



## National Quality Standard Professional Learning Program



## Summative assessment

### Taking the analysis of collected information further

The focus of the last e-Newsletter was *formative assessment*—the range of ways educators collect information about and analyse children's learning. This e-Newsletter explores how educators analyse that collection of information to make a *summative assessment* of each child's progress.



### Summative assessment—What does it mean?

The term *summative* describes assessment processes that 'sum up' what a child has learned by reviewing documentation gathered over time from a range of sources. These processes bring together information about what the child knows, understands and can do in relation to the *Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)* Learning Outcomes. Summative assessment differs from analyses of learning that occur for individual pieces of documentation such as anecdotal records, photos or learning stories, as it involves reviewing a range of records in order to understand and document the 'distance travelled' by a child.

*The Educators' Guide to the EYLF* (DEEWR, 2010) refers to assessment as:

*... an ongoing process of using observations or evidence to make judgements about children's learning and educators' pedagogy. Assessment includes interpreting children's learning against learning outcomes in order to plan for further learning and to report to parents and others about children's learning (p. 37).*

Principle 5 in the EYLF reminds us that reflective practice is essential. Reflection is particularly important in summative assessment. We question what we know about the child, interpret and analyse the information collected and reflect on what this tells us about their learning and development and how we can support the child further. Involving colleagues, families and, if possible, the child in the process adds different perspectives that lead to a deeper understanding of progress.

Assessment helps us to:

- celebrate strengths, interests, learning and development
- acknowledge cultural backgrounds
- notice if there are gaps in our knowledge
- notice if there are social and/or learning difficulties that require further support
- discuss progress with families and children
- plan to further support each child's learning and development
- meet the requirements of the National Regulations and the *National Quality Standard (NQS)*.

### What are the requirements for assessment in the National Regulations and the *National Quality Standard*?

Details about requirements can be found in the National Law: Section 168 and the National Regulations: Regulations 73–76. Helpful advice can also be found in the *Guide to the Education and Care Services National Law and National Regulations* (Guide 2 in the National Quality Framework Resource Kit, ACECQA, 2011a):

*The approved national learning frameworks outline that assessment is a process used by educators to gather information about what children know, understand and can do. This information should be analysed by educators to plan effectively for each child's learning.*

*Assessment information can also be used by educators to reflect on their own values, beliefs and teaching practices, and to communicate about children's learning with children and their families.*

*For children who are preschool age and under, this documentation should include:*

- *assessments of the child's development needs, interests, experiences and participation in the educational program*
- *assessments of the child's progress against the learning outcomes of the educational program (p. 53).*

*A copy of assessments or evaluations of their child also needs to be available for families and given to them when requested (p. 54).*

The learning outcomes mentioned above refer to the five Learning Outcomes in the EYLF that 'provide early childhood educators with key reference points against which children's progress can be identified, documented and communicated to families, other early childhood professionals and educators in schools' (EYLF, DEEWR, 2009, p. 17).

We know that children's learning is ongoing and that each child will progress towards the outcomes in their own way and at their own pace. Their progress in each outcome will depend in part, of course, on age. For example, a baby who reaches out his hand for more after a finger play of 'Round and round the garden' is responding to and engaging with an educator with whom he feels comfortable (Learning Outcome 1). An older child who tells his educator about the football team he barracks for winning at the weekend, adding lots of detail about who kicked the goals, is also demonstrating learning related to Learning Outcome 1. These examples also link to Learning Outcome 5, which demonstrates that the outcomes are interrelated as well as distinct. It is important to remember that children will demonstrate progress in ways other than those listed under the outcomes.



Some services may choose to produce portfolios or learning journals as a way of documenting assessment and progress towards learning outcomes. If so, these must include an analysis of children's learning to meet the requirements of the National Regulations.

*(Guide to the National Law and National Regulations, ACECQA, 2011a, p. 54).*

The *Guide to the National Quality Standard* (ACECQA, 2011b) clarifies the expectations about assessment in Standard 1.1, and Element 1.2.1 refers specifically to assessment. The *Guide* states that assessors may discuss 'how educators analyse the information that is gathered about individuals and groups of children to make judgments about each child's progress towards specific learning outcomes'. Assessors may also sight 'documented assessment and evaluation by educators, which includes what children know, say and can do, and evidence that shows how this assessment/evaluation leads to future curriculum decision making that extends children's learning' (p. 41).

## Turning a collection of information into a summary of the child's learning

Educators collect a range of information, some of which is analysed and acted on at the time. Summative assessment ensures that everything that has been collected is analysed in relation to the Learning Outcomes. This occurs when educators regularly and systematically look at photos, jottings, anecdotal observations, learning stories, samples of the child's work, information shared by the family and other information, and ask the question 'How does this all fit together, how does it link to the Learning Outcomes and what does it tell me about the distance travelled by this child?'

Through summing up what has been gathered, educators gain greater insight into children's relationships, cultural context, interactions, learning styles, dispositions, understanding of concepts and interests. Educators draw on educational theories and knowledge during the process.

## What should summative assessment look like?

The NQS does not specify how assessment should look or how it should be undertaken.

Each of the summaries included in this e-Newsletter has different strengths. Each is also a work in progress, as educators trial various approaches that suit their settings and meet families' needs. They are continually reviewing, amending and trialling them again.

**Example A** has space for photos and statements to show the child's progress. Information recorded under one Learning Outcome can be linked via arrows to other Outcomes. The box for goals demonstrates that completing the assessment leads to further planning.

**Example B** includes space to add information that the family has shared about the child's experiences or interests at home. Recording interests makes it possible to chart changes and developments over time. Providing a place for the family to record their views about their child's progress and goals promotes partnerships. Including a place for planning reminds educators to think of the implications of assessment for practice.

**Example C** includes the sub-elements of each Learning Outcome and visually demonstrates that children's learning is a continuum and that the focus is on the 'distance travelled' rather than the end result.

**Example D** shows that summative assessment can be in the form of a letter that personalises what educators have noticed about the child. Links to the Learning Outcomes are identified.

Whatever method is used, summative assessment should:

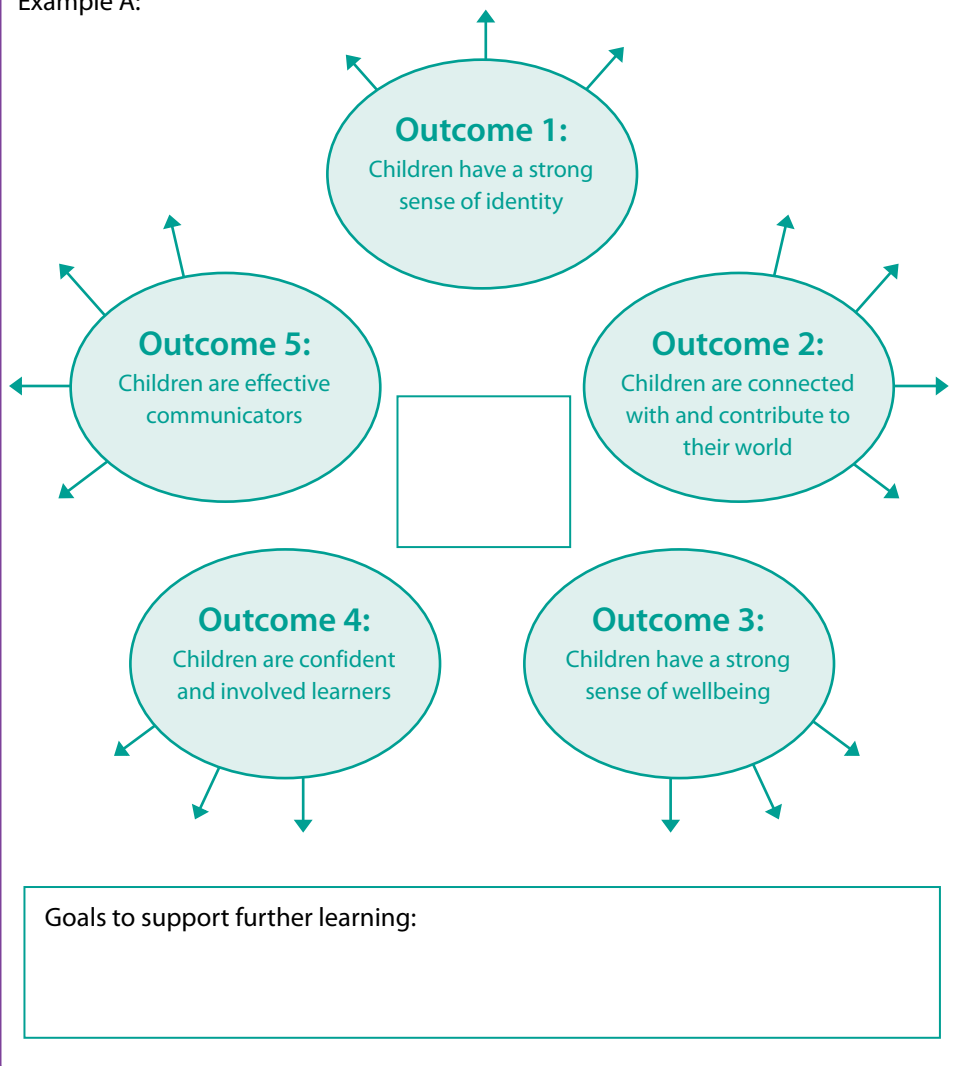
- emphasise children's strengths and make their learning visible
- draw on the family's knowledge about their child so that the documentation reflects the child's life at home as well as at the service
- be free from bias
- be written in clear, easy-to-understand language that makes sense to families
- reflect knowledge of the child's social or cultural background
- occur systematically and regularly so that, over time, educators gain a complete picture of each child's progress in relation to the Learning Outcomes.

## Planning to support further learning

The summing-up process may identify gaps in information relating to a particular Learning Outcome. This alerts educators to look for further examples. The process may also highlight particular areas to focus on during planning.

Once educators have identified what they know about the child, they reflect on how to support that child's learning and development further.

Example A:



Example B:

**Summary of learning and development**

**Date:**

**Recent family experiences:**

**Current interests:**

**Learning and development progress**

**Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity**

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

**Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing**

**Outcome 4: Children are involved and confident learners**

**Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators**

**Family comments and goals:**

**Planning to support further learning and development:**

Example C:

The distance travelled by \_\_\_\_\_

**Learning Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity**

Children feel safe, secure and supported.

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Children develop their emerging autonomy, interdependence, resilience and sense of agency.

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Children develop knowledgeable and confident self-identities.

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Children learn to interact in relation to others with care, empathy and respect.

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Example D:

Term 1, 2012

Dear Holly,

This letter describes some of the things you are learning and enjoying at day care. You are a happy, confident little girl who enjoys making your own choices in play (Learning Outcome 1.3: Children develop knowledgeable and confident self-identities). You love your toy rabbit, Rupert, and take him everywhere—even when we have water play! You love to put him to bed in the dolls' cots, and you also spend a lot of time playing with the dolls.

You are learning to use words to communicate (Learning Outcome 5.1: Children interact verbally and non-verbally with others for a range of purposes) and can say lots of different words. When you want help, such as looking for Rupert or putting your shoes on, you ask us, normally with one word such as 'Rupert?' or 'Shoes?'. Sometimes, when you are scared or someone takes a toy away from you, you scream out 'No!'. We are trying to teach you to use your inside voice and say 'Stop!'. When we remind you, you repeat it after us.

You are learning to use the toilet, and often tell us when you want your nappy changed or if you want to go to the toilet. You pat your nappy and say 'Poo' (Learning Outcome 3.2: Children take increasing responsibility for their own health and physical wellbeing).

You often play quietly by yourself or alongside other children, and you are getting really good at joining in with others (Learning Outcome 1.2: Children develop their emerging autonomy, interdependence, resilience and sense of agency). You watch other children play for a little while and then sit down with them and start playing too. Sometimes you need us to step in and assist you to join in, as you forget to ask for a turn before you take a toy from one of the other children, but if they tell you that it is theirs you quickly give it back (Learning Outcome 2.1: Children develop a sense of belonging to groups and community and an understanding of the reciprocal rights and responsibilities necessary for active community participation).

You love to do artwork such as painting and drawing, and will give anything a go (Learning Outcome 5.3: Children express ideas and make meaning using a range of media). You don't mind if you get a bit messy or dirty, but sometimes you will show us where you have gotten some paint or slime on you. We'll clean it off and you are happy to continue painting.

You are very confident in the day care environment and can find lots of different things to do, either by yourself or with friends, and can ask for help when needed. You participate in many different types of activities, from quiet play such as painting or books, to building or active play, running and climbing outside.

We look forward to watching you continue to learn and grow through the year.

Sarah, Rachael, Mel and Shannon





Plans draw on knowledge about each child's progress. They should focus on building relationships; promoting a sense of belonging and wellbeing; and providing opportunities for children to engage in learning in an environment that is enticing, challenging and provides many possibilities to communicate with others.

As the *Guide to the National Quality Standard* reminds us, 'To engage children actively in learning, educators identify children's strengths and interests, choose appropriate teaching strategies and design the learning environment. Educators carefully assess learning to inform further planning' (ACECQA, 2011b, p. 22).

It is important to note that planning does not only happen after completing summative assessments! Educators often need to follow up immediately on learning, as valuable opportunities may be lost if they delay.

### Heather Barnes

Early childhood consultant and trainer

### References

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### Acknowledgements

Thanks to the following educators for sharing their current methods of assessing children's progress towards the Learning Outcomes:

Jenny Allen, Central Carlton Children's Centre, Vic.

Sarah Boegheim, Kingdom Kare Child Care Centre, WA.

### Biography

Heather Barnes works as a consultant and trainer throughout Australia, assisting educators on their professional learning journey. She is a passionate advocate for the *Early Years Learning Framework* and for the stronger focus on quality improvement that is a key aspect of the *National Quality Framework*.

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**An Australian Government Initiative**

The NQS Professional Learning Program is funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.



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