



**Early Childhood Australia**  
A voice for young children

**OUR  
VISION:  
EVERY  
YOUNG  
CHILD IS  
THRIVING  
AND  
LEARNING**

# 2021 National Quality Framework Approved Learning Frameworks Update

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## Stage Two Discussion Paper

### Early Childhood Australia

### September 2021

#### About us:

Early Childhood Australia (ECA) is a not-for-profit organisation that has been a voice for children since 1938. We have branches in every state and territory in Australia and our membership includes individual professionals, early childhood services and schools, as well as public, private and not-for-profit organisations that share a commitment to young children.

Our vision is that every young child is thriving and learning. To achieve this, we champion the rights of young children to thrive and learn at home, in the community, within early learning settings and through the early years of school.

Our work builds the capacity of our society and the early childhood sector to realise the potential of every child during the critical early years from birth to the age of eight. ECA specifically acknowledges the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families, and the past and current injustices and realities for them around Australia.

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## 1. Executive Summary

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Early Childhood Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the 2012 National Quality Framework Approved Learning Frameworks Update Stage Two Discussion Paper.

ECA has consulted with members to develop this submission. ECA members are very engaged in the ALF Frameworks Update and provide the perspective of everyday users of the ALF in their work with children in education and care settings.

ECA strongly believes that all seven of the NQS quality areas are integral to delivering quality outcomes for children. The quality of relationships between educators, children and families must be a foundational aspect of all quality areas.

A consistent message from ECA members is that training and professional development is important to support use of the EYLF and MTOP, and particularly when updates commence.

### Responses to Discussion Paper Questions

#### The vision

**1. a) Expanding the EYLF and MTOP visions to recognise the role of ECEC and OSHC in advancing Reconciliation.**

ECA **strongly agrees** with this update which should take into account the significant commitment already shown by ECEC and OSHC in advancing reconciliation.

ECEC organisations are collaborating in the creation of their own individual Reconciliation Action Plans (RAP) with support from Narragunnawali.

*Member comments:*

- *I have seen the impact of embedding A&TSI perspectives in programs for young children, and feel ECEC is prime placed to lead reconciliation initiatives, and role model for wider society*
- *Reconciliation requires direct action not passive observation.*
- *This is an important aspect in our Australian community and needs to become embedded into our practice for all children to become familiar.*

**1. b) Adding a principle about embedding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and perspectives in both the EYLF and MTOP?**

ECA **agrees very** strongly with the addition of a principle about embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and perspectives in both the EYLF and MTOP.



Earlier in 2021, ECA made a [submission](#) to the SNAICC/NIAA Discussion paper on the development of a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Strategy. Goal 2 of the Strategy is: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are supported to thrive in their early years. There must be ongoing practical support to educators and teachers, recognising the diversity within Australia's Indigenous peoples and reflecting this in the way that they teach as well as the curriculum or program of learning they deliver.

Cultural barriers are often cited as a pivotal barrier to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children accessing and participating in early childhood education. According to Harrison, Goldfeld, Metcalfe & Moore, 'early learning programs that do not reflect the culture and knowledge of the Indigenous community are not seen as culturally safe and tend not to be used by families in that community'.<sup>1</sup>

*Member comments:*

- *Including a principle will mean this is embedded and not overlooked or brushed over.*

**1. 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.**

ECA **agrees very strongly** with this update which goes to addressing one of the barriers to service access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families – failure to incorporate culture within programs.

In the SNAICC and ECA joint position paper *Working together to ensure equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children in the Early Years*<sup>2</sup>, the recommendations for action included the promotion and support of effective two-way learning processes of genuine partnership development and cultural competency between mainstream services and local Aboriginal And Torres Strait Islander Elders, services and communities.

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<sup>1</sup> Harrison, L., Goldfeld, S., Metcalfe, E., & Moore, T. (2012). Early learning programs that promote children's developmental and educational outcomes. Resource Sheet No. 15. Canberra, ACT: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, and Australian Institute of Family Studies.

<sup>2</sup> SNAICC and ECA (2019). Early Years Position Paper – *Working together to ensure equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children in the Early Years*.



Member comments:

- *I think the 8 ways of learning should be included in EYLF and MTOP.*
- *This practice works well in New Zealand with the Te Whariki.*

**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.**

ECA **agrees very strongly** with changing the term ‘success for life’ is very narrow and doesn’t properly recognise Being, Belonging and Becoming. Members felt the language was ‘stagnant’, difficult to measure and supported the language of lifelong learners. One member shared that their service used the term “life ready”.

### **Pedagogy and Educator’s Professional Practice**

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

ECA **agrees** that further detail should be added as planning is fundamentally important. Members supported clearer guidelines and suggested additional guidance would be helpful.

ECA considers that observing children’s learning is fundamental part of professional practice and supporting children’s development. However, some educators feel that they are completing too much documentation, which could be prevented with more professional support and clarity around expectations from Regulatory Authorities.

Members referred to the Australian Curriculum documents which provides useful examples. The inclusion of explicit examples would better support implementation of the planning cycle.

Member comments:

- *As an experienced Early Childhood Teacher I understand this well however I feel many educators need support with this.*
- *Progress needs to be observed and monitored to plan for future support.*
- *This will need support through added resources and detailed explanation.*
- *This will give common understanding for all educators, and the many early childhood teachers who do not have an understanding planning and the programming cycle. how everything that is done relates back to the continuous cycle.*
- *An interactive EYLF/MTOP would support its use.*

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

ECA agrees with the expansion and recognises this as being an important update to the EYLF/MTOP.



Critical reflection can be challenging for educators when reflecting on children, program or themselves. Some more explanations and examples would be helpful. For example, what is the purpose of reflection – your group program, your professional growth, children’s learning. What is the aim of the reflection process?

*Member comments:*

- *This will require support and acknowledgment of the ways critical reflection can be undertaken and opportunities for learning.*
- *Educators struggle to evidence their critical reflection. Recognise it’s a large part of A&R and agree it should be expanded in the EYLF/MTOP.*

## Principles

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

ECA **strongly agrees** with this update. Collaborative leadership and teamwork is fundamentally important for early childhood education and care and requires an ongoing focus that includes knowledge of contemporary research evidence.

*Member comments:*

- *Collaboration creates a positive working and learning environment for all. This creates a safe and secure environment for all.*
- *This principle needs to be broad in its aims and examples of what this might ‘look like’ in different settings.*
- *Needs to be practitioner focused with equal perspectives from private and not for profit service types on an ACECQA approved provider’s website etc.*
- *Adding information about leadership styles and theories that work in early childhood environments such as transformational and distributive leadership.*

### 6. Expanding the principle of high expectations and equity to reflect modern understandings of diversity and inclusion?

ECA **agrees very strongly** the update proposed. Members feel that diversity is a key part of their work and the terms ‘diversity’ and ‘inclusion’ should be as broad as possible.

*Member comments:*

- *All individuals need to be able to feel safe and supported to be exactly who they are.*
- *There has been a huge change in the understanding of diversity and inclusion so this needs to become more prevalent in the document so there can be common understandings and expectations for educators.*



**7. Adding a principle of sustainability to include environmental, social, and economic sustainability?**

ECA **agrees with** this update and members agree that current practice already includes broader sustainability practice and recognises the current EYLF/MTOP already allow for this.

The context of social and economic sustainability differs to environmental sustainability and therefore examples and support materials will be important.

*Member comments:*

- *Our local actions contribute to global sustainability issues, drawing on UNESCO's 17 Sustainable Development Goals to reach by 2030 & The Earth Charter (children's version) to guide us.*
- *Very relevant so it can be a focus in all centres and our training.*
- *Our Bush Kinder includes all 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?**

ECA **agrees strongly** with this update.

*Member comments:*

- *I like the explicit wording of secure, respectful and reciprocal.*
- *Relationships with children is key in early childhood for learning and teaching.*

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

ECA **agrees strongly** with the strengthening the principle of partnerships. Partnerships are key for supporting the best interests of children and this has been recognised in many strategies including – SNAICCs Discussion Paper - *Ensuring equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children in the early years*<sup>3</sup> and *The Draft National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy*<sup>4</sup>.

*Member comments:*

- *There will be a need to support this principle with resources, including human resources.*
- *It is a more comprehensive definition.*

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<sup>3</sup> SNAICC (2019). Discussion Paper - *Ensuring equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children in the early years*.

<sup>4</sup> National Mental Health Commission (2021) - *The Draft National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy*.



## Practices

### **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.**

#### *Member comments:*

- *By connecting the vision, principles, practices and learning outcomes it makes the document easier to implement rather than the trap of just focussing on one section of the document at a time.*
- *I find it problematic that when referring to the EYLF, most educators only acknowledge the learning outcomes, and are largely unfamiliar with the principles and practices.*

### **11. 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.**

ECA **agrees very strongly with this update.** Members supported this change and felt the language better described their current approaches. It reflects an ongoing continuum or journey for personal and service development.

Some members questioned what a genuine commitment meant and how it could be measured?

ECA has engaged with the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) on its work on Indigenous cultural competency in the Australian teaching workforce. In our submission to AITSL we outlined the important role early childhood teachers play in the early education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, in early childhood settings and in schools.

There must be ongoing practical support to educators and teachers, recognising the diversity within Australia's Indigenous peoples and reflecting this in the way that they teach as well as the curriculum or program of learning they deliver.

#### *Member comments:*

- *Resources needed around building knowledge across a broad spectrum of providers and services.*
- *A good idea as we do not become culturally competent as we are learning throughout life but can be culturally responsive in different situations.*

### **12. Aligning EYLF and MTOP practices to: *Assessment and evaluation for learning, development, and well-being* to reflect modern understandings of authentic and meaningful assessment approaches including children and young people's role in assessing their own learning?**

ECA **agrees** with this update as an opportunity to ensure contemporary knowledge and practice are included in the EYLF and MTOP.





*Member comments:*

- *The language of assessment needs to change as the learning outcomes become a checklist.*
- *Moving beyond only summative assessments being viewed as evidence of the distance travelled.*

## Learning Outcomes

**13. 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:**

- a) specialised age groupings of children and young people (infants, toddlers, pre-schoolers, early years of school and middle school)?
- b) children and young people's different abilities?
- c) social (learning with others) as well as individual learning?
- d) diverse cultures and families?

ECA **agrees strongly** with this update which is an example of broadening the theoretical viewpoints to support knowledge and practice to support inclusion. We suggest the language should be children and young people of *all abilities* (the word different is deficit language).

*Member comments:*

- *Suggest diversity and family cultures should be included here*
- *Whilst ideally the EYLF should be able to be accessed equitably, the reality is not all educators have had the same opportunities for training with curriculum documents (i.e. Qualifications) and in order for certain groups of children (i.e. babies and toddlers) not to be disadvantaged, their educators require more explicit examples to be able to implement this framework in their practice.*

**14. 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 Torres Strait Islanders identities?**

ECA **agrees strongly** with this update. A more nuanced approach to gender identity is raised in The Discussion Paper, with an emphasis on children and people being accepted for whoever they are, rather than having a fixed identity. This concept would apply across all aspects of identity.

**15. Strengthening concepts of sustainability in Learning Outcome 2, based on the broader definition of sustainability promoted by UNESCO spanning environmental, social, and economic sustainability?**

ECA **agrees strongly** with this update. Members expressed support and noted the need for professional development to support the strengthening of these concepts. Some members felt it would be difficult for some services to embrace the broader concepts and may need support to understand existing connections to the EYLF and MTOP.





**16. Expanding the guidance relating to Learning Outcome 3 to reflect information about wellbeing, 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.**

ECA **agrees very strongly** that the guidance for Learning Outcome 3 should be expanded and strongly support the need for recent research, guidelines and practice to be included to support young children in all of these areas.

Members acknowledged the Be You program in mental health, wellbeing and resilience for educators and children, particularly in relation to the current pandemic, natural disasters and other adversities in Australia.

*Member comments:*

- *Guidance should also include healthy brain development science.*
- *There seems to be a greater need for support for young children in all of these areas.*

**17. 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?**

ECA **agrees strongly** with this proposed update but notes the phrase 'language of learning' is somewhat vague and may need further explanation.

*Member comments:*

- *Clear information needed on the process of learning, young children's cognitive development, the absolute importance of learning through play and inquiry in cognitive development.*

**18. 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?**

ECA **agrees very strongly** with this update.

*Member comments:*

- *Suggestion to include more diverse types of communication including sign language – example of children learning Auslan as a group to support children with hearing difficulties.*
- *We need to be very careful about the amount of technology use children are exposed to in the early years, especially in early childhood educational settings.*
- *I support technology for leisure only for MTOP, not for EYLF.*



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

ECA **agrees** with this update to ensure language is professional as well as being understood by the broader community. It's important that the language is still accessible and understandable to all who use the EYLF and MTOP.

*Member comments:*

- *Common language will provide the profession better opportunities and understanding when talking across sites and across states as well as with schools*

**Thinking about the future, what do you think should be the top priority for updating the EYLF and MTOP?**

ECA Members made several comments on what they think should be the top priority for updating the EYLF and MTOP:

- *Alignment across these and to the Australian Curriculum for moving forward.*
- *Use language that is easily understood and able to be put into practice by educators. Making sure that it is applicable in all aspects for 0-5 year olds.*
- *Providing more explicit examples to support inclusion and engagement of educators with diverse qualification and training backgrounds. If they can't understand the document or how their practice should look like, children miss out.*
- *To create a more visual hard copy document and digital technology that can be used and understood by early childhood educators from culturally and linguistically diverse communities.*
- *The importance of connectedness & relationships (that is social & emotional development), as a high priority in all aspects of working in this sector & particularly with children & families.*
- *Providing examples of best practice within the framework whilst also maintaining the flexibility for contextual application.*