DOCUMENTING PROGRAMS FOR SCHOOL AGE SERVICES

The Australian, state and territory education Ministers have agreed to changes to the National Quality Framework (NQF).

This information sheet describes:

- documentation requirements for all school age services

- continuing documentation requirements for school age care services in the ACT, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia

- documentation changes applying to school age care services in the Northern Territory, Queensland and NSW.

WHEN DO THE CHANGES START?

Most changes will commence 1 October 2017 in all states and territories (except Western Australia which will commence on 1 October 2018).

The revised National Quality Standard (NQS) and some related changes will commence 1 February 2018.

WHERE CAN I GET FURTHER INFORMATION?

Visit acecqa.gov.au/resources/ supporting-materials/nqf-changes

Visit your regulatory authority website acecqa.gov.au/help/working-with-your-regulatory-authority

ALL SCHOOL AGE EDUCATION AND CARE SERVICE PROGRAMS

In school age education and care services, the educational program supports learning through play and leisure. Based on the nationally approved learning framework, *My Time, Our Place:* Framework for School Age Care (MTOP), the educational program 'includes all the spontaneous and planned experiences for children at the service designed to support wellbeing and facilitate learning. It includes all the interactions, experiences, routines and events' (MTOP, p.42).

Services are required to ensure the educational program:

- is based on the approved learning framework and delivered in accordance with the framework
- is based on the developmental needs, interests and experiences of each child
- is designed to take into account individual differences of each child
- contributes to the five learning outcomes for each child.

How are school age services unique?

The National Quality Standard acknowledges middle childhood and recreational programs for school age children as distinct from early childhood programs.

School age education and care programs supplement children's formal schooling. The educational program is focused on active learning, social development and wellbeing, and recreational or leisure activities to support continuity of learning

Why is documentation important?

Documentation makes children's learning visible and helps ensure children's wellbeing and need for rest, leisure and engagement are being met through the program.

What are the documentation requirements for school age children?

School age education and care services are required to document the educational program and in some jurisdictions evaluations of each child's wellbeing, development and learning (see 'Continuing documentation requirements for ACT, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia' below).

What should be considered in developing documentation?

In preparing documentation, consider:

- the period of time children are being educated and cared for by the service
- how the documentation will be used by educators at the service
- whether the documentation is readily understandable by educators and families.

Involving children in documentation

School age care services should have processes to enable children to influence the program in response to their own strengths, ideas, abilities and interests, and be able to show how this occurs.

The service should also demonstrate an effective process for ensuring each child's participation and engagement in the program. This may be demonstrated by educators engaging in critical conversations with children and documenting the actions taken as a result of these conversations.

Ensuring 'each child' is included in the program doesn't necessarily mean a large volume of written documentation. The focus is on ensuring the service is inclusive of all children.

For example, the service may have noted that a large number of children are interested in a project and this is reflected in the program. The program should also reflect how the wellbeing, development and learning of a child that is not interested in the project has been planned for.

When educators support each child's interests, learning and developmental needs, they can effectively communicate their understandings of the child and include them within the educational program.

What will authorised officers consider in the assessment and rating process?

When determining if a service is maintaining appropriate and relevant documentation, the authorised officer may discuss with your service how educators:

- make decisions about the educational program
- make decisions about the type and format of documentation
- ensure documentation is readily available and understood by families
- involve children in documenting their own wellbeing, development and learning
- are responsive to children's strengths, ideas, abilities and interests in developing the program.

Some jurisdictions use the documentation to plan for each child's wellbeing, development and learning and to support learning outcomes for children (see 'Continuing documentation requirements for ACT, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia' below).

Authorised officers will also collect evidence by observing children, educators' practices, and sighting documentation examples.

CONTINUING DOCUMENTATION REQUIREMENTS FOR ACT, SOUTH AUSTRALIA, TASMANIA, VICTORIA AND WESTERN AUSTRALIA

There is no change to existing documentation requirements for services in the ACT, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia. These services continue to be required to document evaluations of children's wellbeing, development and learning.

> Evaluation involves reflecting and engaging 'in processes such as scanning, monitoring, gathering and analysing information about how children feel and what children know, can do and understand' (MTOP, p.16).

This documentation is a key component of an ongoing planning cycle that enhances and extends children's wellbeing, development and learning.

How much documentation?

MTOP and the National Regulations do not specify how much, how often or what methods are used to document the program and child evaluations. Services can make these decisions, based on their unique context, the age of children attending, attendance patterns and how the documentation will be used by educators and with families.

A key consideration is the amount of time that the child is being educated and cared for by the service. For example, children attending the service frequently are likely to have more information collected and documented over the course of the year than those attending infrequently. However, this will depend on the individual needs of the child.

Services are encouraged to focus on the quality of the documentation and how is it used to enhance wellbeing, development and learning outcomes for children rather than the quantity of documentation collected for individual children.

> 'While more formal and planned methods of evaluation involve increased documentation, the focus should remain on a planned approach towards particular outcomes, rather than excessive amounts of recording' (MTOP, p.66).

What types of documentation?

There are many electronic, visual and paper-based ways to document evaluations of children's learning. Each format must demonstrate analysis of children's learning to meet the requirements of the National Regulations. Quality documentation focuses on an aspect of learning, not just 'what we did'.

Some examples which an authorised officer may sight include enrolment information, details on children's strengths, ideas, abilities and interests along with ongoing evidence of children's engagement and participation in the program. Other examples may include:

- Learning stories or narratives of key events that demonstrate:
  - educators understand the children and their own practice, have identified outcomes, and suggested ways to build on children's learning and development
  - children have described the experience and why it was important to them.
- Photographs with captions, photographic sequences or video clips that demonstrate:
  - children showing themselves as active participants and decision-makers
  - the experiences children are engaged in, their skills, development and progress.
- Observations or reviews that demonstrate:
  - educators evaluating events and activities for extension
  - children's feedback has contributed to a decision to continue or extend on an aspect of the program.
- Journals that demonstrate:
  - educators reflecting on their own practice and interpreting the feelings, thoughts and ideas of children, families, and colleagues.

An authorised officer may observe:
- Mind maps and surveys:
  - children sharing their ideas with peers and educators using this information to incorporate into the program
  - children conducting surveys to influence changes in the program
- Children's meetings:
  - children conducting meetings with their peers to influence the program
  - children recording their own program ideas and these ideas being reflected in planned experiences
  - children reflecting on what aspects of the program work and what areas can be improved.

DOCUMENTATION CHANGES FOR NORTHERN TERRITORY, QUEENSLAND AND NSW

From 1 October 2017, services that educate and care for school age children in the Northern Territory, Queensland and NSW are no longer required to keep documentation of evaluations of individual children's wellbeing, learning and development. These services must ensure that, for the purposes of the educational program, evidence about the development of the program is documented.

Services are still required to understand all children and their strengths, ideas, abilities and interests and their progress across the learning outcomes as part of the planning cycle. This can be reflected in documenting how and why the education program has been developed to support all children to participate in the program.

Services with a mix of school age children and children preschool age or under are still required to document individual child assessments for the children preschool age or under.

What will authorised officers consider in the assessment and rating process?

When determining if a service is maintaining appropriate and relevant documentation, the authorised officer may discuss how educators:
- articulate how each child is reflected within programed experiences
- obtain and document children's ideas, interests and challenges
- gather information about common trends and how this is included in the program
- collect information regarding all children
- support children to document their ideas, abilities and challenges
- ensure age and developmental appropriate experiences and resources are provided to children.

There is no change for existing requirements for services in the ACT, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia.

Further resources

Victorian Department of Education of Training, Planning for children in school age care

Department of Education and Training, My Time, Our Place – Framework for School Age Care in Australia (MTOP)

Department of Education and Training, Educators' Guide – My Time, Our Place