

OCCUPATIONAL STANDARDS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

“How To” Guide



**Child Care
Human Resources
Sector Council**

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Canada 

This project is funded by the Government of Canada’s Sector Council Program.

The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators: “How To” Guide.....7

USE 1:
Developing Job Descriptions Using the Occupational Standards.....8

Of interest to:
 Directors, Administrators and individuals responsible for Human Resource Management.

USE 2:
Conducting Performance Appraisals Using the Occupational Standards 11

Of interest to:
 Directors, Administrators, Supervisors and Front-line ECEs.

USE 3:
**Informing and Assessing Early Childhood Post-Secondary Education Programs Using
 the Occupational Standards..... 14**

Of interest to:
 Faculty, Program Administrators, Provincial/Territorial Decision Makers and ECEC Directors and Curriculum Developers.

USE 4:
Identifying Ongoing Professional Development Needs Using the Occupational Standards 16

Of interest to:
 Directors, Administrators, Supervisors and Front-line ECEs.

USE 5:
Informing Certification/Registration Measures Using the Occupational Standards 19

Of interest to:
 Provincial/Territorial Decision Makers, Credentialing Bodies and Credentialing Candidates.

Conclusion 20

Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators: “How To” Guide

About the Project:

The Child Care Human Resources Sector Council (CCHRSC) oversaw the initiative to update the occupational standards for early childhood educators, which resulted in the publication of the *Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators* (2010). This update was undertaken with the participation of ECEs and key stakeholders across Canada and was supported by expert advice of the project steering committee, including the Canadian Child Care Federation which worked with the sector to develop the first set of standards in 2003, known as the *Occupational Standards for Child Care Practitioners*. Since these standards were first developed, the sector has evolved and developed. As a result, the Occupational Standards have been updated to ensure that they accurately reflect the full scope of the role of Early Childhood Educators.

Occupational Standards describe what a person in a particular occupation needs to know and be able to do to be considered ‘capable’ in the occupation. In general, ‘capable’ means that a person has the level of skills, knowledge and abilities required to do a job effectively, safely and properly. The *Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators* were developed for the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector, by front-line ECEs who perform the tasks and responsibilities of the job on a daily basis. They were validated at 12 validation sessions involving ECEs and a range of other key stakeholders from every province and territory.

Occupational Standards are an extremely valuable resource tool which can be used by a variety of ECEC sector stakeholders, from government decision makers and curriculum developers to child care centre administrators and front-line ECEs. In fact, there are over 100 documented uses for occupational standards such as informing ECEC licensing requirements, developing ECE training curricula, and developing job descriptions.

About this “How To” Guide:

Within this “How To” Guide, five (5) potential uses for the *Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators* will be described, including using the Occupational Standards for:

- ◆ Developing Job Descriptions
- ◆ Conducting Performance Appraisals
- ◆ Informing and Assessing Early Childhood Educator Professional Program Curricula
- ◆ Identifying Ongoing Professional Development Needs
- ◆ Informing Certification/Registration Measures

For more information on the *Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators*, contact:

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USE 1: Developing Job Descriptions Using the Occupational Standards

Of interest to: Directors, Administrators and individuals responsible for Human Resource Management.

***Note:** There are a number of methods that can be used for developing job descriptions. This “How To” Guide describes one method that can be used to develop a job description using the *Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators*.

Effective job descriptions provide workers with a clear focus and an understanding of expectations and priorities. These descriptions are based on close examination of the job and provide an understanding of what skills and abilities are needed by early childhood educators (ECEs) to perform their roles. Effective job descriptions identify and describe the responsibilities required of a particular job, as well as working conditions, physical demands and the knowledge and skills that are required.

Clear and specific written job descriptions that identify the duties, responsibilities and qualifications for every employee are extremely beneficial for all early childhood education and care (ECEC) programs, regardless of size. Key benefits of effective job descriptions include:

- ◆ **Setting clear expectations** – the ECEC sector is varied and individuals can play a number of roles within their work environments. Each of these roles comes with a specific set of expectations. Well defined job descriptions provide ECEs with a clear understanding of what is expected of them in their current role.
- ◆ **Clarifying hiring needs** – clearly defined job descriptions are effective tools for employers during the hiring process, as they aid in the selection of qualified candidates. Job descriptions provide a synopsis of the requirements of a job and serve as an objective basis from which to measure a candidate’s suitability for employment.
- ◆ **Clarifying relationships between roles** – within an ECEC setting, there are often a number of ECEs with ranging levels of experience, responsibility and qualifications. Clearly defined job descriptions for each role within the setting allows employees to recognize the scope and limitations of responsibilities of all staff and recognize how to form relationships and work together based on these variations.

Steps to Developing a Job Description using the Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators:

The *Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators* define what a capable ECE ‘must be able to do’ in the form of **Tasks, Sub-Tasks** and **Required Skills and Abilities** and what they ‘must know’ in the form of **Required Core Knowledge**. Because they so effectively describe the actual tasks that ECEs perform during their daily work, the Occupational Standards are an excellent foundational document for creating job descriptions. The following is an example of one way to develop a job description using the *Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators*.

Four key steps to developing a job description can include:

- ◆ Define the purpose of the job
- ◆ Outline the responsibilities of the job
- ◆ Describe required education and experience
- ◆ Identify required licences, certificates or registrations

Step 1: Define the Purpose of the Job

This section provides a snapshot of the occupation in 3-4 sentences and is very useful to include in job advertisements. This section typically includes:

- ◆ An overview of the key job responsibilities;
- ◆ The level of supervision and management received (also who the ECE directly reports to);
- ◆ The level of supervision performed by the ECE.

Step 2: Outline the Responsibilities of the Job

This section describes the essential responsibilities of the job and is the most important section of the job description. It is important to note that this section will not outline every responsibility and task that an ECE must be able to perform. Instead, this section will outline the main responsibilities of the ECE. This information is best obtained from the **Tasks** and **Context Statements** within the *Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators*.

To develop the Responsibilities section of the job description:

1. Using the Task Chart, circle all of the **Tasks** and **Sub-Tasks** performed by the ECEs for which the job description is being written.
2. Scan the **Context Statements** and **Sub-Tasks** identified for each **Task** and extract information that briefly describes what the **Task** entails.
3. Use the information from the **Context Statements** and **Sub-Tasks** to write a 1-2 sentence description of the **Task**, which will be listed within the Responsibilities section. It can be helpful to include approximate percentages related to key job tasks, to indicate roughly how much time is focussed, or how much importance is placed, on each responsibility.

For example:

- ◆ In the *Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators* there are a total of 4 Sub-Tasks listed under **Task A.5 – Meet nutritional needs**. However, only the following three **Sub-Tasks** are performed by the ECE for which this (example) job description is being written.

A.5.1 – Plan and provide nutritious meals and snacks.

A.5.3 – Promote healthy eating.

A.5.4 – Accommodate for special nutritional requirements.

The **Sub-Task A.5.2 - Prepare and provide infant nutrition**, has been omitted, as this is not part of this ECE’s job responsibilities. It is important to include only those Sub-Tasks that the ECE actually performs, when developing a job description.

- ◆ The Context Statement for Task A.5 – Meet nutritional needs reads:
Early Childhood educators may plan and provide nutritious meals and snacks and promote and demonstrate healthy eating habits for children. They may be responsible for the preparation of food and for the nutrition of children of varying ages and with various dietary needs and considerations. ECEs follow health and safety precautions and for safe food-handling practices in the preparation and provision of food.
- ◆ The 1-2 sentence description for of the Task, drawing from the Sub-Tasks and the Context Statement may read:
Meet the nutritional requirements of children in the program by planning and providing nutritious meals and snacks, considering various dietary and nutritional requirements and demonstrating healthy eating habits. (10% of time on the job)

Other aspects that can be included in the Responsibilities section, which can also be gathered from the Occupational Standards and from the individual work environment include:

- ◆ *Physical Demands* – the physical demands of the ECE role varies depending on the setting and the age group with which the ECE will be working. Be specific in the job description regarding the physical requirements of the job (e.g., lifting and carrying requirements associated with infant care).
- ◆ *Working Conditions and Environment* – be sure to describe any unique working conditions. For example, if ECEs are required to work shifts, beyond the hours of a typical work day, etc.

Step 3: Outline Required Education and Experience

This section describes the educational background as well as specific knowledge, skills and abilities that are required to perform the responsibilities of the job. Clearly state when specific education and experience requirements are essential versus desirable. Specific knowledge requirements for the position can be extracted from the Required Core Knowledge section of the *Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators*.

Step 4: Outline Required Licences, Certificates or Registrations

This section specifies any additional licences, certifications or registrations that are required for the ECE. These requirements will be specific to each workplace. Examples may include licensure with a provincial regulatory body or association¹, police and child protection record checks, and CPR and first aid certification.

¹For example, the College of Early Childhood Educators in Ontario.

USE 2: Conducting Performance Appraisals Using the Occupational Standards

Of interest to: Directors, Administrators, Supervisors and Front-line ECEs.

***Note:** There are a number of methods that can be used for conducting performance appraisals. This “How To” Guide describes one method that can be used to conduct a performance appraisal using the *Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators*.

The *Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators* are an effective tool for the performance appraisal process to: evaluate performance, set objectives, identify strengths, and identify development needs by analyzing an individual’s level of competency for the skills required to perform a specific job. Being ‘capable’ in a skill requires knowledge, experience, feedback and a positive attitude. Performance appraisal criteria clearly define the acceptable level of ability for each skill required to perform the job. The ECE’s ability in each skill is measured against the *Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators*, which are recognized as a ‘current practice’ framework against which performance can be objectively and fairly assessed and upon which professional development activities can be planned. Performance appraisals are often conducted through an interview process, which involves both the supervisor (i.e., appraiser) and the ECE.

Performance appraisals are very useful for both the supervisor and the ECE. They can acknowledge superior performance and strengths and provide a foundation for career planning and professional development. Performance appraisals should be tailored to address the professional skills development level, maturity and experience of the ECE. The performance appraisal should meet the needs of the ECE at each stage of their professional development. Performance appraisals are often performed within the initial probationary period and thereafter, typically, on an annual basis.

The following illustrates one method in which the *Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators* can be used to conduct performance appraisals.

Four key steps in conducting a performance appraisal can include:

- ◆ Select a performance rating scale or method
- ◆ Develop performance appraisal forms
- ◆ Prepare for the performance appraisal interview
- ◆ Conduct the performance appraisal interview

Step 1: Select a Performance Rating Scale

To conduct a performance appraisal, the supervisor requires a clearly defined rating scale to measure an ECE’s performance of an area or task. There are a number of scales that can be used for appraising performance. Some scales will assign levels (e.g., Level 1, 2 and 3), some will assign titles (e.g., expert, competent, some experience, no experience) and others will assign letters (A, B, and C). What is important for any performance appraisal scale is that the criteria for each ordinal are clearly defined, measurable and performance-based.

For example:

Scale	1	2	3	4	5
	None	Novice	Functional	Competent	Mastery
Performance Based Criteria	ECE has no experience in this area	ECE is developing skills and knowledge for this area	ECE can perform this area with some support	ECE works independently in this area with initiative and adapts to special situations	ECE demonstrates this area well enough to mentor others

Step 2: Develop Performance Appraisal Forms

The *Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators* contain all of the Tasks and Sub-Tasks that may be performed by ECEs working in a range of settings and with various age groups. However, not every ECE will perform every Task and Sub-Task within the Occupational Standards. It is important that the appropriate Tasks and Sub-Tasks are selected for each ECE based on each work situation to ensure that the individual’s performance appraisal is reflective of the activities that they perform.

The Performance Appraisal form will typically contain a section for each applicable Task within the Occupational Standards. For each Task, the applicable Sub-Tasks can be summarized and identified as performance indicators. The ECE’s competency for each Task will be measured using the rating scale defined for the appraisal. Also included in this form should be areas for both the ECE and the supervisor to provide comments, identify major achievements and contributions, define personal development activities and set goals and objectives.

Step 3: Prepare for the Performance Appraisal Interview

The key element of a performance appraisal is the interview. However, there is preparation involved for both the ECE and the supervisor prior to the interview.

ECE Preparation: Prior to the Performance Appraisal Interview, the ECE uses the performance appraisal for self reflection . As outlined above, this self-appraisal will involve listing major achievements and contributions, personal development activities, goals and objectives, as well as rating performance of specified work Tasks according to the rating scale. Once the ECE has completed the self-reflection, the form is returned to the supervisor for use during the Performance Appraisal Interview. In preparation for the interview discussion, the ECE should prepare to discuss the self-reflection ratings with the supervisor and also consider the Tasks that are rated lower in performance and begin thinking of potential options for improving performance in these Tasks.

Supervisor Preparation: Prior to the Performance Appraisal Interview, the supervisor will also complete an appraisal of the ECE’s performance for the various Tasks. Following this appraisal, the supervisor can identify the specific Tasks that she wishes to discuss in detail with the ECE during the interview. These specific Tasks may include those areas in which the ECE is excelling as well as Tasks for which the ECE requires further training to improve performance. For Tasks that require improvement in performance, the supervisor can begin to consider potential training options to discuss with the ECE during the interview.

Step 4: Conduct the Performance Appraisal Interview

One of the most significant features of performance appraisals is that they require interaction between the supervisor and the ECE. The Performance Appraisal Interview serves as a catalyst for meaningful discussion of

job performance which leads to mutual understanding and appreciation. The supervisor and the ECE have a common perception of expectations due to the specific nature of the performance requirements (i.e., Tasks and Sub-Tasks) related to the job.

During the Performance Appraisal Interview, the ECE and supervisor must confirm the appraisal, which requires a high degree of trust and communication. The ECE must feel comfortable in sharing their explanations for their self-reflection and the supervisor must also be open to discussing reasons why their performance rating for specific Tasks may differ from the ECE. The discussion encourages the attainment of the designated performance rating through mutual understanding between the ECE and the supervisor. The discussion of the ECE's current performance, will lead to several positive outcomes including setting goals and objectives for the next review period and identifying areas for additional training and professional development.

All goals should be **SMART** (**S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**ealistic and **T**imely). Setting SMART goals helps the supervisor and ECE to determine if goals have been met each year and can help to address specific programs or employment requirements or responsibilities.

USE 3: Using the Occupational Standards to Inform and Assess Early Childhood Post-Secondary Education Programs

Of interest to: Faculty, Program Administrators, Provincial/Territorial Decision Makers and ECEC Directors and Curriculum Developers.

***Note:** There are a number of methods that can be used for Early Childhood Post-Secondary Education Programs. This “How To” Guide describes how the *Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators* can be used to inform these processes.

The *Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators* reflect the current practice of early childhood education across the country, and define the skills, knowledge and abilities required of today’s Early Childhood Educators (ECEs). They describe ‘what an ECE must be able to do.’ In providing a snapshot of what ECEs currently working within the early childhood education and care sector must be able to do in their daily work, as well as outlining the skills, knowledge and abilities required by today’s ECEs, the *Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators* can be an excellent resource for curriculum developers and faculty to inform and assess ECE professional education curricula.

Informing Early Childhood Post-Secondary Education Programs

To be successful, an early childhood post-secondary education program needs to prepare students for employment in today’s ECEC workforce, and be anticipatory in nature, to prepare students for emerging trends within the sector. There are a number of resources that curriculum developers can use to inform ECE professional education programs, one of these resources being the *Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators*.

The *Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators* were developed for the sector, by the sector using the DACUM (**D**eveloping **a** **C**urriculum) approach. The core philosophy of the DACUM approach states that the most effective way to identify the skills, knowledge and abilities required for a job is to consult with those who perform the job on a daily basis. Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) from across the country and with varying levels of experience and expertise were involved in the development of the Occupational Standards. Involving a cross-section of the ECE workforce in the development process helped to ensure that the *Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators* are Pan-Canadian in nature rather than reflective of a single province, jurisdiction, or approach to early childhood education and care.

As a result, the *Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators* identify the skills, knowledge and abilities that are necessary for capable ECEs working: in various settings (e.g., public, not-for-profit, and privately-funded, centre-based and family-based child care); with a variety of age groups (e.g., infant and toddler, pre-school, school-age and multi-age); and with children from unique situations and varying needs (e.g., children with special or additional needs, children from diverse backgrounds).

How to Use the Occupational Standards to Inform Early Childhood Post-Secondary Education Programs

The Occupational Standards are a sector-created depiction of the current ECE profession. There are a number of ways in which the Occupational Standards may be used as a resource by curriculum developers and faculty throughout the program development process, such as:

- ◆ The Occupational Standards can serve as one of many reference documents used by curriculum developers and faculty to develop learning goals, learning objectives, and program evaluation tools.

- ◆ Following the initial development or revision of a post-secondary education program, the program can be evaluated using the Occupational Standards to determine if all skills, knowledge and abilities required of capable ECEs are being addressed in the program.
- ◆ If a curriculum developer or faculty member is responsible for developing a course for a particular subject area, she or he may review the relevant Tasks and Sub-Tasks within the Occupational Standards to identify the skills, knowledge and abilities required for this subject area.
- ◆ When engaging an expert/consultant to develop in-house educational programs, training sessions or resources (e.g., individual courses), an organization may use the occupational standards to inform the expert/consultant of the minimum skills, knowledge and abilities must be included in the programs or resources.

Assessing Early Childhood Post-Secondary Education Programs

There are many public and private educational institutions across Canada that offer post-secondary educational programs for early childhood educators. The content and curriculum focus of each program will differ and each jurisdiction has their own frameworks for what is considered ‘core’ education and program requirements for ECEs. All professional education programs must prepare students for employment within the sector. To ensure that students are obtaining the necessary skills, knowledge and abilities for employment within today’s ECEC sector, programs must be periodically assessed. Every province and post-secondary educational institution has their own requirements and methods for assessing programs. For example, some provinces and territories have ECE program/curricula frameworks which outline the learning outcomes required of graduates of post-secondary ECE programs. Post-secondary educational institutions conduct periodic full program reviews and individual departments and faculty often conduct regular reviews and assessments of the courses that they teach. Professional curricula and program assessment is required on a regular basis to ensure that programs remain current and reflective of the skills, knowledge and abilities required of ECEs. There are numerous methods and resources which can be utilized to facilitate curricula assessment, and the *Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators* can also be considered as a useful resource for assessing early childhood post-secondary education programs.

How to Use the Occupational Standards When Assessing Early Childhood Post-Secondary Education Programs

There are a number of ways in which the Occupational Standards can be used when assessing program curricula, such as:

- ◆ When a post-secondary institution is conducting their scheduled full program review, the Occupational Standards can be referenced during the review process to ensure that the program covers all Tasks and Sub-Tasks identified in the standards, particularly those areas which are new or emergent in the sector. The *Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators* can serve as a benchmark for current practice which the professional program strives to meet and exceed.
- ◆ Following the development of curricula for an individual course or professional development resources, the Occupational Standards can be used for review and evaluation. For example, curriculum developers can first identify which components of the Occupational Standards are relevant to their program goals. Next, they can compare the skills, knowledge and abilities contained in the relevant sections of the Occupational Standards with their curricula to determine if they have met or exceeded the required skills, knowledge and abilities for the Sub-Tasks within their curricula.

USE 4: Identifying Ongoing Professional Development Needs Using the Occupational Standards

Of interest to: Directors, Administrators, Supervisors and Front-line ECEs.

***Note:** There are a number of methods that can be used for identifying professional development needs. This “How To” Guide describes one method that can be used to identify professional development needs using the *Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators*.

The *Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators* provide a thorough and objective description of what an ECE ‘must be able to do.’ The Occupational Standards can be used not only as a tool to appraise an individual ECE’s performance, but also to identify professional development needs for the improvement of ability and performance.

The following is one method that can be used to identify ongoing professional development needs using the *Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators*.

Step 1: Conduct a Performance Appraisal

Before professional development needs can be identified, it can be beneficial to complete a performance appraisal of the ECE’s skills, knowledge and abilities in the sub-tasks required for the job should be conducted. This appraisal can be formal in nature, in which the appraisal is conducted by a supervisor and the ECE (please see the section on *Conducting Performance Appraisals*) or informally by the individual ECE. When the performance appraisal is being conducted by the individual (e.g., self-reflection exercise), a simple scale can be used to assess how confident or capable the individual ECE feels in performing each Sub-Task.

An example of a scale could be:

Scale	1	2	3	4	5
	None	Novice	Functional	Competent	Mastery
Performance Based Criteria	ECE has no experience in this area	ECE is developing skills and knowledge for this area	ECE can perform this area with some support	ECE works independently in this area with initiative and adapts to special situations	ECE demonstrates this area well enough to mentor others

Regardless of how the performance appraisal is conducted, the result will be a performance appraisal for applicable Sub-Tasks. The Sub-Tasks for which the ECE has received high performance levels are not likely to be identified as areas requiring professional development. However, Sub-Tasks for which the ECEs performance is assessed at a lower level generally indicate areas requiring professional development.

Once key Sub-Tasks have been identified as professional development needs, the *Required Skills and Abilities* and *Required Core Knowledge* can be reviewed to determine if there are particular underpinning skills, abilities and knowledge that could be developed in order to support and improve performance.

Step 2: Identify Professional Development Opportunities

Once the Sub-Tasks requiring additional professional development have been identified, the individual ECE is in the position to consider ways to meet these development needs. There are a number of professional development opportunities available. Methods used to improve one’s knowledge and skills in particular areas may include²:

- ◆ Workshops, training courses, conferences, related post-secondary courses;
- ◆ Mentoring (i.e., obtaining knowledge from an experienced, skilled and knowledgeable colleague);
- ◆ Self-directed learning, such as reading professional journals and periodicals;
- ◆ Conducting self-reflection exercises; and
- ◆ On-the-job experience (e.g., assisting with the performance of tasks that one is less familiar with to develop the necessary skills).

Step 3: Create a Professional Development Plan

Once an individual ECE’s professional development needs and opportunities for improvement have been identified, a customized professional development plan can be created. This plan may include the following activities:

- ◆ **Identify Sub-Task requiring improvement:** use the actual Sub-Task reference (e.g., A.1.1 – Use a variety of observation and documentation techniques) to clearly specify the topic of professional development.
- ◆ **Define professional development activity:** specify the activities that need to be completed to develop the skills and knowledge required for improved performance and knowledge of the Sub-Task.
- ◆ **Confirm required resources:** consider the resources (i.e., time and money) that are required to complete the professional development activity.
- ◆ **Set timeline:** set a realistic timeline to complete the identified professional development activities.
- ◆ **Conduct evaluation:** following the completion of the professional development activities outlined in the plan, the ECE can evaluate or measure the success and outcomes of the activity.

A Professional Development Plan may look something like this:

Task/Sub-Task	Professional Development Activity	Required Resources	Timeline	Evaluation
A.4.12—Promote environmentally-sound practices.	1 day workshop offered by local ECE association	1 day off work \$75 registration	Within 1 month	Increased knowledge of and implementation of environmentally-sound practices

²Where professional development participation is required for certification/registration renewal processes check with the certifying/registering body to ensure documentation requirements are being met.

Step 4: Evaluate Success of the Professional Development Plan

The final step involved in the process of identifying and meeting professional development needs is a self-evaluation of the success of the plan. In other words, reflecting on the professional development activities that have been performed and determining if these activities had a positive impact on one's skills and knowledge development and overall performance of the identified Sub-Task. This period of reflective evaluation also aids in the identification of activities that work best for the individual ECE's learning style and foster the most positive results.

USE 5: Informing Certification/Registration Measures Using the Occupational Standards

Of interest to: Provincial/Territorial Decision Makers, Credentialing Bodies and Credentialing Candidates.

***Note:** There are a number of methods that can be used for informing certification/registration measures for early childhood educators. This “How To” Guide describes how the *Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators* can be used to inform these processes.

The certification and registration of Early Childhood Educators is currently a provincial/territorial jurisdictional issue. There are eight (8) provinces/territories that certify/register applicants to work in the child care sector (i.e., Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia and the Yukon).³ To learn more about the current credentialing processes in Canada, please refer to CCHRSC’s *Guide to Early Childhood Education Credentialing* (March 2010).⁴ At this time, there is no ‘national’ certification system or body for Early Childhood Educators; however, through the Agreement on Internal Trade (AIT), the eight provinces/territories recognize each others’ certification programs, which fosters career mobility and credential recognition across jurisdictions.

Early Childhood Educator college curricula and certification/registration processes and systems currently in use at the provincial/territorial level often pre-date both the *Occupational Standards for Child Care Practitioners* (Canadian Child Care Federation, 2003) and the revised *Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators* (2010). Therefore, a key component of a number of credentialing processes is the completion of a certificate or diploma, based on the assumption that college curricula reflects or meets required ‘standards’ or knowledge and skills requirements. For example, a number of provinces/territories have provincial ECE program standards, which outline what curricula topic areas and skills must be taught within post-secondary professional ECE programs. College curricula have long been a benchmark within the sector upon which to develop requirements for credentialing systems for ECEs.

In addition to the use of college curricula within certification programs, the Occupational Standards can be used as a key resource for overall credentialing systems, as they contain the skills, knowledge and abilities that are required by ‘capable’ Early Childhood Educators. If used in tandem with college curricula, the Occupational Standards can inform credentialing and certification processes.

Developing a National Certification Program Using the Occupational Standards:

At the time of printing, there is no ‘national’ certification system or body for certifying Early Childhood Educators. As noted above, there are currently eight provinces/territories that have certification/registration systems in place to certify/register applicants to work in the child care sector. In the future, the sector may determine, based on the success of the certification and registration systems developed and utilized in the provinces and territories, that a national certification program could be beneficial for the sector as a whole.

There are a number of ways in which national certification programs can be developed. The *Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators* potentially could serve as a basis for a national certification program to foster a benchmark for certification requirements across all jurisdictions, as the standards serve to inform the skills, knowledge and abilities that are required by ECEs working in today’s child care sector.

³ At the time of printing – March 2010

⁴ Access the *Guide to Early Childhood Education Credentialing* at <http://www.ccsc-cssge.ca/>

The following illustrates some potential points for consideration for developing a national certification program using the *Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators*.

Certifying Body: All certification programs need to be developed and implemented by an objective certifying body. Typically, certification programs are managed by professional organizations and associations whose mandate is to increase the professionalism of the occupation. At a national certification level, a number of Sector Councils (which aim to address human resource and skills issues), have developed, or are in the process of developing, certification programs for various occupations within their sectors, using Occupational Standards as a key resource for development. From the point of view of a Sector Council, certification is a method to formally recognize the accomplishments of individuals and to verify that certified individuals possess and demonstrate the required skills, knowledge and abilities to be ‘capable’ in an occupation or profession.

Certification Process: All certification programs, regardless of sector and whether at the provincial/territorial or national level, should have well-defined criteria and requirements. The certification path should be specific, achievable and relevant for applicants. For example, many certification programs have educational requirements for applicants (e.g., successful completion of an ECE certificate or diploma program) and practical work experience requirements (e.g., a stipulated number of hours in the field). In addition, some certification programs will require the applicant to complete a certification examination, which may be knowledge and performance based, to test the individual’s application of their skills, knowledge and abilities. For example, some certifying bodies utilize the skills, knowledge and abilities presented in Occupational Standards to develop questions for certification examinations. These questions may be multiple choice, scenarios, and case studies, among others.

Evidently there are a number of certification processes that can be used. If a national certification program was developed by the child care sector, ideas for a national process could be obtained through a review of the research findings from the CCHRSC *Pathways to ECE Credentialing* project and the *Guide to Early Childhood Education Credentialing*.

Certification and Credential Management: The certifying body, with collaboration and insight from sector representatives, should develop clear guidelines and regulations for a national certification process. Such guidelines and regulations help to ensure consistency in the provision and upholding of certification of members.

These guidelines may include, but are not limited to, such factors as:

- ◆ Who is eligible to apply for certification (e.g., years of experience, educational background).
- ◆ The process of certification renewal (e.g., number of years, process for renewal).
- ◆ The cost of certification and renewal.

Conclusion:

This document was produced as part of the Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators project. It is one of three key products produced as a result of the project including:

- ◆ *Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators*
- ◆ *Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators* Task Chart
- ◆ How to Use the *Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators: “How To” Guide*

These publications are available via the CCHRSC website, or by contacting the Child Care Human Resources Sector Council directly. Other project related reports can also be found on the website:

<http://www.ccsc-cssge.ca/english/>