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Topic 1

In this topic you will learn about:

1A Analysing and clarifying components of the NQF

1B Confirming that staff understand the NQF and the assessment and rating process

Interpreting the National Quality Framework

The National Quality Framework (NQF) underpins education and care practices within Australian regulated services. You need to be aware of the framework's components that are relevant to your service, and be able to navigate and interpret the appropriate standards and overall framework. In particular, you need to understand the assessment and rating process, which measures a service's ability to provide quality education and care to children.

National law and regulations

The Education and Care Services National Law forms the foundation of the NQF. A key part of this is the assessment and rating process, which is used to regulate all registered education and care services. A regulatory authority in each state and territory takes the role of assessment and, from this assessment, rates the service within the following six levels:

1. Excellent rating (the criteria for this rating level is determined by ACECQA)
2. Exceeding NQS
3. Meeting NQS
4. Working towards NQS
5. Significant improvement required
6. Provisional – not yet assessed (services that have not yet been assessed and rated)

Visit ACECQA's website at <http://aspirelr.link/nqs-ratings> to download the National Quality Standard Ratings, or to learn more access the *Guide to the National Quality Framework* at <http://aspirelr.link/nqf-guide-pdf>

You can subscribe to a newsletter through the ACECQA website, which provides up-to-date information on how services are working towards the assessment and rating processes, along with other information of current interest, including changes made to the NQF.

The assessment and rating process is described in more detail in section 1B.

National learning frameworks

The national learning frameworks you may work with are:

- ▶ *Belonging, being and becoming: The early years learning framework for Australia (EYLF)*
- ▶ *My time, our place: Framework for school age care in Australia (MTOF).*

These frameworks encourage educators to design each day's activities to match the children's interests, needs, personal experiences, abilities and understanding. They encourage you to see children as individuals, and to challenge yourself and those you work with to meet children's various needs through planned and spontaneous activities. The frameworks are based on a system of goals and objectives with core principles and practices.

The principles of the learning frameworks are:

- ▶ Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships
- ▶ Partnerships
- ▶ High expectations and equity
- ▶ Respect for diversity
- ▶ Ongoing learning and reflective practice



Relevant legislation

There are many important statutory and regulatory requirements that you need to be aware of and comply with. These requirements may be federal (Commonwealth) or state/territory specific. Legislation that impacts on your work as an educator is outlined in the following table.

Legislation area	Explanation
Child protection and guardianship legislation	<p>State and territory governments are responsible for child protection services.</p> <p>You can find the relevant Act and other legislative details at: http://aspirelr.link/child-protection</p> <p>The key principles of child protection legislation are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ act in the best interests of the child ▶ intervene early ▶ support permanent and stable care for children. <p>You may need to refer to this legislation if you deal with custody orders or if you need to report suspected child abuse.</p>
Discrimination and harassment	<p>The following are federal Acts relating to discrimination and harassment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ <i>Age Discrimination Act 2004</i> ▶ <i>Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986</i> ▶ <i>Disability Discrimination Act 1992</i> ▶ <i>Racial Discrimination Act 1975</i> ▶ <i>Sex Discrimination Act 1984</i> <p>These Acts guide you in maintaining a non-biased service and in supporting others to ensure equality.</p>
Health and safety	<p>Health and safety legislation, such as the <i>Work Health and Safety Act 2011</i> (Cth), is designed to protect the health and safety of all persons in the workplace, and sets out the health and safety rights and duties of everyone in the workplace. Each state and territory has its own health and safety legislation.</p> <p>Under health and safety legislation, you must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ take reasonable care for your own health and safety ▶ not adversely affect the health and safety of others ▶ comply with any reasonable instruction given by your manager ▶ cooperate with any reasonable policy or procedure relating to health and safety in the workplace.
Privacy	<p>The <i>Privacy Act 1988</i> (Cth) aims to regulate and protect the handling of personal information about individuals.</p> <p>The key to effective compliance is in developing an organisational culture that respects privacy. Your service must ensure that management and staff have a good understanding of their responsibilities in protecting personal information from misuse, loss, corruption or disclosure.</p>

Service policies, procedures and position descriptions

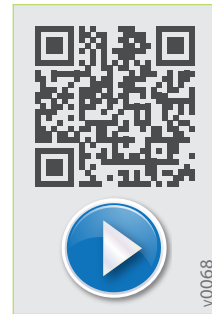
Each education and care service develops its own philosophy, policies and procedures that are unique to the individual service, but are based on national legislation, child-centred practice, duty of care and quality assurance.

If you follow the service’s policies and procedures, you can be confident that you will be meeting the requirements of legislation and standards.

A position description is a document given to staff when they are employed. It describes the boundaries of a person’s job and the skills required to perform that job, including the purpose of the position, key responsibilities, specific tasks, key performance indicators, accountability structure and reporting arrangements, and the terms and conditions of employment relating to the position.

Position descriptions vary because they reflect each centre’s philosophy, structure and objectives. Make sure you understand your role and responsibilities, and how they relate to the NQF and relevant legislation. Seek clarification and advice from your manager if necessary.

Watch these videos to learn more about working in line with policies and procedures.



Analysing the NQF requirements

Once you have a firm understanding of how the NQF and other legislation influences your work, and how the assessment and rating system operates, you can then consider how it impacts on your daily curriculum, as described in the following table.

Component	Related area	Workplace example
Standards	Quality improvement plan (QIP)	All stakeholders must participate in self-assessment to advise the QIP.
	Timing and preparation for scheduled visits and prepared materials	All stakeholders should be prepared and aware of the necessary procedures to undertake during visits.
	Assessment arrangements and applications	Directors and supervisors may be responsible for applications. All staff must demonstrate knowledge of the NQF and how it applies in the service.
	Partnerships with parents and the community	Educators work with parents to understand an infant’s daily routine to ensure their needs are met.
	Leadership	Leaders and mentors must be in place within the service. An educational leader informs and supports curriculum development.

Seeking advice

As discussed, all educators must understand the NQF and its components, and be able to identify their relevance to the service in which they are working. It is your responsibility to implement these structures and participate in an assessment and rating process. To do this you need to be able to clearly explain your practices and demonstrate your knowledge of the principles of education and care provision.

If you require support to learn more about the NQF, or have questions or concerns, there is a range of methods for finding out information, as outlined in the following table.

Type of information	Who can help	Where can you find support
The NQF	Educational leader	▶ In your service
	Professional development or training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Child Family Community Australia (CFCA): http://aspirelr.link/cfca ▶ Membership support, e.g. Community Connections Solutions Australia (CCSA): http://aspirelr.link/ccsa ▶ Early Childhood Resource Hub http://aspirelr.link/ecrh ▶ Conferences ▶ Registered training organisation (RTO), e.g. One World for Children
Assessment and rating system	State/territory regulator	▶ Contact details can be found on the ACECQA website at: http://aspirelr.link/acecqa-contact
Qualification requirements or approvals	ACECQA	▶ ACECQA: http://aspirelr.link/acecqa
Complaints and concerns	ACECQA State/territory regulator	▶ Contact details can be found on the ACECQA website at: http://aspirelr.link/acecqa-contact

Example

Clarifying an issue

Dora holds a Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care and is keen to work with school-age children, but isn't sure if her qualifications are applicable. She goes online to the ACECQA website and looks up the qualification guidelines. Dora finds that, in her state of Western Australia, she is recognised as qualified to work in a school-age service.

Example

Ensuring staff understand the NQF

Edith, an educator, prepares to present information at a staff meeting. She wants to talk to the other educators about the natural environment (NQS Standard 3.2) and how their development of a vegetable garden will be beneficial to the children and help meet this requirement.

At the meeting, Edith plays a video and uses supporting documentation to create discussion that includes:

- ▶ focus points
- ▶ key EYLF concepts
- ▶ key NQS links
- ▶ a viewing guide with questions to ask to start discussion, and ways to look more deeply at the learning and teaching.

Edith asks questions to make sure everyone understands how the activity links and complies with the NQF, and how each person’s role contributes to the service’s overall obligations. This is essential knowledge that will help the educators respond appropriately to questions during an assessment and rating visit.

Practice task 2

1. What would you say if you wanted to confirm an educator’s understanding of Element 2.1.1 of the NQS?

2. Why is the assessment and rating process important to a service, and what are the responsibilities of staff when a representative of the regulating authority visits the service?



Topic 2

In this topic you will learn about:

2A Collecting information and involving others

2B Recording and using information

Facilitating an organisation's self-assessment

An important part of an education and care service's business practice is to regularly self-assess its performance in relation to the NQF to ensure its transparency and accountability, maintain the quality of the service it provides, and collect evidence for the assessment and rating process.

To be effective, self-assessment must be open and honest so that it provides, reliable information that encourages and supports the service towards continuous improvement.

Collecting information

Collecting information and feedback should occur on a regular, ongoing basis. Involve others as much as possible and always inform people why the information is being collected and the benefits of a self-assessment. Including stakeholders in the collection process gives them the opportunity to be involved and to share ideas with you.

For example, make sure everyone knows the process for providing feedback, including who they can go to with either a positive or negative comment. Invite people to let you know if they feel changes are required. Share ideas and information through newsletters and notices so that everyone feels acknowledged and part of the decision-making process and operation of the service.

Determine the most efficient and effective ways to collect information and feedback from stakeholders; for example:

- ▶ an informal conversation with a parent
- ▶ meetings or discussions, including team meetings
- ▶ interviews
- ▶ research
- ▶ observation
- ▶ focus groups
- ▶ questionnaires and surveys
- ▶ feedback forms
- ▶ performance appraisals.

Watch this video to learn more about gathering information and advice.



Organisational data

It is essential that your service has in place the appropriate documents and records that provide evidence of your organisation's compliance with quality assurance, regulations and other legislation. These may include business plans, policies and procedures, procedural forms, checklists, audit reports, and assessment and rating process documents.

Feedback from parents and children

Record any formal or informal feedback received from parents, other carers and children. Feedback may be the results of informal chats at drop-off and pick-up times, observation of children at play, formal meetings, interviews and questionnaires/surveys.

Staff performance appraisals

Read the results of regular performance appraisals to determine how well educators are carrying out their responsibilities, contributing to the quality of the service provided and complying with the NQF. Also consider the results of your own performance appraisal in terms of how you can improve your practice.

Example

Summarising information

The following example shows how an educator summarised information she recorded about Quality Area 2.

Quality Area 2: Children's health and safety	
Information	Results
Summary of strengths	Parents feel their children have developed excellent relationships with educators and that children are well supervised. The hygiene practices used are adequate as there are minimal issues related to spread of infectious disease.
Key improvements sought	Some parents feel that their cultural dietary requirements are not provided for and would prefer that their children were offered sandwiches each day (Element 2.1.3).

Making results available

The results of your self-assessment process must be made available to all stakeholders so they know their input has been acknowledged. The results are also used in discussions to develop a quality improvement plan for an assessment and rating process.

Self-assessment results may be provided in a range of ways, depending on the audience; for example:

- ▶ Management may require a comprehensive report that documents the process; the results against NQS standards and elements; implications for continuous improvement; and follow-up strategies.
- ▶ Staff members may be informed at staff meetings or specific information sessions; through information displayed on noticeboards; in emails or email attachments.
- ▶ Parents may be informed of the self-assessment results through newsletters, information sessions, or the service's website or Facebook page.

Always consider confidentiality and ensure you only include information relevant to the group you are providing it to. For example, while you may include the names of individual families in a report to a service owner, this may be inappropriate if you are addressing a parent committee.

Also ensure the language used is appropriate to the audience. For example, parents may not be familiar with the terminology and processes used in education and care services, such as NQF, elements and the assessment and rating process. Similarly, some people may speak English as a second language or have language difficulties, so make sure the information is accessible to them in easy-to-understand language using graphics or images to assist understanding, and that any specific terminology is explained.

Summary

- ▶ An important part of the NQF assessment and rating process is the self-assessment process.
- ▶ A self-assessment process is required to gather information from stakeholders (including service management personnel, staff, parents, children and members of the community) to assist you to identify how well the service follows appropriate standards and regulations and meets stakeholder needs.
- ▶ You need to collect a range of information to determine how well your service is operating, including documents relating to the NQF, organisational records, feedback from parents and children, and comments from community members.
- ▶ Use a range of methods to collect information, such as research, informal interactions, discussions, formal meetings, observations, focus groups, interviews, surveys, questionnaires, feedback forms and performance appraisals.
- ▶ Record the information as evidence of the service's strengths and weaknesses, and make it available to authorised officers when they visit as part of the assessment and rating process.
- ▶ The information recorded must be clear, accurate, complete, non-biased and current.
- ▶ Self-assessment results should be provided in a range of ways, depending on the audience, such as in a formal report, meetings, newsletters or on the service website, so all stakeholders are given the opportunity to reflect on and discuss the results.
- ▶ Self-assessment results are used to develop a quality improvement plan and to inform the assessment and rating process.

3A Creating a quality improvement plan

A quality improvement plan is used to record self-assessment and quality improvement information. It is also part of the assessment and rating process, as it is the evidence that demonstrates your service's progress.

Quality improvement plans

The NQF assessment and rating process requires that all registered education and care services develop a QIP, and to have it available at the service at all times. The QIP follows this process of development:

1. Self-assessment occurs.
2. Consultation and review occurs.
3. The QIP is developed.

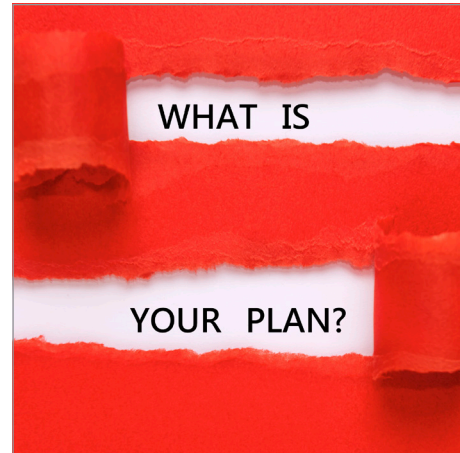
The QIP is requested by the state or territory authority when they commence their assessment and rating process for the particular service. The assessment and rating process is as follows:

Steps for assessment and rating:

- 1 The service is advised that the assessment and rating process has begun.
- 2 The updated QIP must be submitted within six weeks.
- 3 The service receives a receipt advising that the QIP has been received.
- 4 The assessment and rating process is undertaken.
- 5 The rating is finalised.

The QIP must reflect the information you received as part of your self-assessment. ACECQA provides a QIP template that includes:

- ▶ information about the service, its philosophy and its context
- ▶ a summary of the quality of practice and strengths identified through self-assessment for each quality area and element, matched against the national regulations and the NQS



Example

How educators review their QIPs

The following provides two examples of how educators review their QIPs.

1. Katrina develops a QIP. She tells the other educators that she will monitor the section relating to policy development, and add progress notes on a weekly basis to determine whether the policy is working and whether changes need to be made. She completes the monitoring of the QIP by speaking to each of the participants, and recording their responses in regard to progress, difficulties, delays and successes.
2. Linda develops a QIP relating to staff improving their hazard and risk assessment strategies. She indicates that the QIP will be monitored daily to check whether staff are meeting the outcomes/goals. She tells staff she will monitor the QIP by completing a checklist based on staff involvement and implementation of the strategies included in the plan. At the end of the month she will conduct a safety audit and share the results to determine whether further improvements are required.

Practice task 6

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

You are reviewing part of the QIP that relates to the children's program.

A key improvement is to involve a specialist in presenting a new planning method and to facilitate educator meetings to talk about how to implement the specialist's ideas.

The specialist attends and demonstrates this method.

At the first staff meeting, some educators become upset as they feel the specialist has criticised their beliefs, and that the method presented is not in line with their philosophy or their understanding of the learning framework. They are not able to agree with the specialist's ideas.

One of the staff members suggests an additional method she thinks would work well, as it is current, meets the learning framework and fits with the service's philosophy.

1. Identify what action you would take if you were faced with this situation. Clarify if you would:
 - ▶ stop the QIP in this area and reconsider the goal or steps
 - ▶ adjust the QIP to meet any new information
 - ▶ use discussion, clarification, professional development and training to continue the QIP.

Part B

Read the two case studies, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study 1

Part of a QIP relates to the children’s menu. It addresses the need for a dietitian to develop a new menu and consult with parents to identify each individual child’s needs. The plan is expected to take four weeks to implement.

The parents have identified their children’s individual needs and the dietitian has been given this information to add to the menu plan. Unfortunately, she has other commitments and five weeks later has not yet provided the new menu. When the director contacts her, she says the menu will be complete within a week, and also asks for staff to let her know their individual dietary needs.

Case study 2

Part of a QIP relates to the development of a new timetable for cleaning the bathroom; by the time educators are able to fit in this task during their work day, the bathroom often presents safety hazards such as slippery floors. The educators are involved in developing a more appropriate routine/timetable that meets everyone’s needs.

The next day a junior educator comes to you. She is upset as she thinks she hasn’t been cleaning the bathroom correctly and doesn’t understand how the procedure has changed.

1. Identify what action you would take in each scenario. Clarify if you would:
 - ▶ stop the QIP in this area and reconsider the goal or steps
 - ▶ adjust the QIP to address any new information
 - ▶ use discussion, clarification, professional development and training to continue the QIP.

2. Explain why you chose each option.



Topic 4

In this topic you will learn about:

4A Being prepared for a site visit

Coordinating the service for a site visit

A key responsibility for a supervisor, educational leader or director is to coordinate the service for representatives of the regulating authority during the assessment and rating process. This involves arranging meetings to inform everyone that the service is to be assessed, ensuring everyone understands what they are responsible for and checking that all required documentation is complete and accurate.

The following table maps this topic to the National Quality Standard and both national learning frameworks.

National Quality Standard	
	Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice
	Quality Area 2: Children’s health and safety
	Quality Area 3: Physical environment
✓	Quality Area 4: Staffing arrangements
	Quality Area 5: Relationships with children
	Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
✓	Quality Area 7: Governance and leadership
Early Years Learning Framework	My Time, Our Place
Principles	
	Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships
	Partnerships
	High expectations and equity
	Respect for diversity
✓	Ongoing learning and reflective practice
Practice	
	Holistic approaches
	Responsiveness to children
	Learning through play
	Intentional teaching
	Learning environments
	Cultural competence
	Continuity of learning and transitions
✓	Assessment for learning
Outcomes	
	Children have a strong sense of identity
	Children are connected to and contribute to their world
	Children have a strong sense of wellbeing
	Children are confident and involved learners
	Children are effective communicators

During the visit

The duration of the assessment and rating visit depends on the type of service and the number of children, educators and age groups within the service. Similarly, more than one authorised officer may attend a visit if required.

The assessor's objective is to:

- ▶ determine whether the service meets the NQS elements
- ▶ determine whether the service meets regulations
- ▶ rate each standard
- ▶ rate each quality area and element
- ▶ determine the overall rating for the service.

The visit follows a prescribed format where the assessor:

- ▶ greets the contact person and discusses the overall visit
- ▶ views all service areas and activities
- ▶ observes each play space, age group and session
- ▶ observes interactions inside and outside
- ▶ talks to educators
- ▶ reviews documentation
- ▶ provides general feedback about the visit to the contact person.

During the visit, the service has the opportunity to make minor adjustments. For example, if issues arise during the visit, the assessor will consider how these issues are managed and dealt with, and these results will form part of the assessment and rating process.

Example

Summary of an assessor's visit

This summary is in relation to element 5.1.1.

Element 5.1.1: Responsive and meaningful interactions build trusting relationships which engage and support each child to feel secure, confident and included.

Observe	An atmosphere that is generally relaxed and happy.
Discuss	Experiences and routines are organised to maximise opportunities for meaningful conversations between children, educators and coordinators.
Sight	The service's statement of philosophy.

After the visit

After the assessment and rating visit, the service receives a report that provides comprehensive details of the visit and the service rating. If the service would like to appeal the rating, this must be done within 14 days.

Once a rating is final, the results are published on the MyChild website and displayed in the service.

Learning checkpoint 4

Coordinating the service for a site visit

Part A

Undertake online research, ask experienced practitioners and use your own experience and knowledge of the assessment and rating process to assist you in developing a hints and tips brochure or leaflet to support an educator who is about to experience the assessment and rating visit for the first time.

The brochure or leaflet should include:

- ▶ the reason for a site visit
- ▶ what educators are expected to do during a site visit
- ▶ **three** examples of the type of questions the assessor may ask
- ▶ why it is important to be prepared.

Part B

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Your service is receiving an assessment and rating visit by an authorised officer in one week.

You are the health and safety representative and have been asked to prepare a talk for the authorised officer about health and safety in the service (addressing Standard 2.1 in particular).

1. How would you inform the following stakeholders about this visit?

a. Staff

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b. Parents and families

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c. Community members

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