



Discussion Paper:

2021 National Quality Framework Approved Learning Frameworks Update

August 2021

Executive Summary

Background

Along with the Education and Care Services National Law (National Law) and National Regulations, and the National Quality Standard (NQS), the Approved Learning Frameworks (ALFs) are part of the regulatory system that established the National Quality Framework (NQF). Under the National Law, approved providers of education and care services must ensure that the programs they deliver to children are based on an ALF and is delivered in a manner that accords with the ALF.

On 15 December 2020, Education Ministers commissioned an update of the two national approved learning frameworks under the National Quality Framework (NQF) - [Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia](#) (EYLF) and [My Time Our Place: Framework for School Age Care](#) (MTOC). The ALFs inform educational programs and practices in early childhood education and care (ECEC) and outside school hours care (OSHC) services.

As both ALFs have been in use for a decade or more, the purpose of this update is to ensure they reflect contemporary developments in practice and knowledge to extend children's and young people's learning.

A national consortium led by a partnership between Macquarie University, Queensland University of Technology and Edith Cowan University was engaged by ACECQA on behalf of all governments to lead this project and the paper was prepared by the Chief Investigators of the consortium¹. More information about the project is available on the ALFs Update website at www.alfsupdate.mq.edu.au.

The ALFs Update Project

The project is being delivered over three stages:

1. Gathering feedback about the current ALFs from a wide range of stakeholders to inform the Discussion Paper (complete),
2. Gathering stakeholder feedback on the Discussion Paper to inform the updates to the ALFs, and
3. Sector piloting/testing of the draft updated ALFs.

Release of the Discussion Paper marks the beginning of Stage 2 of the project. The [Terms of Reference](#) agreed by Education Ministers for the 2021 ALFs Update can be found on the ALFs Update website at www.mq.edu.au/faculty-of-arts/alfsupdate.

The Discussion Paper

This Discussion Paper identifies current strengths, as well as opportunities for clarification, expansion and updating the ALFs. It is informed by Stage 1 of the project including broad based consultation, survey responses and a literature review. Points of discussion and opportunities to strengthen the ALFs are outlined under the five elements of the EYLF and MTOP:

1. Vision
2. Pedagogy and educator's professional practice
3. Principles
4. Practices
5. Learning Outcomes.

Overview of Opportunities to Update and Improve the ALFs

1. Vision

Strengthening Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives throughout the Frameworks, including the vision, principles, practices and outcomes

The NQF acknowledges Australia is a nation of great diversity, and an ancient land that has been cared for by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for many thousands of years. Strengthening Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, cultures, and perspectives throughout both ALFs is a priority and reflects the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (Education Council, 2019). This includes recognition of the more than 60,000 years of continual connection by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as a key part of the nation's history, present and future. Evidence suggests this is a way to move towards Reconciliation². Expanding the EYLF and MTOP visions recognises the role of ECEC and OSHC in advancing children's engagement in Reconciliation, respect and recognition of the world's oldest continuous living cultures. It also aligns with the Australian Curriculum supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures.

Opportunity

- Expanding the EYLF and MTOP visions to recognise the role of ECEC and OSHC in advancing Reconciliation.
-

- Adding a principle about embedding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and perspectives in both the EYLF and MTOP.
- Making Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders cultures and ways of knowing more explicit in all of the learning outcomes to reflect family/community connections, connection to country, kinship systems, telling of stories (oral history), spirituality, and connecting with the extended family.

Clarify 'success for life'

The vision for both ALFs, with its emphasis on learning experiences that are enriching and engaging, was strongly endorsed by stakeholders. There were concerns raised about the complexity of the statements and the need for more clarity on the phrase of “success for life”. There is opportunity to align the vision with the Mparntwe Education Declaration (2019) which aspires to all children becoming confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community³.

Opportunity

- Reconsidering the words “success for life” in the vision and instead emphasise the vision as all children and young people become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community.

2. Pedagogy and Educator's Professional Practice

Strengthening the link between the vision and the planning cycle

The Education and Care Services National Law (National Law) requires service providers to demonstrate how they plan and implement programs for both individual and groups of children and young people. Planning for learning is a continuous cycle that involves planning, implementation, critical reflection, assessment and evaluation. High quality programs have a strategic and reflective approach to planning for learning. There is opportunity to amplify the importance of planning in both Frameworks to better inform practice and the assessment of children's learning, development and wellbeing in ECEC and OSHC⁴.

Opportunity

- Adding detail on planning for learning that addresses the importance of, and explains the continuous cycle of planning, observation, documentation and reflection.

3. Principles

Strengthening the principle of ongoing learning and reflective practice

The ability to engage in critical reflection is core to the provision of high-quality education and care, and a priority for ongoing learning and continuous quality improvement. While promoted as a key

principle in both ALFs, there is opportunity to further strengthen critical reflection as a principle to emphasise that reflection includes action and children engaging with diverse views⁵.

Opportunity

- Expanding the principle of ongoing learning and reflective practice to further strengthen critical reflection as a principle and professional practice.

Introducing a new principle promoting collaborative leadership

The importance of effective leadership in ECEC and OSHC is well documented including the relationship between effective leadership and children and young people's experiences and outcomes. This goes beyond formal leadership positions, to include leadership by children and young people and educators. The surveys and the focus group comments reflected this theme, and there is opportunity to add a principle that recognises values and supports leadership in this broader context⁶.

Opportunity

- Adding a principle that reflects contemporary research evidence concerning the role of collaborative leadership and teamwork.

Strengthening the principle of high expectations and equity

There has been considerable growth in research and understanding relating to inclusive environments and practices for children and young people. Inclusion makes visible and celebrates the diversity of children and young people's lives. There is opportunity to draw on new knowledge and evidence-based practice to strengthen inclusion in ECEC and OSHC services, whereby educators are skilled in enacting inclusion for all.⁷

Opportunity

- Expanding the principle of high expectations and equity to reflect contemporary understandings of diversity and inclusion.

Introducing a new principle addressing sustainability

Teaching children and young people about the natural environment and how to take care of it is central to education for sustainability. However, sustainability extends beyond environmental education. International organisations, such as UNESCO, now recognise three dimensions of sustainability; environmental, social and economic sustainability. This broader view of sustainability is a feature of several other early years frameworks. Recognising children and young people's interest in supporting a fair and sustainable world, there is opportunity to add a new principle addressing sustainability and to strengthen concepts of sustainability throughout the two Frameworks.⁸

Opportunity

- Adding a principle of sustainability to include environmental, social and economic sustainability.

Updating the principle of secure, respectful and reciprocal relationship to include relational pedagogy

The importance of relationships between educators and children is a key theme of the ALFs. This draws on attachment theory and research demonstrating links between security and trust in relationships with important adults and children's positive sense of self, confidence and self-worth. Relational pedagogy incorporates being responsive to children's lives and circumstances and applying trauma informed practices to create safe spaces for children and young people.⁹

Opportunity

- Revising the principle of secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships to include children and young people's connections with educators and their peers to underpin learning and teaching practices.

Strengthening partnerships to include other professionals

There is no consensus on what is meant by partnerships with families and educators often understanding partnerships differently. Partnerships between OSHC professionals and school principals and management are vital in providing high quality care, play and educational environments for children and young people. Reflective of a holistic approach to children and young people's learning and wellbeing, there is opportunity to expand on partnerships with professionals and schools.¹⁰

Opportunity

- Strengthening the principle of partnerships to include working with diverse families, culturally safe spaces, and strengthening connections with child and family professionals and school communities.

4. Practices

Clarifying the meaning of holistic approaches

The literature notes the concept and practice of 'holistic approaches' appear inconsistent and reflect disparities between pedagogy and curriculum within the sector. In OSHC services, key to high quality pedagogy is the importance of children and young people working with educators to develop the learning program. There is opportunity to strengthen the focus on holistic approaches and provide greater clarity on what this looks like in planning and practice.¹¹

Opportunity

- Clarifying the meaning of *holistic approaches* to learning and teaching, including the connection between the vision, principles, practices and learning outcomes in both Frameworks.
-

Strengthen the connection between play-based learning and intentionality

The current practices of “learning through play” and “intentional teaching” (EYLF) and “intentionality” (MTO) could be more aligned to strengthen the coherence of both ALFs. While learning through play is promoted and strongly endorsed in ECEC and OSHC, research suggests that Australian educators still do not have an agreed understanding of what this is, or a shared language to describe it. There is opportunity to strengthen understanding about play-based learning and intentionality, including the role of children, young people and educators in play and learning.¹²

Opportunity

- Combining the practices of learning through play, intentional teaching and intentionality to reflect contemporary understandings of child and educator roles in play, teaching and learning.

Cultural responsiveness to replace cultural competence

All Australian children and young people have the right to know and value the history and current context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the stories of the land on which they live. Cultural competence is a recurring theme across the principles, practices and outcomes of the EYLF and MTO. Researching and thinking in this area has moved beyond the idea of cultural competence to cultural responsiveness. There is opportunity to update the ALFs to focus on cultural responsiveness in education and care.¹³

Opportunity

- Changing the practice of cultural competence to *cultural responsiveness*, which includes a genuine commitment to embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in all aspects of service provision.

Align assessment and evaluation for learning development and wellbeing

While assessment of children's learning outcomes in early childhood services is required under National Law, and embedded in the NQS, Stage 1 of this project identified varied understandings of its purpose and practice. There continues to be mixed views on assessment in ECEC and the focus on MTO is on evaluation for wellbeing and learning. There is opportunity to strengthen the concepts of assessment and evaluation in the EYLF and MTO and connect these to the planning cycle in authentic, meaningful, and transparent ways. This includes assessment practices that provide children with the opportunity to review and consider their own learning.¹⁴

Opportunity

- Aligning EYLF and MTO practices to: *Assessment and evaluation for learning, development and wellbeing* to reflect contemporary understandings of authentic and meaningful assessment approaches including children and young people's role in assessing their own learning.
-

5. Learning Outcomes

Detail and delineation of examples to reflect children and young people's diverse abilities and educators' promotion of learning

The literature notes that educators and teachers would prefer to have some further description of the five outcomes pertaining to specific age groups such as infants and toddlers and preschool aged children. This approach is evident in other early years curricula. For example, *Te Whariki* (NZ) offers description of learning, development and wellbeing for infants, toddlers, and young children. There is opportunity to strengthen the diversity and usefulness of examples of teaching and learning under the learning outcomes in both Frameworks.¹⁵

Opportunity

- Providing more guidance and examples of what the learning could look like and how educators could promote learning to better reflect difference and diversity to include:
 - specialised age groupings of children and young people (infants, toddlers, pre-schoolers, early years of school and middle school)
 - children and young people's different abilities
 - social (learning with others) as well as individual learning
 - diverse cultures and families.

Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity

Children have multiple and changing identities. There is a push for strengthening the identity of children and young people as Australian citizens with connection to the identities of others. Aspects of identity formation that encompass gender identity and gender expression (with a non-binary dichotomy) and family diversity are also critical. There is opportunity to update Learning Outcome 1 to include these aspects of identity and to strengthen understanding of the importance of identity in framing children and young people's personal self-worth, uniqueness and positive sense of themselves as learners.¹⁶

Opportunity

- Expanding the guidance relating to Learning Outcome 1 to reflect contemporary perspectives of personal (e.g., gender) and social (e.g., customs and rituals) identity and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders identities.

Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world

Children and young people are participating in many communities beyond their local community, many by digital means. Adopting a broader definition of sustainability, encompassing environmental, social and economic sustainability, recognises children and young people as competent problem-solvers, able to engage with complex problems and to enact positive change. It also aligns with understandings of sustainability in the Australian Curriculum supporting continuity of learning.¹⁷

Opportunity

- Strengthening concepts of sustainability in Learning Outcome 2, based on the broader definition of sustainability spanning environmental, social and economic sustainability.

Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse focused attention on the nature, cause and impacts of child sexual abuse, and the role community prevention can play in promoting child safe organisations. The ALFs Update project is asked to consider the role of the two Frameworks in prevention of child abuse and in supporting the implementation of Child Safe Organisation principles in ECEC and OSHC. Recognising the importance of a comprehensive approach to promote and support wellbeing, there is opportunity to strengthen understanding of the benefits of regular physical activity, teaching of wellbeing concepts and mental health promotion.¹⁸

Opportunity

- Expanding the guidance relating to Learning Outcome 3 to reflect information about wellbeing and drawing on recent research and guidelines relating to children's health and wellbeing, social competence, embodied learning, fundamental movement skills, including mental health promotion, protective behaviours and resilience.

Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners

Self-regulation and positive growth mindsets are concepts emphasised in the literature and other similar frameworks. Expanding this outcome to strengthen children's thinking allows the further exploration of metacognition and the language of learning.¹⁹

Opportunity

- Strengthening the focus in Learning Outcome 4 on young people's thinking, development of conceptual thinking (e.g., science and mathematics) and reinforcing the use of the language of learning.

Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators

The literature places significant emphasis on the acquisition of oral language and the ways in which educators support this learning. Times to talk with peers is particularly important and building vocabulary seen as critical in the development of reading skills. So too, children and young people need opportunities for creative expression through different methods and materials that supports all areas of learning. Promoting safe ways of using technology and nurturing critical skills to operate in the digital environment is also of growing importance.²⁰

Opportunity

- Strengthening the guidance relating to Learning Outcome 5 to include oral, aural and non-oral languages, communication through the arts, mathematical thinking and a focus on children and young people as creative, safe, and critical users of technology for learning, leisure and creative expression.
-

Language and accessibility

A key objective of the introduction of the ALFs was to provide a shared professional language for teachers and educators working in ECEC and OSHC. It is important that the ALFs are also clear and accessible for educators with diverse qualifications. There is opportunity to strengthen clarity and understanding of some key concepts in the ALFs to enhance professional practice in ECEC and OSHC.²¹

Opportunity

- Expressing complex ideas in professional language that is accessible to the wider workforce whilst retaining the value of the ALFs for all audiences.

Have Your Say

Feedback can be provided through the following options:

- an [online survey](#) for providers of education and care services (ECEC and OSHC), educators and other professionals,
- an [online survey](#) for families whose children attend ECEC or OSHC services,
- submitting a [written submission](#),
- for those working in an ECEC or OSHC by [gathering perspectives from the children and young people](#).

Stage 2 of the ALFs Update project closes on **17 September 2021** so be sure to have your say before then.

Discussion Paper Questions

The Vision

To what extent do you agree/disagree with updating the EYLF/MTOP by:

1. a) Expanding the EYLF and MTOP visions to recognise the role of ECEC and OSHC in advancing Reconciliation.
b) Adding a principle about embedding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and perspectives in both the EYLF and MTOP.
c) Making Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders cultures and ways of knowing more explicit in all of the learning outcomes to reflect family / community connections, connection to country, kinship systems, telling of stories (oral history), spirituality, and connecting with the extended family.
 2. Reconsidering the words “success for life” in the vision and instead emphasise the vision as all children and young people become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community.
-

Pedagogy and Educator's Professional Practice

To what extent do you agree/disagree with updating the EYLF/MTOP by:

3. Adding detail on planning for learning that addresses the importance of, and explains the continuous cycle of planning, observation, documentation, and reflection.

Principles

To what extent do you agree/disagree with updating the EYLF/MTOP by:

4. Expanding the principle of ongoing learning and reflective practice to further strengthen critical reflection as a principle and professional practice.
5. Adding a principle that reflects contemporary research evidence concerning the role of collaborative leadership and teamwork.
6. Expanding the principle of high expectations and equity to reflect contemporary understandings of diversity and inclusion.
7. Adding a principle of sustainability to include environmental, social and economic sustainability.
8. Revising the principle of secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships to include children and young people's connections with educators and their peers to underpin learning and teaching practices.
9. Strengthening the principle of partnerships to include working with diverse families, culturally safe spaces, and strengthening connections with child and family professionals and school communities?

Practices

To what extent do you agree/disagree with updating the EYLF/MTOP by:

10. Clarifying the meaning of holistic approaches to learning and teaching, including the connection between the vision, principles, practices and learning outcomes in both Frameworks.
 11. Combining the practices of learning through play, intentional teaching and intentionality to reflect contemporary understandings of child and educator roles in play, teaching and learning.
 12. Changing the practice of cultural competence to *cultural responsiveness*, which includes a genuine commitment to embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in all aspects of service provision.
 13. Aligning EYLF and MTOP practices to: Assessment and evaluation for learning, development and well-being to reflect contemporary understandings of authentic and
-

meaningful assessment approaches including children and young people's role in assessing their own learning.

Learning Outcomes

To what extent do you agree/disagree with updating the EYLF/MTOP by:

14. Providing more guidance and examples of what the learning could look like and how educators could promote learning to better reflect difference and diversity to include:
 - specialised age groupings of children and young people (infants, toddlers, pre-schoolers, early years of school and middle school).
 - children and young people's different abilities.
 - social (learning with others) as well as individual learning.
 - diverse cultures and families.
15. Expanding the guidance relating to Learning Outcome 1 to reflect contemporary perspectives of personal (e.g., gender) and social (e.g., customs and rituals) identity and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders identities.
16. Strengthening concepts of sustainability in Learning Outcome 2, based on the broader definition of sustainability spanning environmental, social and economic sustainability.
17. Expanding the guidance relating to Learning Outcome 3 to reflect information about wellbeing and drawing on recent research and guidelines relating to children's health and wellbeing, social competence, embodied learning, fundamental movement skills, including mental health promotion, protective behaviours and resilience.
18. Strengthening the focus in Learning Outcome 4 on young people's thinking, development of conceptual thinking (e.g., science and mathematics) and reinforcing the use of the language of learning.
19. Strengthening the guidance relating to Learning Outcome 5 to include oral, aural and non-oral languages, communication through the arts, mathematical thinking and a focus on children and young people as creative, safe, and critical users of technology for learning, leisure and creative expression.
20. Expressing complex ideas in professional language that is accessible to the wider workforce whilst retaining the value of the ALFs for all audiences.