



Discussion Paper:

2021 National Quality Framework Approved Learning Frameworks Update

August 2021

Section 5: Learning Outcomes

5.1 Strengths

While prompting debate during the development of both ALFs, the identification of five high level learning outcomes is now widely viewed as a strength in both Frameworks. Stage 1 feedback endorsed the continuing relevance of these, however, revealed some different perspectives on the usefulness of the guidance and examples in relation to educator practices and indicators of learning. As noted earlier, there is concern about a narrow focus on the learning outcomes, and a desire to strengthen the connection between the vision, principles, practices, and learning outcomes in both Frameworks. This point was captured well by the focus group discussions.

Example comments from stakeholder feedback

I think that the key components and the examples of when this learning is evident are awesome. They are comprehensive. [But] I don't necessarily think that educators use those in the way that they should (Focus group).

While not a focus in Stage 1 consultation, the role of subject area content and how it is taught, imparted, or shared with children and young people is discussed in the literature (Westoby et al., 2020), often in relation to intentional teaching. Some argue that the Frameworks point to the importance of discipline or content knowledge, recognising this applies to all learning outcomes (e.g., health and nutrition, science and sustainability, oral language development). However, others have suggested this is an area that needs to be strengthened and made more explicit. For example, Krieg (2011, p. 51) argued that the silence in the EYLF on this impacts teachers' and children's access

to “the concepts and methods of inquiry found in the learning areas to support their investigations and inquiries.”

EYLF

EYLF Learning Outcomes 1 to 4 were universally and consistently endorsed by all stakeholders, with 93% to 98% rating these Outcomes as extremely-very rated important (see **Table 8**). The component statements of each of these Learning Outcomes were also very strongly endorsed (see **Appendix 1** for details).

In contrast, Learning Outcome 5 received somewhat lower ratings by educators/providers, with variation in the ratings for the components. Higher ratings were given to the importance of: interact verbally and non-verbally with others (97%); engage with and gaining meaning from a range of texts (91%); express ideas and make meaning using a range of media (87%); and understand how symbols and pattern systems work (87%). The lowest ratings were given for how children use information and communication technologies (75%).

Table 8. Per cent of stakeholders who rated EYLF Learning Outcomes as extremely or very important

EYLF Learning Outcomes	Educators /Approved Providers	Other Professionals	Families
LO 1 Children have a strong sense of identity	97%	97%	95%
LO 2 Children are connected with and contribute to their world	93%	96%	93%
LO 3 Children have a strong sense of wellbeing	96%	98%	96%
LO 4 Children are confident and involved learners	93%	94%	97%
LO 5 Children are effective communicators	87%	90%	92%

Parents’ comments in relation to the Learning Outcomes were focussed on wanting their children to learn through play and it being fun.

Example comments from stakeholder feedback

We are still very fresh and green to the learning outcomes for our little one. Both my partner and I are still just thrilled to see him develop his social skills and personality from going to day care and being with other children and his educators that also provide him much attention and care. This is just amazing for us to experience as first-time parents and to encourage further learning through the activities they host during the day and that we try to carry into the weekend and have some fun with him as well (ECEC Parent, LDC).

Play should be more important than rote learning. Children at preschool should be developing their curiosity about the world and an interest in learning. They should be taught how to think for themselves and given the confidence to trust their own ideas (ECEC Parent, Preschool).

MTOP

Stakeholder feedback on the Learning Outcomes in the MTOP was also very positive, with four of the Outcomes rated as extremely to very important by 85% to 95% of participants, as shown in **Table 9**. As with the EYLF responses, the lower ratings for Learning Outcome 5 were explained by variations in the component ratings: 98% rated ‘children interact verbally and non-verbally with others for a range of purposes’ as extremely-very important compared to 64% for ‘children engage with a range of texts and gain meaning from these texts’ and 75% for ‘children collaborate with others, express ideas and make meaning using a range of media and communication technologies.’

Table 9. Per cent of stakeholders who rated MTOP Learning Outcomes as extremely or very important

MTOP Learning Outcomes	Educators /Approved Providers	Other Professionals	Families
LO 1 Children have a strong sense of identity	95%	94%	90%
LO 2 Children are connected with and contribute to their world	91%	85%	86%
LO 3 Children have a strong sense of wellbeing	95%	96%	97%
LO 4 Children are confident and involved learners	85%	92%	86%
LO 5 Children are effective communicators	76%	79%	79%

OSHC parents’ comments in relation to the outcomes were focussed on the importance of leisure for their children and deep connections with their educators. The children and young people talked about the connection to their educators, use of play and learning new things and a space to build relationships with friends.

Example comments from stakeholder feedback

The carers; the food; the playground; the people; the girls and boys; IT; sandpit; more than 100 kids (OSHC, Child, 8yrs).

You have ‘seconds’ and meet new people (OSHC, Child, 10 years).

5.2 Opportunities

EYLF

The NQS sets the expectation that curriculum decision-making is informed by the ALFs and “contributes to each child’s learning and development outcomes in relation to their identity,

connection with community, wellbeing and confidence as learners and effectiveness as communicators” (ACECQA, Sept 2021, p. 105). In contrast to the very high level of stakeholder endorsement of the importance of the Learning Outcomes, much lower ratings were given for the usefulness of the supporting examples of children's and educator's actions that are provided in the EYLF for each component of the Learning Outcomes. Less than two-thirds of stakeholders rated these as extremely-very useful (see **Table 10**).

Table 10. Per cent of stakeholders who rated EYLF examples as extremely or very useful

In your experience:	Educators /Approved Providers	Other Professionals
How useful are the examples of children's actions in helping to observe and understand each child's achievement of the Learning Outcomes?	64%	63%
How useful are the EYLF examples of how educators promote learning in helping to plan for children's achievement of the Learning Outcomes?	62%	60%

ECEC educators, approved providers and others all emphasised the need for shortened and condensed outcome components, with less overlap and, more explanation and examples of how each outcome looks in practice. They also highlighted the need to address infants and toddlers more explicitly and specifically in the outcomes, with examples of what the outcomes being achieved would look like in practice for each age group. Making the ALFs more relevant to school settings was also emphasised, along with further explanation of play-based approaches to achieve these outcomes and closer links with other curriculum documents.

MTOP

Similar concerns about the usefulness of the examples provided in the MTOP were evident from the ratings and comments of stakeholders. Only half of educators and other professionals rated the examples as extremely or very useful for understanding children's achievement of, and educators' promotion of, the Learning Outcomes (see **Table 11**).

Table 11. Per cent of stakeholders who rated MTOP examples as extremely or very useful

In your experience:	Educators /Approved Providers	Other Professionals
How useful are the examples of children's actions in helping to observe and understand each child's achievement of the Learning Outcomes?	54%	55%
How useful are the EYLF examples of how educators promote learning in helping to plan for children's achievement of the Learning Outcomes?	52%	50%

OSHC educators, Approved Providers and others identified that outcomes be simplified, condensed and made more appropriate for school-age children.

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

Contributing to the overarching principles of the NQF, in particular, that children are successful, competent and capable learners, the ToR for the ALFs Update focus attention on supporting learning and development and assessing children's achievement of the learning outcomes. The ToR also seek to strengthen representation of socially and culturally diverse perspectives.

The literature notes that 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 (White & Flear, 2019). This approach is evident in other early years frameworks. For example, *Te Whariki (NZ)* offers description of learning, development and wellbeing for infants, toddlers and young children. White and Flear (2019) also state strengthening transitions and continuity links to the Australian Curriculum are required. However, Grieshaber (2018, p. 1224) warns to ensure that outcomes are viewed as broad and observable it is important to avoid narrow linear conceptions 'ticked' with 'one-off' consideration.

Focus group participants as well as survey respondents described the need for more guidance in the examples across different settings with children with diverse capabilities. The presentation of the examples was discussed in focus groups to make examples "clearer" and are not seen as "an exhaustive list". Survey respondents also emphasised providing these descriptors could make the connections to the Australian Curriculum be more seamless. Furthermore, focus group participants suggested links to the NQS could assist educators with the interrelated nature of the EYLF/MTOP and the NQS.

Example comments from stakeholder feedback

I would like to see it split into age groups - babies /toddlers/preschoolers. This will support educators to not get so lost in interpreting the children they are focusing on (ECEC, Centre Director, LDC).

We need to include somewhat more tangible examples or ideas: we need to consider the varying education levels and understanding of our educators. Giving them examples will support their understanding of how to apply the frameworks more clearly (focus group)

MTOP learning outcomes need to be specific to OSHC and not early childcare as we are a different environment, looking after children 5-12 years with larger ratio's (OSHC, Nominated Supervisor, BSC/ASC/Vac).

I believe if EYLF is being updated it should have a flow on effect for Early Stage 1 learning outcomes (kindergarten curriculum), as this would be working cohesively across 0-12 years of age (ECEC, Others, Preschool/Kindergarten).

Points of Discussion: Learning outcomes (in general)

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:
 - 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.

5.2.2 Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity

Reflective of the NQF objectives and guiding principles, the ToR for the ALFs Update require consideration of human rights perspectives, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, cultural competence and representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and representation of socially and culturally diverse perspectives. The ToR also require attention to recommendations from relevant inquiries, including the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. Identity has been related to a sense of cultural, social, and spatial belonging, including rituals and the 'ritualised' use of space (Sumsion & Wong, 2011). Additionally, there is a push for strengthening the identity of children and young people as Australian citizens with connection to the identities of others (Marwick, 2017). Aspects of identity formation that encompass gender identity and gender expression (with a non-binary dichotomy) and family and cultural diversity are also critical. Stakeholders in Stage 1 advocated for updating of Learning Outcome 1 in relation to the importance of identity in framing children and young people's personal self-worth, uniqueness, and a positive sense of themselves as learners. This is well supported in the literature (Chapman, 2021; Solomon, 2016).

Example comments from stakeholder feedback

I like coming to preschool to play with my friends (ECEC, Child, 5.5 years)

A list of 12 friend's names (OSHC, Child, 8 years)

Respect for diversity of cultures, values, practices, beliefs, and (identities including gender) (ECEC, Government Department, LDC/FDC).

I would like to see the Outcomes and the examples much more strongly articulate the reality of identity development in children - for children to feel recognised and respected for who they are, they may need support in the language around what their identity means for them - if their developing identity does not fit with expected norms, they may have difficulty articulating themselves and therefore not gain that recognition and respect (OSHC, Others, FDC).

Adding in concepts of gender dysphoria; inclusivity and diversity applies to all the stakeholders and not just the children and their families; the concept of 'citizenship' is a little problematic and ambiguous (OSHC, Educational Leader, BSC/ASC).

Points of Discussion: Learning outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity

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

- 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.*

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

The NQF views children and young people as capable learners who exercise agency in their learning, by constructing their own understandings and contributing to others' learning. The ToR for the ALFs Update include identifying opportunities to strengthen coherent pathways between both ALFs and links to the Australian Curriculum. Children and young people are participating in many communities beyond their local community, many by digital means (Noble et al., 2020). Ideas to be considered in this area include a strengthening of differences and diversity of people, their cultures, beliefs, and perspectives. Caring for the natural environment is a strong theme in other early learning frameworks and with aspects of sustainability, including environmental education could be strengthened in the EYLF and MTOP. There is a significant influence of sustainability education when implemented with children and young people (Hill & Brown, 2014). Adopting a broader definition, sustainability is a principle underpinning early years curriculum in a growing number of countries, is a key requirement in the Australia Curriculum and is increasingly recognised as a significant area of content in contemporary curriculum provision (Edwards et al., 2016, p.36).

Recognising the importance of children and young people being connected and contributing to their world, stakeholders in Stage 1 suggest strengthening this outcome so that my family, my community and my world are highlighted. These views were also reflected in survey responses from ECEC parents.

Example comments from stakeholder feedback

Cultural appreciation particularly learning about the traditional owners of the land (ECEC, Parent, FDC).

Could be separated better and have more on depth on socialising and cultural respect and then being within and caring for our natural environment (ECEC, Parent, LDC).

Points of Discussion: Learning outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world

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

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

5.2.4 Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2017) 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 has been asked to consider the role of the two ALFs in prevention of child abuse and in supporting the implementation of Child Safe Organisation principles in ECEC and OSHC, as well as Strengthen coherent pathways between both ALFs and links to the Australian Curriculum. The importance of mental health in the wellbeing outcome is highlighted in the literature and other similar frameworks. Queensland Health Department (2018) reports that teaching children and young people about mental health is as important as learning about physical health. Furthermore, contemporary frameworks underscore the importance of teaching children how their brains work, what is needed for healthy brain development and the importance of self-regulation an executive function. Other areas to be explored more fully in this outcome are physical play and learning, risk, fundamental movement skills, sport, and healthy lifestyles with attention to food choices, movement and exercise, sleep, and relationships. This includes increased attention to infant and young child feeding practices and the opportunities these create for relationship building and learning (McGuire et al., 2021). International and Australian health guidelines advocate for the promotion and incorporation of physical activity and healthy eating in ECEC programs (Australian Dept of Health, 2019; NASPE, 2013; NSW Dept of Health, 2010; WHO, 2017). Despite strong evidence that regular physical activity in early childhood has psychosocial and cognitive benefits, including school functioning and achievement (Gasser et al., 2018), recent reviews have highlighted vast variations in services' provisions for and encouragement of physical activity and opportunities for risky play (Little & Stapleton, 2021; O'Brien et al., 2018; Saunders et al., 2019).

The teaching of protective behaviours to children and young people in age-appropriate ways is a recommendation of various departments and supported by the literature (Trew et al., 2021). Protective behaviours could be strengthened with an emphasis on building and maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships in ways to assist with resilience, coping and self-soothing and calming strategies. Stakeholders in Stage 1 emphasised the need to address well-being much more comprehensively and to be taught more explicitly.

Example comments from stakeholder feedback

The day to day dramas we encounter that affect our children like: Covid / cancer in families how to cope / homelessness/ gender confusion/ bullying for being different (OSHC, Approved Provider, BSC/ASC/Vac).

The document doesn't focus enough on protective behaviours (ECEC, Educational Leader, Room Leader, Preschool).

Ensuring their safety, this cannot be based on a single person's 'feelings or instincts' (OSHC, Educator, BSC/ASC/Vac).

Greater visibility of mental health. Using the word 'mental health' as well as, or together with, 'wellbeing' is important for breaking stigma around mental health and making visible how school age care services support children's mental health (OSHC, Parent, ASC).

Have some more picnics together (ECEC, Child, 3 years).

Points of Discussion: Learning outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing

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

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

5.2.5 Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners

The NQF recognises that children learn and develop in the different contexts in which they live and are more likely to be successful learners when they see connections and experience continuity of learning between their different contexts. Supporting this, the ToR for the ALFs Update include identifying opportunities to strengthen coherent pathways between both ALFs and links to the Australian Curriculum and learning from equivalent Australian and international frameworks and reviews. Self-regulation, growth mindset and teaching children how their brains function are concepts emphasised in the literature and other similar frameworks. For example, WA Kindergarten Curriculum Guidelines (SCSA, 2014) and the Northern Territory Preschool Curriculum describe this outcome as thinking and learning (NT DET, 2018). The Swedish curriculum for School-Age Educare refers to giving children the opportunity to develop creativity, curiosity and belief in their own abilities and broaden their understanding of different ways of thinking and being (Skolverket, 2018). Expanding this outcome to strengthen children's thinking

allows the further exploration of metacognition and the language of learning. Additionally, Carol Dweck's (2006) work in growth mindset emphasised forming positive dispositions and attitudes for learning. Boylan et al., (2018) assert a growth mindset assists children with motivation for learning, so learning focused on developing growth mindsets should be incorporated into early years curriculum.

In this outcome, the notion of content area has surfaced where educators can assist children to make meaning as they require some familiarity with "concepts and methods found in subject areas" (Krieg, 2011, p. 51). For older children in the year before school there could be some description of concepts that connect to the Australian Curriculum.

Stakeholders in Stage 1 emphasised the need for increased focus on social-emotional regulation and for intentional teaching of social emotional learning, metacognitive strategies, and strategies to exercise executive function.

Example comments from stakeholder feedback

I think there is an opportunity to consider more recent research such as growth mindset and dispositions and a focus on the process of learning, rather than the product. In Early Childhood we have long held the belief the emphasis should be on the process of learning not the product, sadly I still see product focused practice (ECEC, ECT, Preschool).

Goals can be quite tricky in an OSHC setting in comparison to early learning - being they are in groups. I think more of an inquiry approach is better than a direct instruction goal approach (OSHC, Educational Leader, BSC/ASC/Vac).

Explicit reference to executive functions is missing completely ... Whilst the revised EYLF may use different language from that used by the World Bank (in multiple domains), it is well established in research that executive functions underpin learning and need to be reflected in the EYLF (ECEC, Higher Education Institution, Preschool/LDC).

Points of Discussion: Learning outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners

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

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.

5.2.6 Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators

Seeking to support all children to be successful, confident, and capable learners, both ALFs place emphasis on children as effective communicators. Updating Outcome 5 addresses two of the ToR for the ALFs Update: Strengthening coherent pathways between both ALFs and state-based frameworks and link to the Australian Curriculum and learning from equivalent Australian and international frameworks and reviews. There is significant emphasis on the acquisition of oral language and the ways in which educators assist children with this. Times for talking to peers is particularly important and the development of vocabulary seen as critical in the development of reading skills by age eleven (Pascal et al., 2019). Pascal et al write “It is particularly important that...children have a confident grasp of oral language and communication before they are moved on to grasp the skills of written forms of language.” Pascal et al., (2019) caution that communication and language, and literacy skills are to be presented in real world contexts which have meaning for the child and Payler et al., (2017) note opportunities should be provided to experience creative expression through different modalities and materials that supports all areas of learning. The notions of inclusion also surface here as educators, children and young people and families use alternative means of communication; for example, Ford and Fasoli’s (2001) observations on reliance on silence and non-verbal communication in Indigenous communities, also noted in Harrison et al., (2017) recordings of infant-educator interactions in a Queensland Multifunctional Aboriginal Children Services program.

Example comments from stakeholder feedback

I also strongly believe in the benefits of key word sign/Auslan and other visual and communication aids, however these are not easily able to be expanded upon within Learning Outcome 5...This practice can also be applied to verbal children who incorporate Key Word Signs etc. into their own communication with low/non-verbal children in their room (ECEC, Educator, FDC).

Outcome 5 - include more around alternative methods of communication e.g., AAC (ECEC, Parent, LDC).

The incorporation of digital technologies and children and young people's safe and competent use of these tools is evident in the literature and other similar frameworks. For young children and young people, promoting safe ways of using technology and nurturing critical skills to operate in the digital environment is of growing importance. Survey respondents indicated more clarity regarding the use of technology for learning is required. Furthermore, an understanding that digital technology is much more than screentime, can be used intentionally and spontaneously by children and educators, and is relevant to all of the Learning Outcomes, spanning learning, leisure and creative expression is required. Additionally, STEM, STEAM and technology, and expressive forms of the arts were all areas Stage 1 respondents argued needed to be strengthened in the two ALFs to maintain currency.

Example comments from stakeholder feedback

I believe creativity is sadly underrepresented. Music art and other forms of self-expression are barely mentioned in the outcomes (ECEC, Nominated Supervisor, ECT, Preschool).

My service programs are reflective of IT, STEAM, and loose parts play (OSHC, Approved Provider, BSC/ASC/Vac).

It should be more about teaching children how to use technology safely (ECEC, Educator, Preschool).

Points of Discussion: Learning outcome 5: Children are effective communicators

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

- 19. Strengthening the guidance relating to 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.*

5.2.7 Language and accessibility

Addressing language and accessibility of the ALFs responds to the ToR focus on governance arrangements for the ongoing promotion, protection, maintenance, and support of the ALFs and was an emergent theme through stakeholder engagement in Stage 1. The creation of the ALFs saw the introduction of some new terms to educators. Kilderry et al., (2017) found that educators who had trained prior to 2010 felt they were “out of the loop” and uncertain about terms such as pedagogy, agency and what they look like in practice. Additionally, Grieshaber and Graham (2017) describe terms such as intentional teaching, assessment for learning, pedagogy, and scaffolding as terms more commonly used in teaching and understand that not all educators with diverse qualifications will be able to implement. Stakeholders in Stage 1 highlighted extensively that making the language within the framework more accessible to the diverse workforce would aid in implementing the ALFs in both ECEC and OSHC services. Both clarity of terms and well as support for educators in translating the ALFs into practice were common themes.

Example comments from stakeholder feedback

I love it so much, but I think it can be too abstract for some people - languages other than English and people new to the field (ECEC, Educator, LDC).

I think it's got some really great advice in terms of how you become a great professional...[but] there's lots of comments over the years... that the language in there, and the ideas and concepts, are too complex. ...I don't think we remove the strength that is in there, because they're complex ideas and notions. I think that may be that's addressed through supporting resources (Focus Group).

For example: As a general vision, I see its value, but it is a document that is not written or explained very well for new, unqualified, and inexperienced staff (OSHC, Nominated Supervisor, BSC/ASC).

Points of Discussion: Language of the ALFs

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

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