Self-assessment is a first step in planning quality improvement and in preparing a quality improvement plan.

What is self-assessment?

Self-assessment is an integral component of quality improvement and allows education and care services to:

- evaluate their current practices through self-assessment against the National Quality Standard; and
- identify the practices they can or should improve.

It is important for educators to have a way to regularly assess their practice, recognise strengths and identify areas that can or should be improved.

An ongoing process of reflection and evaluation enables education and care services to have a starting point for reflecting on and improving current practice and the quality of the education and care they provide for children and families.

The most effective method of improving practices and the quality of education and care a service provides is to ensure educators are invested in continuing improvement using a collaborative approach to the self-assessment and planning process. The service community must be involved in this process, with educators and staff able to provide open, honest feedback and critically reflect on current practices and how they correlate with the National Quality Standard. Services need to consider how they can include children, families, management, educators, staff and the community in the self-assessment process and bring together a Quality Improvement Plan that is inclusive, reflects identified needs and drives continuing improvement within the education and care service.
A logical approach to self-assessment for the National Quality Framework looks like this:

1. Continue assessing quality and make changes to your QIP
2. Submit your QIP
3. Write your Quality Improvement Plan (QIP)
4. Undertake Self-Assessment process
5. Plan the Self-Assessment process within your service
6. Become familiar with NQS and NQF documents and process

It is critical reflection that makes this process sound and effective.

What is the value of critical reflection and how can we use it?

Critical reflection has a number of significant characteristics:

- It provides the impetus for change in practice, to work towards improved outcomes for children. Not just doing because we have always done. We want to be sure that our practice is competent.

- Reflection can bring clarity on a specific issue and it can also be a way of offloading and debriefing.

- It can assist in moving forward from a ‘state of mind’ and can help individuals to understand the way they feel and why, and be an opportunity to explore other possibilities.

- Provides an opportunity to reflect on the feedback given by others.
It can positively affect our service delivery, the way we interact, the quality of relationships we have with others, the children in our care, our work team, parents, the manager, the community.

Can give us insight into the self.

Enables boundaries to be clearly identified and where practice may have been outside of this (EYLF, MTOP, NQF).

Assists us to be accountable for the responsibilities of our role.

Helps us to identify what is being achieved in all activities/interactions, what’s likely to be achieved, what could be done.

How you undertake the self-assessment within your service will be determined by the skills and strengths of your team.

How do you carry out a self-assessment?

There is no prescribed format. Some examples of how the self-assessment can be conducted in the service include:

1. Working through identified strengths and analysing how these relate to the Standards;
2. Allocating Standards to teams for review and critical reflection across the service;
3. Asking educators to review Standards in which they have a particular interest.
4. Have each Quality Area up in the staff room for educators to note areas where they would like changes to be made in practices and policies.
5. Look at the questions in the Guide to the NQS. These can help focus reflection about why your service has certain policies and procedures in place.
6. Consider using key questions for each element or standard such as: Is what we currently do effective? How does it benefit the children at our service? How does it fit with the new regulatory requirements? Why do we do it like this? Gut instinct – is this the best way of doing this? Can we justify doing this this way, in terms of quality service provision?

A most important aspect of the self-assessment process is the time frames for completion of the Quality Improvement Plan. But self-assessment is ongoing and is a critical component of quality improvement. Remember you do not need to send in your self-assessment to DEC with your Quality Improvement Plan but assessors can ask for evidence of how your self-assessment informed your QIP.