing to options for streamlining existing requirements of the National Law and reduce regulatory burden for education and care services.

As this year comes to a close, it is a great opportunity for services to think about their self-assessment and quality improvement planning processes, such as what has worked well and what could be improved. This process can also be valuable as education and care services begin to have their next assessment and rating visits. QARD has completed over 400 next assessments, with 60 per cent of these achieving an improvement in their overall rating. This is a great achievement that highlights the quality in education and care services and improved learning outcomes being delivered to Victorian children.

In turning our attention to next assessments, this edition of the newsletter has a contribution from Catharine Hydon who discusses the importance of services considering changes since their initial assessment, what has been put in place to support continuous improvement and improved learning and development outcomes for children. We also have an article from Camp Australia providing insight into the implementation of healthy eating programs in OSHC.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Karen Curtis, Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority's (ACECQA) inaugural CEO for her outstanding contribution to the establishment and leadership of ACECQA over the past five and half years and her collaborative approach in working with States and Territories and the Australian Government to successfully implement the NQF.

I wish you all the best for the end of the year and 2017.

Kind regards

Madeleine Smith - Executive Director
Quality Assessment and Regulation Division
Department of Education and Training

Assessment and Rating

ACECQA produce quality reports about education and care services operating under the NQF. These reports, known as NQF snapshots, include a profile of the sector, information on quality ratings by provider management type and service sub-types within centre-based services. These snapshots provide figures on rates of improvements nationally now that education and care services have their next assessment and rating.

The latest NQF snapshot confirms that over 15,400 education and care services are approved to operate under the NQF, with over 4000 of these services operating in Victoria. Victorian services are still performing well with 80 per cent rated meeting or above the National Quality Standard (NQS).

To view a copy of the latest snapshot or review previous edition's visit ACECQA's website at:

www.acecqa.gov.au/national-quality-framework-snapshots

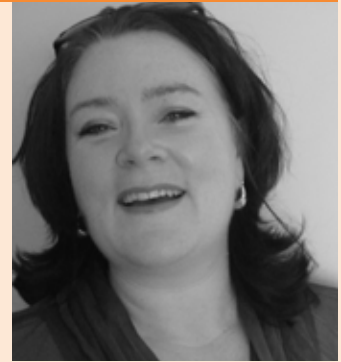
New logos promote NQF service rating

ACECQA, in collaboration with regulatory authorities and the Australian Government, has designed logos to represent the rating levels of the NQS. Education and care services with a published rating will be able to access the relevant logo through ACECQA's national registers to promote their overall rating. Access to and use of these logos is completely voluntary and will not replace the ratings certificate that all assessed and rated services are provided and must display as prescribed in the National Law (section 172).

To access the ACECQA logos services will first need to visit the [national registers](#), located on ACECQA's website and locate their service details. Once you have completed this step, click more details, request for logo by filling out your service details and acknowledge the terms and conditions of use. Once all of these steps have been completed, ACECQA will securely send the logo files and accompanying brand guidelines to the service's email registered in the [NQA IT System](#).

“Continuous improvement is better than delayed perfection.”

Mark Twain



In a culture of continuous improvement within early childhood services one thing remains constant – the necessity for all aspects of the program to evolve and progress towards better outcomes for children, families, staff and the community. Fundamental to the Assessment and Rating process is the expectation that services will develop plans to improve what they do and then repeat the process again and again in a quest to be the very best we can be.

We are not alone; many other pursuits see the arrival at a particular point as a signpost to future possibilities rather than an end in itself. As the drivers in the Bathurst 1000 complete the race there is always talk of the next race, the next car and how they might better conquer the complexities of the mountain. And when the cooks on those reality television shows present their cooking creations they do so in a spirit of making a better dessert than they have ever made before and when your next door neighbour spends hours in the garden tending to his tomato plants he does so hoping that the next crop will be a bumper one.

“Learning and innovation go hand in hand. The arrogance of success is to think that what you did yesterday will be sufficient for tomorrow.”

William Pollard

So, it should be no surprise that continuous improvement has made its way to early childhood services and that embedded in our approaches to quality is a call to consider how we might take the next step in delivering transformative programs that enrich children’s and adult’s lives. The Guide to the National Quality Standard refers to this process of continuous improvements as a ‘...positive organisational culture [in] an environment of trust and openness where management and staff members are motivated to continuously improve the service for the benefit of children and their families’. (ACECQA, September 2013, p.167). Indeed the reality of attaining an exceeding rating in the National Quality Standard is that the work must continue unabated. The culture of continuous improvement that resulted in being rated above the standard must be nurtured and cultivated. In other words, the strategies, ideas and practices that helped the service climb this far will not be enough to keep you there. Nor will they be enough to help you continue to be there very best you can be. A commitment to continuous improvement is the time for innovation, creativity not simply more of the same.

With a view to what is possible we need also to be cautious about becoming fixated on the next best thing. Continuous improvement does not mean we become so fixated on the future that we ignore the here and now. Anne Pelo, in her 2013 book *The Goodness of Rain: Developing an Ecological Identity in Young Children* (Pelo, 2013), reminds us of the need to be fully present with children and slow down long enough to

deeply engage with children, families and community in the pursuit of becoming a learning community.

Continuous improvement requires deep reflection. Flashy improvements implemented to look good on the day or as a response to what the centre down the road are doing will surely compromise continuous improvement and will not lead to extemporary practice. Just because an exhibitor at a conference tells you that some product will help you get or keep exceeding or a consultant tells you that this strategy is “a must” does not mean that it will help you improve.

What is needed is the ‘lively culture of professional enquiry’ (DEEWR, 2009, p.13) as described in the Early Years Learning Framework – in such a space educators can think and rethink, imagine and reimagine and make shared decisions about what improvement looks like for them. These examples will illustrate the lively cultural that leads to innovative improvement in action:

The school age care leadership team of a large suburban program worked hard to develop a regular opportunity to meet as an educator team. These meetings were organised to emphasise reflection and discussion about the program with a short time allocated each meeting for housekeeping. Because of this, and many other initiatives, the service was rated exceeding. The leadership team has since reflected on this meeting process, based on a strong commitment to improving what is working well, and decided that the next step for these reflective meetings would be to invite educators to bring ideas to the meeting and lead the discussions themselves - and share the outcomes with each other!

A small inner city long day service has actively developed a relationship with the local school. The transitioning process is well defined and there are many visits between the two places over the course of the year. This was noted in their rating and assessment visit and along with many other initiatives resulted in an exceeding rating. The team felt that this program, although very successful, could be made even better if they stretched the transition work from visiting into pedagogy. To achieve this, they have set up a regular meeting and classroom visit between the kindergarten teacher and one of the foundation teachers to discuss teaching approaches, assessment and curriculum with a view to making the transition process more effective and to understand better each other contexts. They plan to offer joint learning opportunities to their children into the future. The family day care leadership team in a rural community felt that the recruitment and induction process was not as effective as it could have been resulting in educators still being confused about expectations of the service well into

Continuous Improvement: The New Normal continued.....

their employment. The recruitment and induction process was improved to require educators to attend a comprehensive training program and an easy mechanism for them to upgrade their qualifications which many of them have taken up. These actions and along with many other initiatives have resulted in an exceeding rating. The leadership team as always on the lookout for new ideas and they recently saw an article in a FDC magazine about an induction process that included time spent in other educator's homes getting a taste for the work and learning directly from a fellow educator. They have since trialled this for a recently appointed educator and are moving to embed this step in their induction process.

These examples give us a sense of what it means to continuously improve. Rather than being content with what is working well, a service and educators team who are committed to continuous improvement are always thinking about how their great practice and successful strategies can become better and better. The next assessment and rating visit will be an opportunity for us all to demonstrate what we are capable of!

Bibliography

- ACECQA. (September 2013). *Guide to the National Quality Standard*.
DEEWR. (2009). *Belonging, being and becoming: The early years learning framework for Australia*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.
Pelo, A. (2013). *Goodness of Rain*. Washington: Exchange Press.

Insight from the Sector

Rosa Piteri - National Operations Manager, Camp Australia

Implementing Healthy Eating Programs in OSHC

Research has shown that eating habits developed in childhood can continue into adult life. Unfortunately, childhood obesity is a growing problem in Australia and around the world. Healthy Eating in OSHC should extend beyond what the children eat to include their active participation in its preparation. With this in mind Camp Australia is proud of their achievements in this area through the introduction of its revised Healthy Eating Program.

Camp Australia has always been committed to providing healthy eating options for children in its care. We have been very mindful of the allergies and the health risk they present to some children. Many years ago we also recognised that not everyone has the same knowledge and understanding of how to address these combined issues appropriately. Which is why our policies and procedures ensure that the food options available at any individual service is restricted to foods that are low in salt and sugar, and free from common allergies (e.g., nuts, dairy and eggs). Subsequently, over 70% of our food budget has been spent on fresh fruit and vegetables for many years. While we are proud of what we have been doing, we felt that we could do more to establish positive relationships between children and healthy eating options. So we decided to revise our healthy eating program to be more engaging.

Developing the New Healthy Eating Program in line with Healthy Body and Mind

Camp Australia is committed to ensuring that children in our care receive a variety of healthy food choices to meet their nutrition requirements for a healthy body and mind. This helped set the tone and the framework for the revised program. What we wanted to do was find ways to get the children more conscious of the food choices they were making and more involved in its preparation. To do this we decided to create a Cookbook as a focal point for the new program.

The Cookbook has been developed to include a wide range of recipes that can be prepared with the variety of equipment available in OSHC settings, actively involves children, can be prepared and eaten during regular hours of operation and are nutritious. The development of the cookbook was a collaborative approach involving a number of staff across Australia, who suggested recipes, refined them and tested them through pilot OSHC sites so feedback could be gathered to inform the product.



The Camp Australia Cookbook has been accredited by Nutrition Australia Vic's Healthy Eating Advisory Service (HEAS) and contains more than 60 delicious and easy to prepare recipes. Now implemented across every Camp Australia service, the Cookbook adheres to the Australia Dietary Guidelines to promote health and wellbeing for all children in our care. Supporting its implementation has been the provision of online training via Camp Australia's learning management system. The response we have received in relation to the program from the Educators, children, families and schools has been overwhelmingly positive.

Aligning with the Department of Health and Human Services' Food and Drink Guidelines for Outside School Hours Care, the Cookbook ensures that children's nutrition requirements are met and enable Camp Australia to broaden the variety of nutritious food we can offer the children. Importantly the Cookbook also encourages children to become positively involved in the preparation of healthy food.



Preparation for Bushfire Season 2016/17

Victoria has a number of fire-prone areas where there is a higher risk of bushfire activity. Early childhood services operating in these locations are placed on the Department's Bushfire At-Risk Register (BARR). The BARR list is reviewed annually and published on the Department's

website, available at: www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/health/Pages/bushfirerisk.aspx

Education and Care Services and Licensed Children's Services listed on the BARR are required to meet these conditions on their service approval/license:

- the approved provider/licensee of a service on the BARR must ensure that on any day declared to be a Code Red day for the region in which a service is located, that the service is closed and remains closed for the duration of the Code Red day; and
- services named on the BARR must submit their current Emergency Management Plan (EMP) annually to the Department by 21 November.

The Department may take compliance action against services that have been placed on the Department's BARR and who have not submitted a copy of their emergency management plan by the specified date. Services that have submitted their EMP already in 2016 are not required to re-submit the same plan again, unless it has been changed or updated.

For services that have not submitted their EMP, this can be completed by one of the two following methods:

- Services approved under the National Law can upload their EMP via the national IT system (NQA ITS) by completing a *Notification of Change to Information About an Approved Service* (SA12) form.
- For services licensed under the *Children's Services Act 1996*, you can email your EMP directly to the Department at: licensed.childrens.services@edumail.vic.gov.au



The approved provider of each **Family Day Care** service must:

- Assess the location of each residence and/or venue to determine whether the residence or venue is located in an area considered as high risk of bushfire. The Department's BARR can be used to determine locations at high risk of bushfire and is available at: www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/health/Pages/bushfirerisk.aspx.
- Incorporate procedures for monitoring bushfire risks for each family day care residence or approved venue.
- Ensure that education and care is not provided at a family day care residence or venue located in an area considered as high risk of bushfire on a declared Code Red day in their Bureau of Meteorology district.
- Inform families of any family day care residence or approved venue where education and care cannot be provided due to a Code Red day in their Bureau of Meteorology district.

Resources

The Department has also developed a range of resources to assist services in developing and reviewing their emergency management plans:

- Bushfire factsheets for Centre-Based and Family Day Care Services
- Guide to Developing an EMP
- EMP FAQs
- EMP template for early childhood services
- A number of short video tutorials are available to assist with developing area maps, evacuation diagrams and communication trees within the Emergency Management Plan template document.

These resources available at: www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/support/Pages/emergency.aspx

In the event of an incident or natural disaster the Department may need to seek information or provide your service with information. For this reason it is critical that the Department has the most current contact information for your service, including emergency contacts. Services can update their details through the NQA ITS by completing a *Notice of Change to Information About an Approved Service* (SA12) form available on ACECQA's website at:

www.acecqa.gov.au/notifications



Regulation under the Spotlight

Qualifications

Recently the ACECQA Board agreed to extend a transitional measure that will allow educators to be recognised as equivalent to an early childhood teacher until the end of 2019. This agreement means that a person who holds all the following will be recognised:

- a primary teaching qualification that includes at least a focus on children aged 5 to 8 years old
- current teacher registration in Australia
- an ACECQA approved diploma level (or higher) education and care qualification.

This transitional measure will cease at the end of 2019, however educators who had obtained this combination of qualifications prior to the end of 2019 will continue to be recognised under this provision.

ACECQA also have a number of tools that can help determine if an individual's qualifications are recognised under the National Law. These tools include a list of approved (and former approved) qualifications, as well as information on how to apply to have a qualification approved or have your individual qualification(s) assessed as equivalent to an approved qualification.

The Qualifications List, Qualifications checker and information about how to apply to have your application assessed is available at: www.acecqa.gov.au/educators-and-providers1/qualifications

Managing Complaints

Services have an obligation to notify the Department of any complaints alleging a contravention of the National Law or raising concerns about children's safety, health or wellbeing. Further the NQS requires services to have processes in place to ensure that all grievances and complaints are addressed, investigated fairly and documented in a timely manner.

Ensuring that the service has transparent, practical and effective dealing with complaints policy and procedures (regulation 168 2(o)) in place will assist staff within the service to manage concerns and grievances in ways that will benefit all involved. The NQS also assesses processes the service has in place to ensure all grievances and complaints are addressed, investigated fairly and documented in a timely manner.

It is also beneficial that families are familiar with the service's complaints handling policies and procedures and also given the opportunity to provide comment at time of their review. This will assist families to feel confident that any concerns or issues they may raise with the service will be handled promptly and professionally.

The fact sheet entitled National Quality Framework, Incidents and Complaints provides further guidance of notification requirements to the Department and is available at:

www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/regulation/Pages/nqffactsheets.aspx

Regulation under the Spotlight

Documenting child assessments in OSHC

The way that information is collected for each child will vary from service to service and therefore the National Law does not prescribe the approach to capture and record this information. In particular school age children have the ability to contribute to their own assessment of wellbeing development and learning and services may wish to consider how they incorporate older children in meeting this requirement.

Some children attending OSHC services spend limited time at the service and for that reason the quality of child assessments is not reflected in the quantity of information, rather the context of the service setting, the relevancy of information and how this is used by educators to inform the program for individual children and it's availability to families.

The National Law (section 168) prescribes that an OSHC services program is based on an approved learning framework that include:

- The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)
- Framework for School Age Care (FSAC)
- The Victorian Early Years and Learning Development Framework (VEYLDF)

When using these frameworks, OSHC services may use the VEYLDF for children up to 8 years of age and the FSAC for children over 8 years of age.

Information about the service's educational program must also be displayed at a place accessible to parents and a copy of the educational program to be made available at the service's premise for the Department to inspect (regulation 75).

Worksafe Visits to Education & Care Services

We know that child safety is always a top priority in our education and care services, but what about staff safety? WorkSafe Victoria recently visited a number of early learning centres across the state to assess compliance with workplace health and safety laws. The findings from the Worksafe inspectors' visits and resources developed to help make your service a safe place to work are available at:

www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/safety-and-prevention/your-industry/early-learning



Professional Development

Gowrie Victoria provides free professional support under the Kindergarten Intensive Support Program to eligible kindergarten services that have a rating of *Working Towards National Quality Standard* or *Significant Improvement Required*, or been referred to Gowrie Victoria for support by the Department.

The Kindergarten Intensive Support Program incorporates a range of professional support, tailored to meet individual service need such as:

- Onsite support with a Learning and Development Advisor, to work through your Quality Improvement Plan
- Development of a Professional Learning Plan to map the professional development needs of your staff and the best learning approach to meet these needs
- Development of an Action Plan
- Phone and email support and advice

Gowrie Victoria also provides free phone and email support to all Victorian state funded kindergarten services. Gowrie Victoria Learning and Development Advisors can:

- Provide you with advice, support and the latest information on any aspect of working in or managing a service
- Answer your questions, provide you with a range of resources, or direct you to the appropriate agency to support your needs.

Our phone line is attended 9am to 5pm, Monday to Fri (exclusive of Public Holidays). Please contact us on 03 9362 2210.

Gowrie Victoria acknowledges the support of the Victorian Government.

Resources

New or updated resources are available at: www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/regulation/Pages/nqffactsheets.aspx

- Information to be displayed - new
- Notifications to Regulatory Authority - new
- Policies and procedures - new
- Staffing arrangements - updated
- Serious incidents and complaints - updated
- Enrolment records - updated

Fact sheets for services operating under the *Children's Services Act 1996* are available at:

www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/regulation/Pages/vcsresources.aspx

Keeping in touch

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You can get in touch with us by:

Visiting our website www.education.vic.gov.au

Phoning us on 1300 307 415

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