

The *National Quality Framework* and early childhood intervention

According to the *National Quality Framework* (NQF), inclusion is the work of everyone ...

What does this mean for early childhood educators and early childhood intervention professionals?

For early childhood educators, this means talking with early intervention professionals about your plans for children, and reflecting together on children's strengths, capabilities and interests and how together you may best support the learning and development of the children with whom you all work.

Learning more about early childhood intervention services (ECIS)

ECIS provides services to babies and young children below school age who have a significant developmental delay or disability, where their support needs are additional to those available through universal services. For children to be eligible for ECIS, there must be significant impact on function, and the disability must be ongoing.

In recent times, the focus of early childhood intervention both nationally and internationally has been moving towards work with families and early childhood education and care (ECEC) services. Children's development is shaped by the environments in which they live and spend their time, and the main learning environments for young children are the family, ECEC and other community settings (McWilliam, 2010). For early childhood intervention professionals there has been increasing recognition that most of children's learning occurs between home visits or sessions with professionals, rather than during these visits.

The relationships between early childhood educators and early childhood intervention professionals are therefore crucial to ensuring the quality of learning outcomes and inclusion of children with a disability. Both ECIS and ECEC services aim to ensure that, together with families, they are able to provide young children with experiences and opportunities to gain and use the functional skills needed to participate meaningfully in the key environments in their lives.

How does the NQF link with ECIS?

The NQF acknowledges the responsibility of all those who work with young children to promote inclusion and, as stated in the ECA-ECIA position statement on inclusion

(ECA & ECIA, 2012), 'the introduction of Australia's first *National Quality Framework* is a powerful driver for achieving inclusion. The *Early Years Learning Framework* is a core part of the NQF and provides a strong theoretical and philosophical foundation for respecting diversity and acting for equity and inclusion for all children in ECEC programs'.

The Victorian Early Childhood Intervention Practitioner Competencies outline four underpinning practitioner beliefs and values:

- A child with a disability is a child first and foremost.
- Every child is rich in possibilities and potential.
- A child is an agent in his/her own life.
- Play and social learning are the primary ways in which a child learns and interacts with his/her surroundings.

These competencies are designed to align conceptually and in principle with the *Early Years Learning Framework* (DEEWR, 2009) which requires early childhood educators to demonstrate high expectations in supporting children with a disability to achieve learning and development outcomes consistent with those identified for all children.

The *Early Years Learning Framework* requires educators to work on enabling each child's learning in the five outcomes:

- Children have a strong sense of identity.
- Children are connected with and contribute to their world.
- Children have a strong sense of wellbeing.
- Children are confident and involved learners.
- Children are effective communicators.

For inclusion to be effective, close collaboration and sharing of skills and knowledge is required ... it is important for both ECIS professionals and early childhood educators to have a common understanding of terms used in both the early childhood education and disability fields. The *Early Years Learning Framework* provides an excellent vehicle for this collaboration through the provision of a common language about children, their strengths, capabilities, and aspirations. For families, collaboration and shared language assists in working through the maze of professionals involved with their child and family.

Key features of ECIS also reflect the NQF Principles and Quality Areas

- ECIS practice demonstrates a strong commitment to family-centred practice ... recognising and building on family strengths, assisting families in the decision making about their child, working in partnership with families, increasing family confidence, and building the capacity of families to meet the needs of their child with a disability. This commitment aligns with the NQF Principle of respecting and supporting the role of parents and families.
- ECIS provides service in everyday family environments ... promoting and utilising naturally occurring routines and learning and development opportunities. This reflects the NQF Principle of recognition of the rights and best interests of the child as paramount.
- ECIS promotes engagement in ECEC services ... utilising inclusive learning and development opportunities, and building the confidence and capacity of early childhood educators to meet the needs of children with disabilities within their programs. This supports the NQF Principles of children as successful, competent and capable learners, of equity, inclusion and diversity, and of best practice expected in provision of ECEC services.
- ECIS service provision is based on a key worker approach supported by a transdisciplinary team of early intervention professionals. ECIS provides support, information and resources in a collaborative and timely way. This relates to the NQF Principle of respecting the role of parents and families and the Quality Area of assisting with collaborative partnerships with families and communities.

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Together supporting the best interests of children and families

For ECIS professionals, a reflective approach to their work, demonstrating family-centred practice, partnerships with early childhood educators and together having high expectations for every child, is intrinsically aligned to the aims of the NQF.

Promoting the active, meaningful participation of children with disabilities in their everyday environments and promoting their engagement in and benefitting from educational opportunities is linked to the five learning outcomes of the *Early Years Learning Framework*.

Ensuring families are well supported and confident in their ability to support their child's learning and development links clearly to NQF principles supporting the best interests of the child and respect for the role of parents.

ECIS, like early childhood educators, must plan and deliver their service to children and families based on the child's strengths, needs, capabilities, interests and real-life experiences, reflecting the aspirations of families and of the children themselves.

Working together, ECIS, early childhood educators and other professionals such as Inclusion Support Facilitators, can support the rights and best interests of young children with disabilities and their families, reflecting the Principles and aims of the NQF.

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References

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