

2021 National Quality Framework Approved Learning Frameworks Update Discussion Paper (Stage 2)

**Goodstart Early Learning submission
September 2021**

Goodstart acknowledges all Traditional Custodians across Australia and recognises First Nations Peoples' continued cultural and spiritual connection to the land, sky and waterways that surround us. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

About Goodstart Early Learning

We are for children, not profit

Goodstart is Australia's largest not-for-profit social enterprise and Australia's largest ECEC provider, with 671 centres located in all states and territories, caring for more than 70,700 children from 59,200 families with a team of 14,900 employees. Across Australia, 39% of children attending our services have at least one indicator of vulnerability.

Our purpose is to ensure all Australia's children have the learning, development and wellbeing outcomes they need for school and life. It is our view that all children should be supported to participate in quality early learning and care, regardless of where they live in Australia, their family circumstances, their inclusion support needs, or their early learning setting. We believe the best way to do this is to ensure all children have access to high quality, inclusive early learning and care no matter their location or life circumstances.

Overarching statement

Goodstart welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Review of the Australian Learning Frameworks, specifically in relation to the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF). We support and are deeply committed to the EYLF and acknowledge that it was and still is a world-class learning framework. We therefore support the intention of this review to refresh and revitalise the Framework, so it reflects contemporary research, practice and language.

To inform the development of this submission, we consulted widely across our national network of teachers, educators and in-centre and around-centre teams. Consistently, our educators told us they were pleased to see the following themes in the Discussion Paper:

- Embedding Indigenous knowledge and perspectives throughout the frameworks;
- Improving understanding and practice of playful intentional teaching;
- Recognising the importance of collaborative leadership and teamwork in high quality early learning and care;
- Adopting more inclusive language and supporting inclusive practice that welcomes and understands diversity and difference;
- Clarifying and reaffirming the value of critical reflection as a determinant of process quality;
- Clarifying and lifting expectations around relational pedagogy with children and partnerships with families and communities; and
- Better aligning the frameworks with the National Quality Framework, National Quality Standards and Principles for Child Safe Organisations.

Since the EYLF was developed and introduced, the capability and professionalism of the sector has grown and matured as the upskill and quality improvements envisaged under the National Quality Framework were realised. With the rise in quality, qualifications and professional recognition, educators are telling us they want clear guidance around what each child needs (child development), how to assess that (formative, summative and diagnostic assessment) and then use that information and analysis to inform their planning, program and practice.

In terms of quality, the EYLF is also a key document for supporting services to self-assess against the National Quality Standards to help drive continuous improvement through critical reflection and practice self-evaluation. It is imperative that this review ensures the framework is a resource that is accessible and functional, promotes practice quality uplift and informs activities in the service's Quality Improvement Plan.

When the EYLF was first introduced, it was complemented by a funded national workforce strategy and professional development to support its implementation and the implementation of the National Quality Agenda. Over a decade later, the sector finds itself in a similar situation – with a revised EYLF to be implemented at the same time as recommendations from the Review of the National Quality Framework (NQF) and a sector eagerly awaiting the finalisation of a National ECEC Workforce Strategy.

A high quality – qualified, experienced and supported – workforce is critical for delivering high quality early learning and care. Over the last 18 months, ECEC has been recognised as essential for families, employers, the economy and for children. Yet, our workforce is facing critical shortages and its overall wellbeing has been severely impacted by COVID-19. For the revised EYLF and NQF to be implemented efficiently and effectively, they must be complemented by a comprehensive, funded national workforce strategy.

Recommendation summary

1. Goodstart agrees or strongly agrees with the key recommendations made in the paper, with additional detail below.
2. We feel the revised Framework needs to have reference to pedagogical language around assessment (formative, summative and diagnostic) and the early childhood theoretical perspectives against which to assess children (i.e. child development).
 - Specifically, where key information is not embedded in the EYLF document, the Framework should clearly refer or link to high quality supporting documentation to support educators in their practice – this includes detail on child development and commencing or continuing a Reconciliation journey.
3. We note that in order to effectively and efficiently deliver the revised EYLF:
 - It must be complemented by a funded, national ECEC workforce strategy and we note this is currently under consideration by Governments.
 - It should be supported by training and professional development with funding to support delivery and non-contact time for educators, particularly those in smaller and/or regional or remote services with limited access and/or capacity.
 - Educators and services will need time to embed the revised EYLF, so a key consideration will be how that is reflected in the Assessment and Ratings process.

Please note:

While some of our centres offer outside school hours care programs, our primary focus is on high quality early learning and care for children birth to 5 years. For this reason, our submission predominantly provides feedback in relation to the Early Years Learning Framework, not the My Time, Our Place framework.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO DISCUSS ANY PART OF THIS SUBMISSION IN FURTHER DETAIL, PLEASE CONTACT:

Kelly Millar
National Social Policy Manager
Goodstart Early Learning
Mobile: 0409 576 847
Email: kmillar@goodstart.org.au

Goodstart's responses to the Discussion Paper questions

Abbreviations

ACECQA	Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority
ECEC	Early childhood education and care
EYLF	Early Years Learning Framework
MTOP	My Time, Our Place
NQF	National Quality Framework
NQS	National Quality Standards
OSHC	Outside school hours care

The Vision

Q1. Proposal in discussion paper	Goodstart's Position
a) Expanding the EYLF and MTOP visions to recognise the role of ECEC and OSHC in advancing Reconciliation.	Agree very strongly ✓✓✓
b) Adding a principle about embedding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and perspectives in both the EYLF and MTOP.	Agree very strongly ✓✓✓
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.	Agree very strongly ✓✓✓

Position statement

Goodstart wholeheartedly supports expanding the EYLF vision to advance Reconciliation and to add a principle about embedding Indigenous knowledges and perspectives into the learning frameworks.

General feedback

Our vision for Reconciliation is for Goodstarters to engage with Reconciliation on both a personal and professional level, creating the conditions that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social justice, equality and equity. Through this vision, we are laying the foundations to grow future generations that value and recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and heritage as a proud part of a shared identity.

An important part of this shared identity is recognising the unique status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in our country's history by acknowledging their stories, traditions and their original sovereignty. Our First Nations peoples are the custodians of the world's oldest continuous living cultures, which should be revered and celebrated.

"We seek constitutional reforms to empower our people and take a rightful place in our own country. When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country."¹

¹ Uluru Statement from the Heart (2017), available [here](#).

The ECEC sector has a unique opportunity to support the advancement of Reconciliation by teaching *through* – not just *about* – First Nations culture. This paves the way for a richer and more harmonious Australia while also ensuring a culturally safe and responsive environment for First Nations children and their families.

ECEC services also play a foundational role of helping children and families commence or continue their journey of Reconciliation, which then continues into schools. We acknowledge and support the recommendation in the ACARA Review of the Australian Curriculum to strengthen the existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures as a cross-curriculum priority. Similarly, we note the Mparntwe Education Declaration seeks to ensure students understand, acknowledge and celebrate the diversity and richness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures and that learning is built on and includes local, regional and national cultural knowledge and experience of First Nations peoples.²

While we – as an organisation – are advanced on our Reconciliation journey, there is a shared awareness that many educators and services may be hesitant about embracing Reconciliation and Indigenous perspectives for fear of 'getting it wrong' or offending First Nations people. It is important that any aspirational commitments in the EYLF are supported by clear direction and guidance about how to meaningfully engage with Indigenous culture, knowledge and perspectives. We highly recommend the Reconciliation Australia Narragunnawali platform to support individual services to begin or continue their Reconciliation journey³. Goodstart centres use this platform to develop their individual Reconciliation Action Plans and are highly positive about the experience. There is also an opportunity to explicitly call out and amplify the importance of working with and engaging with Elders and community leaders in order to authentically develop culturally safe practices and environments.

Q2. Proposal in discussion paper	Goodstart's Position
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.	Agree ✓

Position statement

Goodstart supports the proposed broadening of the vision, so long as it remains clear, aspirational and easy to communicate.

General feedback

At Goodstart, our vision is for 'all children to have the learning, development and wellbeing outcomes they need for school and life'. So, our vision is well-aligned with the current vision in the Learning Frameworks, which is that 'all children experience learning that is engaging and builds success for life'.

"It's important to remember that the EYLF represents a time in a child's life – from birth to 5 years – that can never be revisited. It is about amplifying play and curiosity in early childhood, not just preparing for the future. A child will never be 3 years old again."

~ Goodstart Early Childhood Teacher.

² The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (2019), available [here](#).

³ Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Education, available [here](#).

In feedback from our national network of educators and through our Centre Reference Group, there was strong support for the continuation of the EYLF language around *Belonging, Being, Becoming*. Educators and centre teams feel strongly that it is just as important to celebrate who children are today and allow them to just 'be' as it is for them to focus on 'becoming'.

Pedagogy and Educator's Professional Practice

Q3. Proposal in discussion paper	Goodstart's Position
Adding detail on planning for learning that addresses the importance of, and explains the continuous cycle of planning, observation, documentation, and reflection.	Agree very strongly ✓✓✓

Position Statement

Goodstart strongly supports the proposed changes to the EYLF to add detail on planning for learning, particularly to clarify the role of observation in formative assessment.

General Feedback

Consistent feedback from our early childhood educators is that they want a revised EYLF to include clear guidance around what each child needs (child development bands), how to best assess that (formative, summative and diagnostic assessment) and then use that information and analysis to inform their planning, program and practice.

Additional detail on planning for learning should be included in the EYLF and should be clearly aligned with NQS Quality Area 1 – Educational Program and Practice to ensure consistent messaging. References to 'observation' should be contemporised to define it as a key method of formative assessment in ECEC – drawing in assessment for, of and as learning (Arthur et al, 2021, DEEWAR, 2009). This acknowledges the importance of and difference between formative and summative assessment, which enable educators and teachers to monitor learning, development and wellbeing progress over time rather than through one-off disconnected experiences.

The 'for learning' part of the cycle needs to be strengthened. There is a common misunderstanding that children's interests are the learning itself, rather than a hook into learning. We have also seen a shift away from analysis as part of sound observational practice to determine next learning steps. The use of analysis is the critical component to ensure understanding of alignment to the outcomes and developmental trajectories to determine implications for learning.⁴

Principles

Q4. Proposal in discussion paper	Goodstart's Position
Expanding the principle of ongoing learning and reflective practice to further strengthen critical reflection as a principle and professional practice.	Agree strongly ✓✓

Position Statement

Goodstart strongly supports the proposal to expand the principle, particularly to strengthen critical reflection in professional practice to improve process quality.

⁴ Arthur, L., Beecher, B., Death, E., Dockett, S., and Farmer, S. (2021). *Programming and planning in early childhood settings*. (8th ed.). South Melbourne: Cengage.
Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), (2009). *Belonging, being and becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*. Canberra: DEEWR.

General Feedback

Critical reflection is central to social justice and citizenship and early childhood educators need to be critically reflective to drive change and transformation in thinking, leadership and practice. The EYLF has a strong foundation in social justice principles, which should be retained while also improving understanding and practice around cultural responsiveness and sustainability (i.e. UN Sustainable Development Goals). These two topics are inherently intertwined and could be strengthened across the frameworks.

"Contemporary conceptualisations of early childhood education as a site of democratic practice, coupled with research that points to the potential of ECEC to contribute to redressing educational disadvantage, compel us to argue that there is a moral obligation for leaders of ECEC to be deeply concerned with issues of social justice."⁵

The EYLF defines critical reflection as 'reflective practices that focus on implications for equity and social justice. Yet, within the framework, 'critical reflection' and 'social justice' only appear twice each, with once being the above statement in the glossary. Engaging with Authorised officers, teachers and educators has shown mixed understandings and representations of the differences between reflection, evaluation and critical reflection. The review could further advance the importance of critical reflection to support enacting social justice principles, quality practice and citizenship.

There was strong and consistent support from our national network and Centre Reference Group around strengthening critical reflection as a principle and through professional practice, which can significantly improve process quality. The Review presents an opportunity to make a clearer distinction between reflecting on practice, which seeks to improve an educator or teacher's skills and capability, and critical reflection, which is a process of inquiry to identify, assess and question our knowledge and deeply held assumptions. Educators highlighted the importance of critical reflection and listening to the perspectives of others to support genuine inclusion and addressing unconscious bias.

Performed well, critical reflection was seen to be transformative for the educator but with flow-on benefits for children and families. However, there was also a recognition that critical reflection is a skill that requires practice and benefits from facilitated discussions or inquiry. The role of the Educational Leader is pivotal in supporting and improving critical reflection. Dr Melinda Miller's work on critical reflection was recommended for its clear definition, practical advice and accessible language.⁶

As well as promoting critical reflection, the EYLF is also the framework against which educators self-assess, particularly in relation to NQS Area 1 – Educational Program and Practice. This review presents an opportunity to ensure the definitions, language and practical examples in the framework support educators in their self-assessment and critical reflection, so they can easily identify strengths and areas for improvement to include in their Quality Improvement Plan (QIP).

Q5. Proposal in discussion paper	Goodstart's Position
Adding a principle that reflects contemporary research evidence concerning the role of collaborative leadership and teamwork.	Agree strongly ✓✓

⁵ Hard, L., Press, F., & Gibson, M. (2013) 'Doing' Social Justice in Early Childhood: the potential of leadership,' *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood* 1(4): p.324-334.

⁶ Miller, M. (2011). Gowrie Australia Summer 2011 Issue 45: *Critical Reflection*. Available [here](#).

Position Statement

Goodstart strongly supports the addition of a principle around collaborative leadership and teamwork.

We surveyed our Centre Reference Group to support the development of this submission and, in relation to new and expanded principles, they ranked this principle around leadership as the one that mattered most to them.

General Feedback

Pedagogical leadership is an essential component of leading an educational organisation to improve teaching and learning⁷. It is about improving educational outcomes for children and is a core responsibility of leaders - shared with all those working within ECEC services⁸. According to Siraj (n.d), pedagogical leadership includes:

1. knowing the children in your care deeply
2. understanding how children develop and how they learn best
3. knowing the relevant curriculum framework and how to implement it
4. valuing the importance of assessment and monitoring children's progress of learning, and
5. growing the ecosystem children where children grow, develop and learn.

To support this vital leadership, Goodstart staff are encouraged to work together to develop centre-level visions that support our organisation-level vision and purpose. Centre-based teams are encouraged to create spaces of democracy through the provision of time (planning meeting, paid staff meetings) and the use of resources, people (centre support staff), programs (learning and training directories) and technology (Storypark planning; Microsoft 365 suits) to support centres on their leadership journey.

Q6. Proposal in discussion paper	Goodstart's Position
Expanding the principle of high expectations and equity to reflect modern understandings of diversity and inclusion.	Agree strongly ✓✓

Position Statement

Goodstart strongly supports the proposal to contemporise language and guidance around diversity and inclusion. In particular, we welcome the shift in how equity is defined in the current EYLF, focussing on the child's diverse circumstances and abilities, to instead promote inclusion and welcoming environments for all children and their families.

General Feedback

Inclusive practice is fundamental to our way of working. As an inclusive organisation, all children, families and educators are welcomed at Goodstart. Quality early learning begins with secure, nurturing relationships between educators and children. Each and every day, our centre teams work in partnership with thousands of families across Australia to deliver high quality, inclusive and community connected early learning to achieve learning, development and wellbeing outcomes for all children, especially children who experience vulnerability or disadvantage. We actively support all children to participate in our services, irrespective of their abilities, developmental capabilities or their family's structure or circumstances.

⁷ Palethorpe, 2019; Kagan & Bowman, 1997; Sergiovanni, 1998

⁸ Fonsén, 2013.

Q7. Proposal in discussion paper	Goodstart's Position
Adding a principle of sustainability to include environmental, social and economic sustainability.	Neutral ~

Position Statement

Goodstart generally supports the proposal to improve understandings of sustainability to move beyond environmental sustainability. However, consideration of sustainability may be more appropriately reflected under Principle 3 – High Expectations and Equity or Principle 5 – Ongoing Learning and Reflective Practice, particularly with reference to and reflection on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals⁹.

General Feedback

A quote from one of our amazing Indigenous educators in relation to sustainability:

'We should be looking at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sustainable practices after caring for Country for the past 60,000 years.'

Q8. Proposal in discussion paper	Goodstart's Position
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.	Agree strongly ✓✓
Q9. Proposal in discussion paper	Goodstart's Position
Strengthening the principle of partnerships to include working with diverse families, culturally safe spaces, and strengthening connections with child and family professionals and school communities.	Agree strongly ✓✓

Position Statement

Goodstart strongly supports the proposals to revise and enhance the principle, understanding and practice around relationships and partnerships, particularly with respect to cultural safety.

We support the proposal to strengthen the principle to include working with diverse families but we recommend more inclusive language, such as ECEC centres being safe and welcoming spaces for 'all families', regardless of their structure, cultural background or circumstance.

General Feedback

Feedback from across our network consistently highlighted the opportunity this revision presents, particularly in recognising that child's wellbeing is often informed by, even dependent on, their family's wellbeing. There is also an opportunity to clarify and enhance understanding of peer-to-peer development and the role of educators in supporting this.

Revising this principle should clarify both the expectations and the opportunities for educators when engaging with families, schools and other supports around the child. Importantly, this should consider the continuity of learning, particularly as it extends to the home, through transitions to school and into community learning environment.

As outlined below (Q12), we support the improvements in language from cultural competency to cultural safety and cultural responsiveness. Referring to competency can be limiting in that people

⁹ United Nations, Dept of Economic and Social Affairs. Sustainable Development: The 17 Goals. Available [here](#).

assume completing a training program makes them culturally competent, rather than continuing to explore, understand and practice in a more culturally responsive way.

Case study: Family Connections program

Family Connections is our foundational social inclusion professional development program. We have partnered with allied health professionals and other support agencies to develop and deliver this unique program to enhance outcomes for children and their families in vulnerable circumstances. It is delivered over a 12-month period to Centre Directors and educators and includes a monthly face-to-face professional learning session, additional on-the-floor coaching in centres, facilitated centre team meetings and mentoring for centre leaders.

Family Connections aims to strengthen practice and relationships between educators, children and families by focusing on their strengths, resources and aspirations to generate improved child outcomes. Importantly, the program supports centres in building connections with community services. Family Connections is delivered in Learning Circles over the duration of a year and covers topics such as leading change for children, attachment-based practices, communication, social, emotional, sensory development and play, partnerships with families and community links.

Practices

Q10. Proposal in discussion paper	Goodstart's Position
Clarifying the meaning of holistic approaches to learning and teaching, including the connection between the vision, principles, practices and learning outcomes in both Frameworks.	Agree ✓

Position Statement

Goodstart welcomes clarification around holistic approaches to learning and teaching, particularly by creating clearer connections between the vision, principles and practices in the Learning Frameworks.

General Feedback

There was clear and consistent feedback from our network of educators that they like and appreciate the structure of the EYLF in terms of the vision, principles, practices and learning outcomes. However, the way this is implemented in centres sometimes means that certain sections in the EYLF, such as the vision and principles, are assigned to leadership roles, whereas the practices and outcomes sections are for educators. Around centre support teams indicated they often observe too much focus on the outcomes section in practice. This revision will help address this misunderstanding and hopefully promote improved engagement with exceeding themes, such as engaging with research.

It is also important that there is clearer alignment between the Learning Frameworks and the NQF and NQS. Similarly, any revisions or changes to the NQF must be reflected with correlating language in the EYLF.

Q11. Proposal in discussion paper	Goodstart's Position
Combining the practices of learning through play, intentional teaching and intentionality to reflect contemporary understandings of child and educator roles in play, teaching and learning.	Agree very strongly ✓✓✓

Position Statement

Goodstart strongly supports the proposal to combine the practices of learning through play, intentional teaching and intentionality to reflect contemporary research, practice and understandings.

General Feedback

There is a continuum of pedagogical strategies for play-based learning¹⁰. At one end of the continuum, we have free child-directed play with plenty of time and space but no resources or teacher guidance, only non-obtrusive observation. At the other end of the continuum, there is very structured, educator-led learning through direct instruction. For a high quality early learning and care experience, the optimal position along this continuum is in the centre – where playful, intentional teaching is the result of collaboration between child-initiated interests and educator-guided play.

In consultations with our national network through Stage 1 and Stage 2 of this Review, our educators and teachers consistently raised the need for better definition of - intentional teaching and play-based learning. In these discussions – and in observations of planning, programming and practice across centres – it became apparent that there is sometimes a binary notion of intentional teaching and play, rather than the desired practice of playful intentional teaching. Educators sometimes view intentional teaching as a pre-planned activity that generally occurs in group time, rather than something that can occur spontaneously in response to a child's interests and learned through play. This limited view and practice of intentional teaching also hinders children's agency in identifying their strengths and interests.

Feedback from our educators and around centre teams specifically requested more explicit reference to the value of risky play within a safe environment. They also highlighted the following resources as useful in terms of understanding and practicing playful intentional teaching:

- 1) *Intentional teaching. Acting thoughtfully, deliberately and purposefully.* Anne Kennedy.
- 2) *Play in the Early Years.* Professor Marilyn Fleer.
- 3) *Leading age-appropriate pedagogies in the early years of school.* Associate Professor Bev Flückiger.

Q12. Proposal in discussion paper	Goodstart's Position
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.	Agree very strongly ✓✓✓

Position Statement

We strongly support shifting the language in the learning frameworks from cultural competency to cultural responsiveness and any and all activities that support embedding First Nations perspectives throughout service provision.

General Feedback

As noted above, Goodstart is deeply committed to Reconciliation and acknowledges the unique and invaluable role of ECEC in advancing Reconciliation for and with First Nations people. We support the proposal for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives to be embedded in all

¹⁰ Appetite to Play (2021). Play-based learning continuum. Available [here](#).

aspects of service provision, as this reflects the organisation-level awareness and responsiveness we strive for at Goodstart. We recognise and respect that Reconciliation benefits all children in our centres but also their families, communities and the educators who are on the same journey. One way for this to be achieved is for children and families to see themselves and their culture reflected in our centre environments and teams.

We support the change from cultural competency to cultural responsiveness to reflect that creating and continuing culturally safe and responsive spaces is an ongoing journey, not just a competency that can be achieved by completing a training program. Responsiveness also implies *action* – educators are not just learning about Indigenous culture and knowledge; they use that knowledge to inform and empower their practice.

'We need culturally safe and welcoming spaces where our people will know our jarjums our safe & will want to engage as they feel valued to do so.' ~ Indigenous Goodstart educator.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been the traditional custodians of this land for tens of thousands of years and, as well as a rich and beautiful culture, they hold an immeasurable wealth of knowledge about our environment – our flora, fauna, seasons and stars. Indigenous ways of teaching and learning are also well-aligned with early learning pedagogy and practice, such as through storytelling, symbols and images, and non-verbal communication. Embedding these perspectives in the EYLF supports children to learn *through* – not just *about* – First Nations culture.

There was some feedback from our educators that a 'genuine commitment' was not aspirational or specific enough and that the commitment should be actionable and visible. Many educators also acknowledged that delivering culturally responsive services draws on the aforementioned principle and skills around critical reflection on our interactions with others, unpacking unconscious biases and taking on board different perspectives. There was also recognition that these skills and processes would benefit all children and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, not just Indigenous Australians.

'First Nations and Torres Strait Islanders local cultural learnings should be first and foremost within our program to be respectful of our Traditional Custodians on whose land we live, learn and play. People need to know about the Country they live on and the people who come from it. This also helps to breakdown cultural barriers.' ~ Indigenous Goodstart educator.

Case study: Community of Practice

A key part of our inclusive practice is creating culturally safe and welcoming environments. We have implemented an "Engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Educators" Community of Practice program. The Community of Practice aims to increase workforce participation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and overcome barriers to Indigenous children participating in early learning. The model enables solutions to be created and addressed locally, aiming to create culturally safe and competent early learning centres, strengthening local community connections and relationships. For more information about our Community of Practice initiative, see **Attachment A**.

Q13. Proposal in discussion paper	Goodstart's Position
Aligning EYLF and MTOP practices to: Assessment and evaluation for learning, development and well-being to reflect contemporary understandings of authentic and meaningful assessment approaches including children and young people's role in assessing their own learning.	Agree very strongly ✓✓✓

Position Statement

Goodstart strongly supports revisions to assessment and evaluation to reflect contemporary understandings and practice and to support assessment as a key determinant underpinning the planning, programming and practice cycle.

General Feedback

Best practice does not regard assessment as a standalone process but as integral to the planning and assessment cycle. Conversely, the analysis of learning is necessary to inform the next learning steps. However, within the Australian context, there are no policy guidelines about what assessment tools should be utilised to ensure children's next learning steps are planned for and that all children are making progress. Recent evidence highlights the appetite of the sector to source suitable formative tools¹¹, which is consistent with feedback from our national network of educators.

While the cycle of planning and assessment in ECEC is based on guiding teaching and practice towards individual learning objectives, the Australian school sector mandates a range of assessment tools, each applied in a cycle of teaching and testing to monitor learning progress against the Australian Curriculum¹². Two such differing approaches is not conducive to an effective learning continuum between ECEC and primary schooling.

Feedback from across our network and around-centre support teams indicates there is a desire to achieve a shared understanding of how assessment can be for, of and as learning and address and improve inconsistent practice around children's assessment of their own learning. Goodstart educators use a range of formative assessment tools when determining what children are learning, what they know, and what they can do to guide their teaching and practice. These tools include: learning stories; jottings; anecdotal records; running records; time samples; event samples; observations of learning in the moment; and information from families. There is a lack of consistency in educator knowledge and understanding of how the tools can be used in practice to inform next learning steps and individual learning objectives. Our educators require more support in understanding of such pedagogical techniques, tools and documentation.

Educators also raised the issue of ensuring the right level of documentation to support assessment, critical reflection and practice improvement. Specific reference was made to potential benefits of technology as a tool to support educators in relation to assessment and planning, as opposed to technology in the hands of children. The use of technology for observation and assessment was noted for its time efficiency – which can increase the level of child-educator engagement and interaction – but also for its benefits in collating and analysing child outcomes data.

Case studies: Early Years Toolbox and All Children Communicate!

In 2018, Goodstart commenced a prototype and co-design process with educators and teachers to use the Early Years Toolbox to support educators' assessment of children's learning and progress. This was further enhanced in 2020, with development and prototyping of All Children Communicate! (ACC!).

Early Years Toolbox is a collection of readily accessible measures of young children's learning and development. Each measure is a brief, engaging game-like assessment that has been developed for the iPad. Two child-level assessment measures are used by educators – a vocab app measuring expressive language and numbers assessing a child's early mathematical skills. By co-designing implementation with educators and scaling over time, the Early Years Toolbox is now used in over 200 centres to provide a summative assessment of children's development at three points in the

¹¹ Harrison, et al; 2020.

¹² Lingard, Thompson, & Sellar, 2016; Readman & Allen, 2013.

year. Crucially, the Toolbox is used to validate educators' and teachers' observations and is used as just one point of reference in planning and programming.

ACC! is an early communication program designed to build upon educators' existing knowledge and practice skills to best support children's early communication outcomes. The program includes implementing the ACC! Assessment Tool – a formative assessment tool measuring four key communication domains: listening and attention; receptive language; expressive language; social communication. The ACC! Pilot findings are showing that educators respect and welcome the monitoring tool and are finding it easy to implement and use to inform planning.

Learning Outcomes

Q14. Proposal in discussion paper	Goodstart's Position
<p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - specialised age groupings of children and young people (infants, toddlers, pre-schoolers, early years of school and middle school). - children and young people's different abilities. - social (learning with others) as well as individual learning. - diverse cultures and families. 	<p>Agree strongly ✓✓</p>

Position Statement

Goodstart supports the proposal to provide more guidance and examples to support inclusive practice for all children, including children with different abilities and support needs, as well as children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

General Feedback

While there was strong support for this proposal from our network of educators, many raised concerns about the language of 'difference and diversity'. Instead, educators indicated a preference for inclusive language that reflects the differentiated needs of all children and families without implying a deficit discourse.

All children need and benefit from high quality early learning and care experiences achieved through universal best practice. Just as the 'rising tide lifts all the boats'; inclusive practice lifts the quality for all children in the centre. A deep understanding of inclusive practice supports educators to respond to children in the way they learn, how children engage with the environment, rather than the way they want to teach.

Guidance and examples should support educators around the notion of equity and ensuring the service environment, resources and staffing is representative of community and beyond. Understanding and reflecting the local community context brings a unique, contextualised sense of *belonging* for the children and families who attend.

Q15. Proposal in discussion paper	Goodstart's Position
<p>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.</p>	<p>Agree very strongly ✓✓✓</p>

Position Statement

Goodstart strongly supports the proposal to expand guidance in Learning Outcome 1 to reflect contemporary perspectives of personal, social and Indigenous identities.

General Feedback

This proposal is consistent with the objectives of the Review of the Learning Frameworks, that is, to refresh and revise the frameworks to reflect contemporary research, language, understandings and practice. Using genuinely inclusive language that is neither prescriptive nor stereotypical will also help to ensure the frameworks do not become outdated in future.

Q16. Proposal in discussion paper	Goodstart's Position
Strengthening concepts of sustainability in Learning Outcome 2, based on the broader definition of sustainability spanning environmental, social and economic sustainability.	Agree ✓

Position Statement

Goodstart supports the proposal to strengthen concepts of sustainability and broaden the definition to reflect contemporary understandings of environmental, social and economic sustainability.

General Feedback

As noted above (Q7), adding a principle of sustainability may not be essential but we recognise the value in strengthening definitions and practical examples relating to sustainability under Learning Outcome 5.

Q17. Proposal in discussion paper	Goodstart's Position
Expanding the guidance relating to Learning Outcome 3 to reflect information about wellbeing and 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.	Agree strongly ✓✓

Position Statement

Goodstart strongly supports the proposal to expand the guidance around children's health and wellbeing, social competence, protective behaviours, mental health and resilience.

General Feedback

Feedback from our early childhood teachers and educators demonstrated a strong and consistent theme around improving mental health and wellbeing – for children, their families and for the educators themselves. While COVID-19 has reinforced the importance of resilience and being able to cope with day-to-day challenges, there is also a recognition that wellbeing and perseverance are highly beneficial for lifelong learning.

The Mparntwe Declaration recognises the vital role education plays in supporting the wellbeing, mental health and resilience of young people. Notably, it acknowledges that education is pivotal in promoting the 'intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic

development and wellbeing of young Australians, and in ensuring the nation's ongoing economic prosperity and social cohesion'.¹³

The Productivity Commission's Mental Health Inquiry acknowledged that mental health underpins children's and young people's social and emotional development and their sense of wellbeing. The Productivity Commission also recommended investing in ECEC to support children's social and emotional development in the early years because investing in the mental health of children and young people delivers significant returns for them, their family and the community.¹⁴

We also recognise the importance of teaching and instilling protective behaviours in the context of safeguarding children and the Child Safe Standards. One of the Child Safe Standards is for children to participate in decisions affecting them and be taken seriously. Specifically, children must be able to access abuse prevention programs and information and to express their views.¹⁵ This Review presents a timely opportunity to align the EYLF with the Child Safe Standards and other contemporary research and best practice regarding safeguarding children.

The importance of physical development in the early years should not be understated as there is a strong correlation between movement, play and child development. Archer and Siraj (2014) found that educators (and other adults) play a pivotal role in intervening to support improved movement experiences for young children. To improve the quality of movement play in early childhood education settings, educators should not only observe children's movement but also take an active role with children in their movement-play and, in turn, children will share movement conversations with them.¹⁶

Q18. Proposal in discussion paper	Goodstart's Position
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.	Agree strongly ✓✓

Position Statement

Goodstart strongly supports the proposal to strengthen the focus on young people's thinking, development of conceptual thinking and the use of the language of learning.

General Feedback

There is strong evidence around the benefits of metacognition, executive functioning, and self-regulation and how these lifelong skills are largely developed in a child's first five years. Persistent improvements in 'soft skills' from ECEC programs can improve learning and is attributed to several adult outcomes.¹⁷ In fact, executive functioning and impatience (rather than cognitive skills) at ages 3-5 are predictive of disciplinary referrals up to seven years later.¹⁸

These concepts are aligned and connected with the EYLF vision of children as confident and involved learners with the agency and capacity to initiate and lead learning. Improving the use of the language of learning can support children in 'thinking about thinking' and monitoring their own learning, thinking and emotions. In this way, it can also support children's self-assessment of their own learning.

¹³ The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (2019), available [here](#).

¹⁴ Productivity Commission: Mental Health Inquiry (2020), available [here](#).

¹⁵ Child Safe Standards, available [here](#).

¹⁶ Archer, C. and Iram Siraj (2014). European Early Childhood Education Research Journal 23(1):1-22, *Measuring the quality of movement-play in Early Childhood Education settings: Linking movement-play and neuroscience*.

¹⁷ Cunha and Heckman (2008); Cunha, Heckman, and Schennach (2010); and Heckman, Stixrud, and Urzua (2006).

¹⁸ Castillo, Marco, John A. List, Ragan Petrie, and Anya Samek. 2020. *Detecting Drivers of Behavior at an Early Age: Evidence from a Longitudinal Field Experiment*. Working Paper. 28288. National Bureau of Economic Research. doi: 10.3386/w28288.

Feedback from our early childhood educators and teachers indicated support for conceptual thinking and language of learning but that developing conceptual thinking requires clearer explanation in order for this to be supported. They also noted the need to provide children with time and space for thinking through and expressing their thoughts and emotions. There were some concerns that overly structured routines and timeframes can 'close children down'. Feedback also highlighted the need for guidance around the importance of working memory.

Q19. Proposal in discussion paper	Goodstart's Position
Strengthening the guidance relating to Learning Outcome 5 to include oral, aural and nonoral 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.	Agree very strongly ✓✓✓

Position Statement

Goodstart strongly supports strengthened guidance around Learning Outcome 5, particularly in relation to oral, aural and nonoral languages.

General Feedback

Children communicate from birth and it is during these first five years that speech and language acquisition is the most rapid and crucial¹⁹. In fact, evidence suggests early communication is key to fostering life chances²⁰, as children with good language development do better on literacy, as well as other educational outcomes²¹.

As ECEC educators work with babies and young children in the period most critical for language development, it is essential all educators have the knowledge and skills to best support communication and language acquisition for all children. This means educators require a deep understanding of early childhood development relating to early communication. They also need to understand the curriculum requirements and teaching strategies to best support babies' and young children's development and facilitate communication-rich environments to maximise the opportunity for young children's learning and acquisition of language. At Goodstart, we are committed to improving the early communication outcomes of all children with many priorities focused on this objective, including:

- The development and implementation of an intensive early communication program, which upskills educators about the importance of early communication and language acquisition and provides them with the necessary knowledge and skills to improve teaching and their practice to best support children with this development and learning outcome.
- The development of assessment tools that measure babies' and young children's progress in four communication domains to understand their development and monitor progress.
- Resourcing to enable language-rich environments and to provide an organisation-wide understanding about the importance of positive interactions and strategies to support language development.
- Providing time and resources to enable peer to peer learning about early communication and language acquisition.

¹⁹ McLeod & Barker, 2017; Melhuish, 2016; Owens, 2016, as cited in Verdon, Mackenzie, McLeod, Davidson, Masso, Verdon, & Edwards-Grove, 2019.

²⁰ Law, 2015.

²¹ Melhuish, 2016.

In a similar vein, ARACY are advocating for a National Early Language and Literacy Strategy²², with a particular focus on supporting language development before starting school. The priorities in the proposed strategy will consider the environments in which babies and children are nurtured, including home, early learning and community, and the systems needed for a coordinated response, including ECEC, child and maternal health and other research and support services. Strengthening the guidance around early language in the EYLF will also support this endeavour.

With regard to digital technology, many of our educators and around-centre teams indicated support and appreciation for the guiding principles and practical advice outlined in the *Statement on young children and digital technologies*²³, developed by Early Childhood Australia.

Q20. Proposal in discussion paper	Goodstart's Position
Expressing complex ideas in professional language that is accessible to the wider workforce whilst retaining the value of the ALFs for all audiences.	Agree ✓

Position Statement:

Goodstart supports the proposal for accessible and accommodating language, while also ensuring the value of the EYLF is not only retained but improved.

General Feedback

Educators highlighted the importance of continuing to lift the quality of the EYLF to reflect contemporary best practice and that, where it outlines complex themes or concepts, the Framework should clearly link to high quality and/or recommended supporting documentation. An example of complex themes being simply conveyed and accessible was when ACECQA developed additional resources to explain and support the Exceeding themes under the NQS. Some educators also suggested infographics may be helpful in conveying elements of EYLF.

While educators fully support the intention to update the EYLF with contemporary language, they highlighted that new language does not always mean that a concept or process becomes any clearer in terms of comprehension or action. For example, renaming concepts like 'critical thinking' or 'intentional teaching' does not necessarily lead to better understanding; definitions and practice examples would still need to be provided to ensure it is interpreted and implemented as intended.

²² ARACY (2021), Proposed National Early Language and Literacy Strategy, available [here](#).

²³ ECA (2018), Statement on young children and digital technologies, available [here](#).