Gathering evidence for effective service assessment and quality improvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Quality Standard</th>
<th>An effective self-assessment and quality improvement process is in place.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standard 7.2</td>
<td>There is a commitment to continuous improvement.</td>
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<td>Element 7.2.3</td>
<td>The approved provider of an education and care service must ensure that a quality improvement plan is prepared for the service that—</td>
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<td>The Regulations</td>
<td>(1) Includes an assessment by the provider of the quality of the practices of the service against the National Quality Standard and these Regulations; and</td>
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<td>Regulation 55</td>
<td>(b) Identifies any areas that the provider considers may require improvement; and</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(c) Contains a statement of the philosophy of the service.</td>
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Quality Area 7 is focused on the effectiveness of the service management and leadership. Element 7.2.3 focuses on the importance of self-assessment and quality improvement processes in informing continuous improvement, and the extent to which the program supports learning and development outcomes for children aligned to the learning framework/s.

The National Quality Standard (NQS) identifies that “ongoing self-review that results in informed judgment about performance is fundamental to an effective cycle of improvement.” The Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) process represents high-level self-assessment against the NQS and provides a starting point for determining whether self-assessment informs practice or merely describes the intent.

What is self-assessment?

Self-assessment is a systematic process of data or evidence-driven self-reflection. It is shaped by a set of clearly articulated goals (the NQS) to inform decision-making and operational practices.

There are four main components of a self-assessment process:

1. data or evidence gathering
2. analysis of data or evidence that informs assumptions about service practice
3. reflection on assumptions involving educators, families and children
4. decision-making for ongoing improvement linked to the actions identified in the QIP.
Why is self-assessment important?

Self-assessment enables a service to find out:

- the outcomes being achieved and the extent to which they are achieved
- the value or benefit of the outcomes to children, families and service operations
- the effectiveness of service processes in contributing to these outcomes.

An essential part of the self-reflection or review is to focus on the overarching philosophy that underpins and informs the outcomes of a service. The philosophy, as a set of statements, must guide the service’s operations and link with the NQS. The values and beliefs espoused in the philosophy should be clearly evident in the ongoing day to day practice and should reflect the principles of the Education and Care Services National Law and approved learning framework/s.

What might self-assessment or review look like?

For there to be effective ongoing self-assessment there should be a clear process whereby practices and procedures relating to the service are scrutinised, and for services rated as exceeding, the review should be by a range of stakeholders. The stakeholders involved may include management committees, approved providers, educators, families, children and other staff.

During this process it is important for services to acknowledge:

- what they do well
- why what they do works for them in their context
- the outcomes that are achieved for the children, service, educators, families and community.

The service can then use this information to make decisions about practices or procedures that need to be amended or improved, and identify the approach to manage and implement the change.

For services to be rated as exceeding the NQS, self-assessment must include genuine opportunities for family members and children to offer feedback or input into the decision making at the service. Service providers use consultation and collaboration processes in order to provide opportunities for families and children to inform service and program decisions. Genuine consultation and collaboration includes stakeholders in all aspects of the process, such as identifying and defining issues; shaping consultation mechanisms; publishing feedback; and documenting the rationale behind decisions. Transparency is the key to effective collaboration.
Evidence to look for

To determine if a service has engaged in meaningful self-assessment to review their performance against the NQS, authorised officers may look for evidence of:

- data or evidence gathering as a trigger for reflection. Examples might include:
  - Australian Early Development Index data to inform curriculum decision-making and resourcing priorities
  - maintenance registers – replacement of or upgrading resources
  - attendance trends and fluctuations to inform staffing
  - frequency and nature of incidents and accidents
  - workflow or staff scheduling challenges
  - regular surveys or questionnaires for families and staff about the service. Examples might include operational matters such as routines, arrival and departure procedures, policy documents, governance arrangements, philosophy and programing.

- formal interviews with families

- analysis of data or evidence – what did the data or evidence tell you
  - summaries in newsletters
  - amended policies or procedures.

- priorities reflected in the QIP

- communication with families about the identification of service priorities supported by reasons

- timeframes built into review processes and followed through

- acknowledgement and celebration of quality improvements through photo stories, newsletter items etc.

- opportunities for educators to reflect on practice as individuals, in small or large groups.
Turning reflection into quality improvement

The most effective improvements to service delivery are initiated from within the service, rather than being imposed from the outside. Once the service has undergone self-assessment, the next step is to determine where quality improvements can be made and to plan effectively to implement them.

Quality improvement should be customised to the service’s needs, and consider practice against the NQS. The QIP and service philosophy should be reviewed in consultation with staff and families. Authorised officers should examine the QIP to determine whether the service has actually reflected on their self-assessment.

Example:
During the self-reflection process it was identified that families were not receiving regular updated information about their child, the program or the service. The QIP noted the actions the service will implement to meet the requirement under Quality Area 6 for collaborative relationships with families and communities. These actions included:
  o updating the parent handbook
  o creating a parent notice board
  o developing a regular electronic newsletter for parents.

Self-assessment leads to action

Self-assessment and reflection are most worthwhile if they lead to action. Key pieces of evidence to identify decision making leading to action include:

- documented outcomes of the service’s self-assessment. Examples of this might include:
  o meeting agenda noting the proposed discussion
  o staff meeting minutes where practice is discussed
  o minutes of a committee or parent meeting indicating topics discussed and outcomes proposed
  o collated parent or staff survey results.

- linking the areas identified for improvement and the strategies to address them

- demonstrated action that reflects the improvements identified

- amendments to the philosophy of the service and the resultant change to policies and procedures

- evident change in practice leading to improved outcomes for children.