

Early Childhood
Development Steering
Committee

**National Quality
Standard for Early
Childhood Education
and Care and School
Age Care**

Council of Australian Governments

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The National Quality Framework

Introduction

This document provides general information regarding some aspects of the new National Quality Framework and the introduction of the new National Quality Standard and rating system.

Readers of this document may also wish to consult the Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) fact sheet series that provides some key information about the new framework.

The new framework will be progressively implemented from 1 July 2010 and will apply to long day care, family day care, outside school hours care and preschools from 1 January 2012. Requirements under the new framework relating to staffing arrangements, such as staff-to-child ratios and workforce qualifications, will take place over a number of years.

Further advice and guidance on the framework will be provided over the coming months.

Background

In December 2009, all Australian Governments through COAG agreed to a partnership between the Commonwealth and state and territory governments to establish a National Quality Framework for early childhood education and care.

The framework forms part of a broader COAG agenda to pursue substantial reform in the areas of education, skills and early childhood development, to deliver significant improvements in human capital outcomes for all Australians.

The Australian Government and state and territory governments recognise the importance of increasing their focus on the early years to ensure the wellbeing of children throughout their lives and to lift the productivity of our nation as a whole. The drive for change in the early childhood sphere is based on clear evidence that the early years of a child's life are very important for their present and future health, development and wellbeing.

In July 2009, COAG endorsed Australia's first ever overarching national strategy for early childhood development. *Investing in the Early Years: A National Early Childhood Development Strategy* provides a blueprint for the future. It outlines a shared vision for the development of young children in Australia that by 2020 *all children have the best start in life to create a better future for themselves and for the nation.*

Focusing on all aspects of children's development from before birth to age eight, the strategy will guide governments and encourage greater engagement between governments, with the non-government sector, and with families around the needs of young children.

Over time the strategy will strengthen early childhood and family services and supports, and join service delivery across sectors. It will also deliver improved outcomes for parents, including improved parenting skills and confidence, and greater capacity to participate in the community and the workforce.

The new framework is a key mechanism for achieving the strategy's vision for young children in Australia. It aims to raise quality and drive continuous improvement in early childhood education and care, and school age care services through three components:

- Streamlined regulatory arrangements
- A National Quality Standard including the *Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF) and quality rating system
- A new national body jointly governed between the Commonwealth and the states and territories.

Transitioning to the National Quality Standard

The Australian Government and state and territory governments are working collaboratively to ensure a smooth transition for services to the National Quality Standard.

Initially, this will involve field testing and targeted consultation in order to finalise the detail of the National Quality Standard by 1 July 2010. This process will focus on technical issues in the application of the standard. Information and support will also be provided to services to assist them to build their capacity and move toward meeting the new National Quality Standard.

The National Quality Standard will be applied to all long day care, family day care, outside school hours care services and preschools from 1 January 2012. During this transition phase, where states and territories wish to begin assessment of preschool services against the National Quality Standard before 1 January 2012, they will be able to do so.

As part of the transition process, from 1 July 2010, the National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC) will start to assess Child Care Benefit 'approved' long day care, family day care and outside school hours care services against the National Quality Standard. (These services are currently subject to the existing Child Care Quality Assurance System).

Services will be expected to participate in the National Quality Standard and show continuous improvement in the delivery of services in order to continue to be eligible for approval for Child Care Benefit purposes.

The assessment of services not required to be approved for the purposes of Child Care Benefit, such as most preschool services, will be a priority following formal commencement of the National Quality Standard on 1 January 2012.

During the transition period from 1 July 2010 until 1 January 2012, assessments and ratings will be undertaken using a joint planning approach between the NCAC and state and territory regulatory agencies. State and territory licensing and regulatory standards and functions will continue to apply during this time.

Existing staff-to-child ratios and educator qualification requirements, under state and territory legislation will continue to remain in force until the new staff-to-child ratios and qualification requirements under the Staffing Arrangements quality area of the National Quality Standard are introduced.

These new ratio and qualification requirements will be implemented progressively, starting with the introduction of a 1:4 staff-to-child ratio for children between birth and two years in long day care and preschool services on 1 January 2012.

Note on terminology:

The National Quality Standard specifically uses the term 'educator' to define a person who works directly with children and is included in the educator-to-child ratio.

The National Quality Standard also uses the term 'staff' to refer to staff members in a centre-based setting who are not included in the educator-to-child ratios and/or perform another primary function in the service such as cook, administrator, gardener, housekeeper or cleaner.

The general term 'staff-to-child ratio' is, at times, used more broadly in the early childhood education and care sector and in current state and territory regulations.

Structure of the National Quality Standard

The National Quality Standard comprises guiding principles, quality areas, standards and elements. There are seven quality areas in the National Quality Standard, which capture aspects critical to the provision of quality early childhood education and care and outside school hours care services, including educational concept and practice, structural quality, interactions between educators and children and targeting services to meet the needs of families and local communities.

The quality areas are:

1. Educational program and practice
2. Children's health and safety
3. Physical environment
4. Staffing arrangements, including staff-to-child ratios and qualifications
5. Relationships with children
6. Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
7. Leadership and service management

The order of presentation should not be considered an indicator of importance or priority.

Each individual quality area contains a number of standards which are high level outcome statements. The National Quality Standard contains 23 standards with between two and six standards for each quality area. Under each standard sit elements. The National Quality Standard includes the quality areas, the standards and the elements.

A legal framework will support the introduction of the National Quality Framework from 1 January 2012. It will replace current licensing and regulation processes in each state and territory and will incorporate an Act, Regulations and Schedules to support the introduction of the National Quality Standard and the new ratings system.

Guidelines will also be issued to provide further information and clarify interpretation of the requirements set out in the Act and Regulations. They will provide information to both service providers and staff about best practice, meeting the standards, and implications of the standards for particular service types.

The standards, regulations and schedules will be the enforceable components of the National Quality Standard. Penalties may apply for non-compliance, with stronger penalties to be attached to the requirements or offences contained in the Act.

Approval to operate

All services will be required by legislation to obtain an approval to operate.

For centre based services, an approval will be issued once, nationally, enabling providers to operate many services across multiple jurisdictions. The service manager, or person who has on-site responsibility, is also subject to approval, as is each service's venue and operations.

Family day care schemes, rather than individual educators will require approval.

Where a service satisfies the requirements of the National Quality Standard, an approval to operate will be issued without a fixed term of approval. This will mean that an 'approval to operate' will be ongoing. A national and consistent 'approval to operate' fee will be introduced for all services.

Interim approvals and deemed compliance

It is proposed to have a process for interim approvals and deemed compliance under the National Quality Framework. These processes will only be available for the Staffing Arrangements and Physical Environment quality areas of the National Quality Standard.

An *interim approval* denotes a situation where the regulator has temporarily approved a service to operate notwithstanding that it does not comply with all requirements under the National Quality Standard. For example, a service could request an interim approval from indoor space requirements while a renovation is underway, so as to prevent some children from being temporarily removed from the service. An interim approval may be granted for a specific and time-limited duration.

Services requesting *interim approvals* are expected to develop an action plan to address non-compliance issues and provide evidence that action has or is being taken to meet the National Quality Standard. Services with interim approvals will be rated as Operating Level in the quality area to which the interim approval applies.

Alternatively, a service could *be deemed to comply* with the intent of the National Quality Standard, for example, because its facilities are fit for purpose, such as remote services using enclosed verandahs as part of their indoor space.

In the case of *deemed compliance*, services will be considered to be meeting the National Quality Standard. In contrast, an interim approval is an indication that a service is not currently meeting the standard.

Assessment and Rating

Ratings

The new rating system will provide clear and accurate information for families and services.

It combines the seven quality areas with a five point rating scale that describes the quality of early childhood education and care and OSHC that all families, services and the broader community should expect to find in the diverse childhood education and care settings available across Australia.

Services will receive one of five ratings for each of the seven quality areas of the National Quality Standard along with an overall rating.

The ratings will indicate whether the service is meeting, exceeding or not meeting the National Quality Standard. They are designed to provide parents with a comprehensive understanding of the quality of a service. They will also allow services to highlight areas where they perform well, even when they may be unable to meet a particular standard in a quality area.

The five ratings are:

Unsatisfactory: indicates that a service is not meeting the National Quality Standard and the regulator is working closely with the service to immediately improve its quality. Otherwise the centre will need to be closed.

Operating Level: indicates that a service is working towards meeting the National Quality Standard. All new services will commence operation with an Operating Level rating.

National Quality Standard: indicates that a service is meeting the National Quality Standard.

High Quality: indicates that a service is exceeding the National Quality Standard.

Excellent: indicates that a service demonstrates excellence and is recognised as a sector leader. Services will need to apply to be assessed against this rating.

To achieve a National Quality Standard (or above) rating for a particular quality area, a service must meet:

- all elements within a standard (to meet that standard); and
- all standards within the quality area.

To achieve a rating of High Quality in the Educational Program and Practice quality area, a service (other than an OSHC service) which has children enrolled and attending in the year before school must provide (or provide access to) a preschool program for 15 hours per week for 40 weeks per year by a degree-qualified early childhood teacher.

This links the National Quality Standard with the commitment for Universal Access to Early Childhood Education under the National Quality Agenda.

A service's overall rating will be determined on the following basis:

- Where a service receives any rating for a quality area of Unsatisfactory or Operating Level, the lowest rating would be the overall rating.
- Where a service receives all quality area ratings at the National Quality Standard level, the overall rating would be National Quality Standard.
- Where a service receives all seven quality area ratings at either the National Quality Standard or High Quality level, the overall rating would be National Quality Standard if only three or fewer ratings are at the High Quality level.
- Where a service receives all seven quality area ratings at either the National Quality Standard or High Quality level, the overall rating would be High Quality if four or more ratings are at the High Quality level, and two of these are from the following four quality areas: Educational program and practice; Relationships with children; Collaborative partnerships with families and communities; Leadership and service management.
- Services with a High Quality rating would submit an application for assessment as Excellent.

Service ratings will be published on the internet

Quality Improvement Plans

The National Quality Framework will emphasise the importance of ongoing improvement. Each service will develop a Quality Improvement Plan which outlines how the service is, or is not, meeting the National Quality Standard. Services will be required to develop and/or update their Quality Improvement Plan annually and keep it on site and available for review by the regulator.

Services will be required to submit their Quality Improvement Plan to the regulator prior to full assessment which will be carried out dependent on the service's history in meeting the National Quality Standard.

Assessment

All services (including new services and services which have not yet been rated against the National Quality Standard) begin at Operating Level until a full assessment against all standards and elements takes place. For new services, this assessment is likely to take place within 3 to 6 months of opening.

Assessment by an appropriately qualified assessor, against all the elements of the National Quality Standard will be conducted at site level. Post-assessment written advice will be provided to service providers.

Where a provider delivers several services at the same site (for example, an integrated long day care and outside school hours care service), a single assessment will be undertaken and a single rating applied across all services. Family day care schemes, not individual educators, will be rated. A selection of educators will be visited for assessment purposes, but these educators will not be individually rated.

Services must apply for an assessment to determine whether the service should have an Excellent rating.

Frequency of assessment

The frequency of assessment will depend on the principle of earned autonomy and on risk profiling.

This means that the number and frequency of visits will depend on a service's record, its rating and any events associated with a risk or change in practice that indicate a service might not be meeting the National Quality Standard.

The following table indicates the expected frequency of assessments.

Service rating	Frequency of assessment	Requirements for reporting / visits
Excellent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Every 3 years for a full assessment <p><i>Note: Services must apply to be assessed as 'Excellent'.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Submission of application for assessment
High Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Every 3 years for a full assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Notification of any identified events ▪ Submission of Quality Improvement Plan prior to assessment ▪ Quality Improvement Plan to be available at the service ▪ Spot checks ▪ Targeted campaign visit
National Quality Standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Every 2 years for a full assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notification of any identified events • Quality Improvement Plan to be available at the service • Submission of Quality Improvement Plan prior to assessment • Spot checks • Targeted campaign visit
Operating Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ For new services a site visit before service is approved. Additional visit after 3 months and before 6 months ▪ For existing services minimum of one visit per annum for a full assessment ▪ Services not meeting the NQS may require more frequent visits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notification of any identified events • Quality Improvement Plan to be available at the service • Submission of Quality Improvement Plan prior to assessment • Spot checks • Targeted campaign visit
Unsatisfactory Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Services will be visited more frequently 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sanctions/closure will be considered • Improvement plans

Events that may require the regulator to visit and/or assess a service more frequently than indicated above include:

- change of approval holder
- change of primary contact/person in charge for service site
- a health and safety incident
- complaints about the service
- notifiable breach of the National Quality Standard
- change to the premises or operating requirements
- advice from other authorities regarding matters of fraud, Child Care Benefit compliance, food safety, child protection, occupational health and safety, and/or police involvement.

National Quality Standard

Introduction

The National Quality Standard communicates a national view about the quality of early childhood education and care and school age care all families should expect to find in the diverse types of education and care settings available across Australia.

The way quality is defined and reflected in the National Quality Standard is a key aspect of the National Quality Framework. It supports a better integration of education and care, incorporating broader outcomes for children attending early childhood education and care and school age care services.

The National Quality Standard brings together structural components of quality such as staff-to-child ratios, educator qualifications and health and safety matters currently addressed by regulation with the process aspects of quality such as interactions with children, partnerships with families, stimulating environments and programs and service management currently addressed through accreditation. This new integrated approach will mean that services are working within a single unified national system.

The National Quality Standard will apply to centre based long day care, family day care, outside school hours care and preschool¹ in the first instance.

The development of the National Quality Standard was informed by recent research about best practice and the way in which high quality early childhood education and care contributes to positive outcomes for children. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)² identifies aspects of quality critical to the provision of early childhood education and care services. These aspects include educational concept and practice, structural quality, interaction between educators and children and targeting services to meet the needs of families and local communities. These aspects of quality are reflected in the standard.

The EYLF guides early childhood educators in developing quality early childhood programs. It describes the early childhood pedagogy (principles and practice) and the outcomes required to support and enhance young children's learning from birth to five years of age, including their transition to school. The EYLF underpins the implementation of more specific curriculum relevant to each local community and early childhood setting. As it is focussed on children from birth to five years of age, other frameworks will be applicable to school age children.

For the first time Australia has a National Quality Standard that is linked to a national learning framework which recognises that children learn from birth. The National Quality Standard will support the implementation of the EYLF and frameworks supporting the care of school age children by ensuring that the necessary environments, facilities, staffing arrangements, resources and management structures are in place.

Combined, these frameworks outline fundamental components to inform and guide service providers, early childhood educators, co-ordinators and staff in the delivery of nationally consistent and high quality experiences, programs and care across Australia.

¹ In some jurisdictions within Australia preschool is referred to as kindergarten. The Standard will apply to kindergarten.

² Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2006). Starting Strong II Early Childhood Education and Care, OECD.

Guiding principles that apply to the quality areas

Six principles apply across all seven quality areas of the National Quality Standard. These principles inform the delivery of quality early childhood education and care and school age care. Services should consider these principles when working to achieve the National Quality Standard and improve quality at the service. These principles are:

The rights of the child are paramount

Each child has the right to be an active member of the community in which they live; to have their individual and cultural identity recognised and respected; to express their opinions and have their views considered in any decisions that may affect them.

The National Quality Standard reflects Australia's commitment to the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* and the obligation of all those who work with children to protect children from harm, respect their dignity and privacy and safeguard and promote every child's wellbeing.

Children are successful, competent and capable learners

Children are active learners from birth, constructing their knowledge, meanings and understanding through their interactions, relationships and experiences.

They are able to form opinions, express their ideas, collaborate with others, plan and persist in learning.

The starting point for all learning is what children already know. Rich, engaging environments and meaningful interactions, where children's voices are listened to and acted upon, build on this foundation for successful life long learning.

Equity, inclusion and diversity

In a fair and just society the intrinsic worth of all children and their families, their strengths and their right to equitable access and participation in the community is clearly visible in all aspects of service delivery.

Programs for the care, education and recreation of children have a unique opportunity to include children from all family circumstances, cultural backgrounds and levels of ability. In particular, a commitment to the full participation of children with additional needs and their families involves enabling their initial access as well as supporting their day-to-day participation in the program. It requires capturing and maximising resources to support each child's participation in and engagement with the program. By providing nurturing environments and supportive relationships they ensure that each child is valued for who they are and has opportunities to reach their full potential.

One of Australia's greatest strengths lies in its unique history and diverse heritage. The many different cultures, contexts and values of families and communities contribute to the richness of contemporary Australian society and inform plans for meaningful learning experiences for children.

Valuing Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures

An approach that recognises and respects the strengths and contribution each individual and group makes to the Australian community and challenges bias, builds positive relationships and responds sensitively to the particular needs of each child and their family. Such an approach values Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures as a core part of the nation's history, present and future. This is relevant for all services, not only services with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island children and families enrolled in the service.

The role of parents and families is respected and supported

Parents and families are recognised as the child's primary nurturers and teachers. They have both a right and a responsibility to be involved in decision making affecting their child. Respectful, collaborative relationships

strengthen the capacity and efforts of parents and families and of early childhood education and care and school age care services to support their children and promote each child's learning and wellbeing.

High expectations for children, educators and service providers

The best interests of children and their right to learn and develop in a safe and nurturing environment is the primary consideration in all decision making at the service and is visible in the actions, interactions and daily work with children.

Programs that reflect best practice in the care, education and recreation of children set high standards and expectations for all those responsible for the delivery of the service. They have an open and accountable organisational culture that is flexible and responsive to the local community. They continually reflect on their practice to find ways to improve outcomes for children in their service.

Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice

The educational program and practice is stimulating, engaging and enhances children's learning and development. In school age care services the program nurtures the development of life skills and complements children's experiences, opportunities and relationships at school, at home and in the community

Standards and Elements

Note: Standards and elements in green are assessed as part of a service's application for an approval to operate. All standards and elements are assessed 3-6 months after opening and as part of all full assessments.

1.1 The Early Years Learning Framework (or other approved learning framework) informs the development of a program for each child that enhances their learning and development.

1.11 The Early Years Learning Framework (or other approved learning framework) guides curriculum decision making and enables each child's learning in the five outcomes:

- Children have a strong sense of identity
- Children are connected with and contribute to their world
- Children have a strong sense of wellbeing
- Children are confident and involved learners
- Children are effective communicators.

1.1.2 Curriculum decision making is informed by the context, setting and cultural diversity of the families and the community.

1.2 The program for each child takes into account their strengths, capabilities, culture, interests and experiences.

1.2.1 Each child's current knowledge, ideas, culture and interests provide the foundation for the program.

1.2.2 Every child is supported to participate in the program.

1.2.3 Each child's learning and development is assessed as part of an ongoing cycle of planning, documenting and evaluating children's learning.

1.2.4 Critical reflection and evaluation of children's learning and development, both as individuals and in groups, is used as a primary source of information for planning and to improve the effectiveness of the program and teaching strategies.

Regulations and schedules will include:

- The program is planned, documented and evaluated.
- Relevant information about the program and their child's participation in the program is shared with parents.

Further guidance and information will be provided on:

- The Early Years Learning Framework Educator's Guide

Quality Area 2: Children's health and safety

Every child's health and wellbeing is safeguarded and promoted.

Standards and Elements

Note: Standards and elements in green are assessed as part of a service's application for an approval to operate. All standards and elements are assessed 3-6 months after opening and as part of all full assessments.

2.1 Each child's health is promoted.

- 2.1.1 Each child's health needs are supported.
- 2.1.2 Each child's comfort is provided for and there are appropriate opportunities to meet each child's need for sleep, rest and relaxation.
- 2.1.3 Effective hygiene practices are promoted and implemented.
- 2.1.4 Steps are taken to control the spread of infectious diseases and to manage injuries and illness, in accordance with recognised guidelines.

2.2 Healthy eating and physical activity are embedded in the program for children.

- 2.2.1 Healthy eating is promoted and food and drinks provided by the service are nutritious and appropriate to the age of the child.
- 2.2.2 Physical activity is promoted through planned and spontaneous experiences and is appropriate to the age of the child.

2.3 Each child is protected.

- 2.3.1 Children are adequately supervised at all times.
- 2.3.2 Reasonable steps are taken to identify and manage risks, and every reasonable precaution is taken to protect children from harm and hazards.
- 2.3.3 Plans to effectively manage incidents and emergencies are developed in consultation with relevant authorities, practised and implemented.
- 2.3.4 Action is taken to respond to every child at risk of abuse and/or neglect.

Regulations and schedules will include:

- A comfortable and safe environment is provided for children.
- Current health and hygiene practices are used within the service.
- Children with infectious diseases are removed from the service when it is necessary to protect the health and safety of other children.
- Parents of children enrolled at the service are notified of any case of infectious illness at the service.
- A suitably equipped first aid kit is readily available at the service.

- Authorisation to administer medication (including prescription, over-the-counter and homeopathic medications) is obtained and documented. (In an emergency, authorisation may be given verbally by a parent or medical practitioner.)
- Medication must be within its use-by date and in its original packaging. The dosage to be administered must be checked by a second adult (unless this is not possible). Prescription medication must bear the child's name.
- Procedures are in place to manage children with medical conditions and children who have been diagnosed as being at risk of anaphylaxis.
- Cleaning materials, disinfectants, flammable, poisonous and other dangerous substances, tools and toiletries are inaccessible to children.
- Food and beverages are nutritious, varied and adequate in quantity.
- Heating and cooling equipment is provided to maintain a comfortable temperature for children.
- Emergency procedures are developed and practised regularly.
- Educators have ready access to an operating telephone or other similar means of communication.
- Collection of children must be by parent or authorised person and a record of children's arrival and departure is kept at the service, with the signature of the person responsible for verifying the accuracy of the record or the person collecting the child.
- Children may only be taken outside the premises by an educator.
- Written authorisation is required for a child to be taken outside the premises (except in an emergency situation).
- Parents are provided with information regarding excursions (designation, mode of transport, educator-to-child ratios, number of adults in attendance) and their written approval is obtained and documented.
- All excursions must be subject to a risk assessment by providers prior to being undertaken and the provision of information to parents.
- Every adult working with children understands and meets their obligations under the relevant state or territory Child Protection legislation.

Further guidance and information will be provided on:

- Promoting healthy eating and physical activity including:
 - Australian Government Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Guidelines for Early Childhood Settings (birth to five year olds)
 - Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents in Australia (school age children)
 - Australia's Physical Activity Recommendations for 5-12 year olds (school age children)
- Poisonous plants
- Sun protection including shade.

Quality Area 3: Physical environment

The physical environment is safe, suitable and provides a rich and diverse range of experiences which promote children's learning and development.

Standards and Elements

Note: Standards and elements in green are assessed as part of a service's application for an approval to operate. All standards and elements are assessed 3-6 months after opening and as part of all full assessments.

3.1 The design and location of the premises is appropriate for the operation of a service.

- 3.1.1 Outdoor and indoor spaces, buildings, furniture, equipment, facilities and resources are suitable for their purpose.
- 3.1.2 Premises, furniture and equipment are safe, clean and well maintained.
- 3.1.3 Outdoor spaces include natural elements and materials which allow for multiple uses.
- 3.1.4 Facilities are designed or adapted to ensure access and participation by every child in the service and to allow flexible use, and interaction between indoor and outdoor space.

3.2 The environment is inclusive, promotes competence, independent exploration and learning through play.

- 3.2.1 Outdoor and indoor spaces are designed and organised to engage every child in quality experiences in both built and natural environments.
- 3.2.2 Resources, materials and equipment are sufficient in number and organised in ways that ensure appropriate and effective implementation of the program.

Regulations and Schedules will include:

Centre based services

- A minimum of 3.25 sq m of unencumbered floor space is provided for each child. This may include verandahs in some services (approval of regulator required).
- A minimum of 7 sq m of useable outdoor play space to be provided for each child. This may include:
 - verandahs in some services (approval of regulator required); and
 - additional indoor space (such as a gymnasium) in school age care services (approval of regulator required).
- Outdoor space is enclosed by a fence or barrier that prevents a child (from birth to school age) from going through, over or under.
- Toilet and washing facilities for children are accessible from both indoors and outdoors.
- Rooms are well ventilated.

- Indoor spaces allow exposure to natural light.
- Space is allocated for administrative functions, private conversations and consultation with parents.
- Separate indoor space is provided for children under the age of two years.
- Outdoor space is designed to afford children opportunities to explore and experience the natural environment.
- Space is organised to encourage choice and to facilitate active engagement with the environment.
- Each child has access to furniture, materials and equipment suitable for the educational program.
- Specified shaded outdoor play space to be provided.
- Services that are unable to comply with particular facilities requirements apply to the regulator to be 'deemed to comply' with those requirements.

Home based services

- Risk assessments of the educator's own home are regularly conducted to ensure the health and safety of children.
- The educator's own home has appropriate kitchen and bathroom facilities and fencing.

Further guidance and information will be provided on:

Centre based services

- In quality centre based services, group sizes do not exceed three times the ratio that pertains to the relevant age group.
- Information about the design of centre based services including outdoor play spaces.

Quality Area 4: Staffing arrangements

Staffing arrangements create a safe and predictable environment for children and support warm, respectful relationships. Qualified and experienced educators and coordinators encourage children's active engagement in the learning program. Positive relationships among educators, coordinators and staff contribute to an environment where children feel emotionally safe, secure and happy.

Standards and Elements

Note: Standards and elements in green are assessed as part of a service's application for an approval to operate. All standards and elements are assessed 3-6 months after opening and as part of all full assessments.

4.1 Staffing arrangements enhance children's learning and development and ensure their safety and wellbeing.

4.1.1 Educator-to-child ratios (including qualification requirements) are maintained at all times.

4.2 Educators, coordinators and staff have the skills and knowledge to support children's learning, health, safety and wellbeing.

4.1.2 Educators, coordinators and staff demonstrate the awareness, attitudes, knowledge and skills required to provide an environment where diversity and difference are acknowledged, valued and respected.

4.1.3 Educators and coordinators are focused, active and reflective in planning and delivering the program to each child.

4.1.4 The performance of educators, coordinators and staff is evaluated and individual development plans are in place to support performance improvement.

4.3 Educators, coordinators and staff are respectful and ethical.

4.3.1 Professional standards guide practice, interactions and relationships.

4.3.2 Actions are aligned with the statement of principles under which the service operates.

4.3.3 Educators, coordinators and staff work collaboratively and affirm, challenge, support and learn from each other to further develop their skills, to improve practice and relationships.

4.3.4 Interactions convey mutual respect, equity and recognition of each other's strengths and skills.

Regulations and Schedules will include:

Schedule: Educator-to-child ratios – preschool and long day care services³

Age group	Educator-to-child ratio	Timeframe for compliance
Birth to 24 months	1:4	1 January 2012
25 to 35 months	1:5	1 January 2016
36 months to school age	1:11	1 January 2016
Mixed age groups	Proportional formula based on the above ratios.	1 January 2012

Educator qualification requirements – preschool and long day care services

Number of children in attendance (at any one time)	Qualified educator requirements	Timeframe for compliance
Less than 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 50% of educators have (or are actively working towards) a Diploma level ECEC qualification or above (the teacher may be included) * ▪ Other educators have (or are actively working towards) a Certificate III level ECEC qualification (or equivalent) ▪ An early childhood teacher is in attendance for some of the time that the service is being provided to children. 	1 January 2014
25 to 59 children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 50% of educators have (or are actively working towards) a Diploma level ECEC qualification or above (the teacher may be included) * ▪ Other educators have (or are actively working towards) a Certificate III level ECEC qualification (or equivalent) ▪ An early childhood teacher is in attendance at the service whenever the service is being provided to 26 children or more. 	1 January 2014
60 to 80 children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 50% of educators have (or are actively working towards) a Diploma level ECEC qualification or above (the teacher may be included) * ▪ Other educators have (or are actively working towards) a Certificate III level ECEC qualification (or equivalent) • An early childhood teacher is in attendance at the service whenever the service is being provided to 26 children or more. • A second early childhood teacher or another suitably qualified 	1 January 2014 1 January 2014 1 January 2014

³ Note: Until the following staffing arrangements come into place according to the timeframes below, state and territory staff-to-child ratios and educator qualification requirements that are in force prior to the commencement of the National Quality Standard on 1 January 2012 will continue to apply.

Number of children in attendance (at any one time)	Qualified educator requirements	Timeframe for compliance
	leader is in attendance at the service for at least half the time the service is being provided to 60 children or more.	1 January 2020
over 80 children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50% of educators have (or are actively working towards) a Diploma level ECEC qualification or above (the teacher may be included)* • Other educators have (or are actively working towards) a Certificate III level ECEC qualification (or equivalent) • An early childhood teacher is in attendance at the service whenever the service is being provided to 26 children or more. • A second early childhood teacher or another suitably qualified leader is in attendance at the service for at least half the time the service is being provided to 60 to 80 children, and once there are more than 80 children, the teacher needs to be there whenever the service is being provided. 	<p>1 January 2014</p> <p>1 January 2014</p> <p>1 January 2014</p> <p>1 January 2020</p>

- For the purposes of clarity, in relation to 50% of Educators have a Diploma, for every 2 educators (or part there of) at least one must have (or be enrolled in and studying) a Diploma level ECEC qualification, that is if there are 15 carers in the service 8 must hold a Diploma level ECEC qualification.
- For the purposes of clarity, an early childhood teacher is in attendance at the service whenever the service is being provided to 26 children or more, would require the teacher to be at the service at least 6 hours per day.
- A staff-to-child ratio of 1:10 for children 36 months to school age will be retained in New South Wales, Tasmania and Western Australia where this ratio currently applies, instead of 1:11 under the National Quality Standard.
- A staff-to-child ratio of 1:4 for children 25 – 35 months will be retained in Victoria where this ratio currently applies, instead of 1:5 under the National Quality Standard.
- The current requirements for a second teacher in New South Wales for centres with greater than 40 children, and a further teacher for every 20 children thereafter will be retained.
- Several jurisdictions will continue to require higher teacher-to-child ratios in their preschool programs than those proposed for the National Quality Standard.
- Services licensed in Queensland by 1 January 2011 that can justify a need to use a staff to child ratio of 1:5 for a group of children aged 15-36 months will be deemed to comply with the NQS staffing ratios. This arrangement will expire on 31 December 2017. All Queensland services will be expected to be compliant with the NQS staffing ratios from 1 January 2018.

Educator-to-child ratios – family day care services

Age group	Educator- to-child ratio	Timeframe for compliance
Mixed age groups of children	1:7 with a maximum of four children not yet attending school (including the educator's own children).	1 January 2014

Educator and coordinator qualification requirements – family day care services

Qualified educator and coordinators requirements	Timeframe for compliance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All carers have a minimum Certificate III level qualification (or actively working towards). All coordinators have a Diploma qualification. 	1 January 2014

Educator-to-child ratios requirements – OSHC services

The National Quality Standard applies to OSHC services but at this stage no changes to educator-to-child ratios is proposed.⁴

State/Territory	Educator-to-child ratio	Timeframe for compliance
ACT	1:11	Immediately
NSW	None prescribed	Immediately
NT	1:15	31 Dec 2013
QLD	1:15	Immediately
SA	1:15	Immediately
TAS	1:15	Immediately
VIC	1:15	Immediately
WA	As prescribed in WA Child Care Outside School Hours Care Regulations 2006 Schedule 1 – contact staff requirements and Division 1 – Prescribed matters 8. Prescribed Qualifications: section 12(2)9c)	Immediately

⁴ COAG RIS page 3

Educator qualifications requirement – OSHC services

The National Quality Standard applies to OSHC services but at this stage no changes to educator qualification requirements is proposed.⁵

State/Territory	Educator qualifications requirements	Timeframe for compliance
ACT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1/3 of educators must hold a Diploma level qualification or above; or have completed a Certificate III component of a Diploma qualification or half a Degree qualification and demonstrate continuing progress toward completion of that qualification No formal entry-level requirements for other educators 	Immediately
NSW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No prescribed qualification requirements 	Immediately
NT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 50% of carers must hold a post-secondary sports and recreation or teaching qualification or equivalent No formal entry-level requirements for other educators 	31 Dec 2013
QLD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 50% of educators must hold at least a Diploma level qualification in community services or a two-year qualification in a relevant area of study Other educators must hold at least a Certificate III or IV in Community Services or a one-year qualification in a relevant area of study 	Immediately
SA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 50% of educators must hold at least an Associate Diploma level qualification in child care and/or youth or recreation No formal entry-level requirements for other educators 	Immediately
TAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No prescribed qualification requirements 	Immediately
VIC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 50% of educators must hold at least a 2 year post-secondary early childhood qualification or a 2 year post-secondary childcare or youth recreation qualification Other educators must hold at least a Certificate III in Children's Services or equivalent or commence obtaining a qualification within 6 months of commencing to care for children 	31 Dec 2010
WA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1/4 of educators must hold at least a Certificate IV in children's studies covering ages four to fourteen or a Certificate IV in outside school hours care No formal entry-level requirements for other educators 	Immediately

⁵ COAG RIS page 3

Other requirements

Minimum age of educators

- Educators (except family day carers) under the age of 18:
 - may be counted in the educator-to-child ratios;
 - are not permitted to work alone in a service; and
 - must be supervised by an adult with a Diploma qualification or above (or actively engaged and working towards the qualification).
- For purposes of clarity educators under the age of 18 holding a Diploma qualification would still need to be supervised as above.
- Family day carers must be 18 years of age or above.
- Staffing arrangements support children undertaking activities as part of a group that is of appropriate age and composition and promotes relationships with peers and educators.
- At least one educator with a prescribed first aid competency/qualification is present while children are at the service.
- All family day carers have a prescribed first aid qualification.
- Professional development plans are documented and implemented.
- Information on activities that are not considered to be working with children.
- In quality services, educators and coordinators:
 - hold or are supported to work towards qualifications that are
 - higher than the minimum; and
 - regularly participate in professional development opportunities.
- In quality services, groups of children do not exceed three times the ratio that pertains to the relevant age group.

- Ready reckoner for calculating mixed age groups:

Age of child	Educator -to - child ratio	Number of children in the group	Proportion of educator required (based on ratio)
Birth-24 months	1 to 4	1 child	25%
		2	50%
		3	75%
		4	100%
25-35 months	1 to 5	1 child	20%
		2	40%
		3	60%
		4	80%
		5	100%
36 months-school age	1 to 11	1 child	9%
		2	18%
		3	27%
		4	36%

Quality Area 5: Relationships with children

Relationships that are responsive, respectful and promote children's sense of security and belonging free them to explore the environment and engage in learning.

Standards and Elements

Note: Standards and elements in green are assessed as part of a service's application for an approval to operate. All standards and elements are assessed 3-6 months after opening and as part of all full assessments.

5.1 Respectful and equitable relationships are developed and maintained with each child.

- 5.1.1 Interactions with each child are warm, responsive and build trusting relationships.
- 5.1.2 Every child is able to engage with educators in meaningful, open interactions that support the acquisition of skills for life and learning.

5.2 Each child is supported to build and maintain sensitive and responsive relationships with other children and adults.

- 5.2.1 Every child is supported to work with, learn from and help others through collaborative learning opportunities.
- 5.2.2 Each child is supported to understand how their own actions affect others.

5.3 Each child's behaviour, interactions and relationships are guided effectively.

- 5.3.1 Behaviour guidance strategies preserve the dignity and rights of the child at all times.
- 5.3.2 Each child is supported to manage their own behaviour, respond appropriately to the behaviour of others, and communicate effectively to resolve conflicts.

Regulations and Schedules will include:

- The service has a written policy on positive guidance of child behaviour that reflects current practice.
- The use of physical force and restraint; physical, verbal or emotional punishment and practices that demean, humiliate, frighten or threaten a child are prohibited.

Further guidance and information will be provided on:

- Children should belong to a group so that they may undertake activities as part of a group that is of an appropriate size and composition, develop relationships and receive direct care from educators and develop friendships with other children.
- Examples of what elements would look like in practice and the types of evidence that would demonstrate meeting the standard will be provided.

Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities

Collaborative relationships with families are fundamental to achieve quality outcomes for children. Community partnerships that focus on active communication, consultation and collaboration also contribute to children's learning and wellbeing.

Standards and Elements

Note: Standards and elements in green are assessed as part of a service's application for an approval to operate. All standards and elements are assessed 3-6 months after opening and as part of all full assessments.

6.1 Respectful supportive relationships with families are developed and maintained.

- 6.1.1 There is an effective enrolment and orientation process for families.
- 6.1.2 Families have opportunities and support to be involved in the program and in service activities.
- 6.1.3 Families have opportunities to influence and shape the service, to review service policies and contribute to service decisions.

6.2 Families are supported in their parenting role and their values and beliefs about child rearing are respected.

- 6.2.1 The expertise of families is recognised and they share in decision making about their child's learning and wellbeing.
- 6.2.2 Information is available to families about community services and resources to support parenting and family wellbeing.

6.3 The service collaborates with other organisations and service providers to enhance children's learning and wellbeing.

- 6.3.1 Links with relevant community and support agencies are established and maintained.
- 6.3.2 Continuity of learning and transitions for each child are supported by sharing relevant information and clarifying responsibilities.
- 6.3.3 Access to inclusion and support assistance is facilitated.

6.4 The service participates in the community.

- 6.4.1 The service participates in the community and demonstrates respect for families and communities.
- 6.4.2 The service is involved in appropriate community projects and events.
- 6.4.3 The service takes an active role in caring for its environment and contributes to a sustainable future.

Regulations and Schedules will include:

- Families have access to the service during operating hours and are able to speak with educators and coordinators about issues affecting their child.

- The service has a policy about:
- families' participation in the service; and
- inclusion and procedures for reducing discrimination.
- The service has documented enrolment and orientation procedures.
- The service plans and implements a variety of opportunities for families to participate.
- The service establishes links with other services to support children and their families.
- Educators and coordinators have access to space for private and confidential discussions with families and access to the service for families during the hours of operation.

Further guidance and information will be provided on:

- Examples of collaborative partnerships in each service type, including evidence to demonstrate a service is meeting the standard will be provided.
- Information regarding research and theories on developing collaborative partnerships.

Quality Area 7: Leadership and service management

Effective leadership contributes to sustained quality relationships and environments that facilitate children's learning and development. Well documented policies and practices that are developed and regularly evaluated in partnership with educators, coordinators, staff and families contribute to the ethical management of the service. There is a focus on continuous improvement.

Standards and Elements

Note: Standards and elements in green are assessed as part of a service's application for an approval to operate. All standards and elements are assessed 3-6 months after opening and as part of all full assessments.

7.1 Effective leadership promotes a positive organisational culture and builds a professional learning community.

- 7.1.1 A suitably qualified and experienced educator or coordinator leads the development of the curriculum and ensures the establishment of clear goals and expectations for teaching and learning.
- 7.1.2 There is continuity of educators and coordinators at the service.

7.2 There is a commitment to continuous improvement.

- 7.2.1 A statement of principles is developed which guides all aspects of the service's operations.
- 7.2.2 An effective planning and evaluation process is in place that guides service operations and programs and enables the identification and delivery of ongoing improvement initiatives.
- 7.2.3 The induction of educators, coordinators and staff is comprehensive.

7.3 Management and administrative systems enable the effective provision of a quality service.

- 7.3.1 Administrative systems and communication channels are established and maintained to ensure the effective operation of the service.
- 7.3.2 Service practices are based on effectively documented policies and procedures that are available at the service and reviewed regularly.
- 7.3.3 Records and information are stored appropriately to ensure confidentiality, are available from the service and are maintained in accordance with legislative requirements.
- 7.3.4 Appropriate governance arrangements are in place to manage the service.
- 7.3.5 The authority/ies responsible for administering the standard is/are notified about any relevant changes.

7.4 Adults working with children and those engaged in management of the service or residing on the premises are fit and proper.

- 7.4.1 The provider, including managing bodies, any authorised supervisor/nominee engaged to be a manager (on and off-site) demonstrates their fitness and propriety.
- 7.4.2 The provider takes reasonable steps to ensure the fitness and propriety of educators, coordinators and staff.
- 7.4.3 The provider takes reasonable steps to ensure the fitness and propriety of any adults who reside in or are frequent visitors to a home based service while children are in care.

7.5 Grievances and complaints are managed effectively.

- 7.5.1 Processes are in place to ensure that all grievances and complaints are addressed, investigated fairly and documented in a timely manner.
- 7.5.2 The authority/ies responsible for administering the standard is/are notified of complaints which allege a breach of legislation or a serious incident.

7.6 Information is exchanged with families on a regular basis.

- 7.6.1 Current information about the service is available to families.
- 7.6.2 Information is available to families about their child which includes documentation of the child's learning, development and participation in the program.
- 7.6.3 Information provided by families is documented as appropriate.

Regulations and Schedules will include:

- The holder of an approval to operate including managing bodies, any authorised supervisor/nominee engaged to be a manager (on and off-site) is fit and proper.
- The holder of an approval to operate identifies an educator or coordinator as the 'pedagogical leader' to lead the development of programs and ensure the establishment of clear goals and expectations for teaching and learning within the service.
- The approval to operate and rating is displayed at the service.
- Service practices are documented in policies and procedures and information is available at the service and to families, and reviewed regularly (see table below).
- The holder of an approval to operate ensures that recording and management of relevant information related to children and families is administered effectively including updating, storage, maintenance of confidentiality, access for families and the authority/ies responsible for the National Quality Standard (see table below).

Schedules of Policies and procedures, information and records

Policies and procedures to be developed and kept available at the service	Other information to be available at the service	Records to be kept
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Statement of principles ▪ Code of conduct ▪ Outline of the program ▪ Behaviour guidance policy ▪ Excursions policy and procedures ▪ Dealing with illness, emergency care and infectious diseases ▪ Anaphylaxis management policy ▪ Emergency evacuation procedures ▪ Safety and health policies and procedures ▪ Complaints policy and procedures ▪ Admission and enrolment procedures ▪ Arrangements for the delivery and collection of children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Approval to operate and any 'Interim Approvals' ▪ Hours of operation ▪ Fees charged and arrangements for payment ▪ Manager/person responsible on duty ▪ Staffing (numbers and qualifications) ▪ Participation of students and volunteers ▪ Notice of any occurrence of modifiable/vaccine-preventable infectious disease ▪ Notice that a child at risk of anaphylaxis attends the service ▪ Menus ▪ Contact details for the authority/ies responsible for the National Quality Standard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Enrolment ▪ Attendance ▪ Permission for excursions ▪ Child progress ▪ Medication ▪ Incident and illness ▪ Staffing ▪ Custody arrangements/court orders.

Further guidance and information will be provided on:

- The educator or coordinator identified as the 'pedagogical leader' should:
 - have current knowledge of child development and effective approaches to teaching and learning;
 - have a knowledge of planning, assessing and documenting children learning and the importance of sharing information with families;
 - oversee and lead other educators to implement the Early Years Learning Framework including pedagogy and curriculum decision making;
 - plan and deliver the preschool program for children in the years prior to school;
 - work with other educators in observing, supporting and extending children's learning and lead discussions on reflective practice;

- support educators in the process of assessment for learning;
 - lead and share information, knowledge and expertise on practice, policy developments and community changes that may impact on curriculum;
 - be a professional role model for high quality education and care for children;
 - build the capacity of all educators by supporting and mentoring others to take on leadership roles in areas of expertise or of potential interest.
-

Glossary

The following glossary explains some key terms as they are used in the National Quality Standard.

Authorised supervisor/nominee is an adult nominated by the holder of an approval to operate/service provider to help ensure the service is operated in compliance with the National Quality Standard and assist with communication between the holder of an approval to operate/service provider and authority(ies) responsible for implementing the National Quality Standard.

Built environments include manufactured, synthetic and commercially produced surfaces, materials, toys and equipment.

Centre based refers to an education and care service providing long day care, preschool, kindergarten and outside school hours care. The service may operate from standalone or shared premises including those on school grounds.

Children is the term used within this document to refer to each baby, toddler, three to five year old and school age child both as an individual and a member of a group in the education and care setting, unless otherwise stated.

Collaboration involves working together cooperatively towards common goals. Collaboration is achieved through information sharing, joint planning and the development of common understandings and objectives.

Community refers to a group of people who have common characteristics. In this context the term can be defined according to location, race, ethnicity, age, occupation, interest in a particular issue, or other common bonds. In an education and care setting the term community may include children, families, educators, staff, other professionals, school staff and volunteers. It may also include members of the wider community and particular groups or organisations in the local area.

Continuous improvement is the process by which the service evaluates and seeks opportunities to improve its operations and daily practice. The ultimate goal of continuous improvement is to enhance outcomes for children.

Coordinator refers to the professional staff employed by a family day care scheme to support, monitor and provide pre-service and in-service training for educators. The term 'coordinator' includes: coordinator, child development officer, child care services officer, field officer/worker, manager, director, authorised supervisor, team leader, and play session/group leader.

Critical reflection involves examining and analysing events, experiences and practices from a range of perspectives to inform future planning and decision making.

Culture describes the customs, ideas, values, practices and way of living shared by a group of people.

Curriculum means 'all the interactions, experiences, activities, routines and events, planned and unplanned, that occur in an environment designed to foster children's learning and development' (adapted from Te Whariki).

Deemed to comply is when a service may not technically comply with either the Staffing Arrangements or Physical Environment standards of the National Quality Standard, but the service is assessed as being fit for purpose on an ongoing basis.

Diversity refers to the differences among all individuals. In an education and care setting, diversity may include, but is not restricted to, differences in background, culture, customs, language, faith, religion, family structure, ability, gender, sexuality, child rearing practices and socio-economic status. Diversity is respected when difference is valued and where inclusive practices are implemented.

Documentation results from a process of recording information, discussions and decisions. Documentation of children's learning may include examples of children's writing, drawing, painting and construction, photographs of projects and works in progress, transcripts of children's comments and conversations about their experiences.

Educator is a person who works directly with children and is included in the 'educator-to-child' ratio.

Effective means achieving the desired outcome from a particular course of action. A policy is effective when it is consistently put into practice and results in the desired outcome being achieved for children. For example, a sun

protection policy is effective when educators consistently implement the strategies outlined in the policy and children and adults are protected from harmful exposure to the sun.

Equity refers to fair and just treatment of all individuals.

Evaluation measures the effectiveness of something by identifying its outcomes, strengths and weaknesses. The results of evaluation are used to inform future planning and decision making.

Experiences are defined as the activities and routines provided for children. Experiences may be planned or spontaneous and should reflect children's needs, interests and abilities.

Family describes the network of significant people involved in caring for the child outside of the service.

Family day care is a child care service that provides small group care for children from birth through to school age in the home environment of a registered educator. Educators work in partnership with scheme management and coordination unit staff.

Fit and proper describes a person's suitability and ability to meet the standard required to work with children and families or be involved in the operation of an education and care service.

Guidelines are supporting information which outlines ways in which a service can meet the National Quality Standard or achieve a High Quality rating.

Harm to a child is any detrimental effect of a significant nature on the child's physical, psychological or emotional wellbeing. Harm can be caused by physical, psychological or emotional abuse or neglect or sexual abuse or exploitation.

Hazards are items which have the potential to cause harm, illness or injury. In an education and care setting hazards may include cleaning products, garden chemicals, medications, pest control agents, broken or damaged toys, equipment or surfaces, electrical equipment, sharp objects, soiled materials, foreign objects, spiders and vermin and poisonous plants.

Home based services are provided in the home of the educator or the child's family. For example, a home based service is provided by an educator in a family day care scheme or a registered individual who is not part of a family day care scheme.

Hygiene refers to the clean and sanitary practices which maintain good health at the service. The spread of infectious diseases is minimised when educators and staff use accepted hygiene practices during daily routines such as toileting, nappy changing and handwashing.

Inclusion and support assistance aims to develop the capacity of child care services to create an inclusive environment for all children and their families, including those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, those with on-going high support needs and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Induction is a planned process of introducing new staff, relief staff, students or volunteers to the service in preparation for their role. An effective induction will assist new members of the service to understand what is expected of them and what they can expect from the service.

Interim approval is where a service is permitted to operate notwithstanding that it does not meet a particular requirement under the National Quality Standard. An interim approval is time-limited and only available for requirements under the Staffing Arrangements and Physical Environment standards. A service with an interim approval will be rated as Operating Level for the quality area to which the interim approval applies.

Leader refers to the suitably qualified and experienced educator or coordinator who leads the development of the program and is a role model for other educators in the service.

Natural environments include natural materials and surfaces that have undergone very little modification, for example grass, trees, rocks, plant materials, soil, sand, water, clay, timber, bark, seeds, shells and stones.

Observation describes information obtained by watching, listening and interacting with children to identify their skills, interests, needs and abilities. This information will assist educators to plan meaningful experiences for children.

Orientation is a process designed to familiarise children and families with educators, staff, service operations, and daily practices when they commence care. The primary goal of orientation is to support children to adapt to unfamiliar routines, new people and new places. Orientation also provides an initial opportunity for sharing of information between families and the service about care expectations, the child's individual needs and how the service will meet them.

Outside school hours care is a service that provides care for school age children before school, after school, on pupil-free days and/or during school holidays (vacation care). Outside school hours care may use standalone facilities, share school buildings and grounds, and/or share facilities such as community halls. Care for school age children outside of school hours, on pupil-free days and during school holidays may also be provided by family day care and long day care services.

Parents of a child include the natural or adoptive parent of the child and their spouse, a person who, under Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander tradition, is regarded as a parent of the child or the carer of the child under relevant legislation.

Partnership is a co-operative and mutually beneficial relationship between those working together and sharing a responsibility to achieve a common goal, such as positive outcomes for children. Effective partnerships require good faith, mutual respect and common understanding from which decisions can be made.

Planning occurs at a number of levels within an education and care service. Planning refers to making decisions about what will happen at the service for children. In daily planning, educators consider relationships and interactions, routines, the environment, experiences provided for children and how the program will be delivered. Planning also occurs at the service level to ensure effective management and administrative practices and systems are in place so that the service is responsive to the needs of children, families and the community.

Policy is a written statement which details service practices and procedures and explains the reasons for them. A policy is informed by current best practice and guides consistent application of service procedures by ensuring that all stakeholders have the same understanding and expectations.

Preschool programs Preschool programs in the year before full-time schooling are play based learning programs, planned and delivered by an early childhood qualified teacher for a minimum of 10 hours a week (15 hours a week from 1 January 2013) for 40 weeks per year. For children other than those in the year before full-time schooling, preschool programs are play based learning programs, planned and delivered by an early childhood qualified teacher.

Professional development is the process of maintaining and continuously improving current knowledge and skills in an area of expertise through both informal and formal learning opportunities.

Professional standards describe the appropriate and expected behaviour of management, educators and staff. They are used to guide ethical decision making and respectful relationships within the service.

Programs include the spontaneous and planned experiences provided for children at the service designed to facilitate learning.

Provider refers to the owner and operator of an education and care service. The term 'provider' also refers to an individual operating a home based service which is not part of a family day care scheme.

Resources are items such as toys, play equipment, books, writing materials and craft materials for children to use in their play, learning experiences and physical activities. Resources provided by the service must be safe and appropriate to the age and skills of the children using them and should extend their interests and abilities.

Routines are structured, daily events that occur at regular intervals in the education and care environment. They may include children's arrivals and departures, the collection of school age children, transitions, nappy changing and toileting, snack and mealtimes, rest and sleep.

Service describes the management, educators and staff of a family day care scheme, long day care centre, or outside school hours care service. In family day care, the term 'service' refers to both the coordination unit and the carer's home. The service may also comprise a holder of an approval to operate or sponsor responsible for the operation of the service.

Spontaneous means unplanned, impulsive or 'spur of the moment'. In an education and care setting spontaneous learning opportunities emerge as children, explore, discover, imagine and interact with both educators and their peers.

Staff refers to staff members in a centre based setting who are not included in the educator-to-child ratios and/or perform another primary function in the service such as cook, administrator, gardener, housekeeper or cleaner.

Statement of principles outlines the values and beliefs that are important to children, families, educators, staff and management which guide everything that happens at the service.

Supervision is the continuous and active observation of children and intervention to promote their wellbeing. Active supervision ensures that children are safe, that risks within the environment are minimised and that they are engaged in positive interactions and activity, without over-protection or over-direction. Supervision requirements will vary according to the age and number of children, the activity taking place, the environment and the needs of individual children.

Sustainability is the result of finding ways to meet current needs that do not impact on the quality of the environment or reduce the capacity of future generations to meet their own needs.

Teacher means an early childhood teacher holding an approved qualification under the National Quality Standard or a qualification that has been assessed as equivalent.

Transitions describes the movement of children from one setting or service to another, from one group or room to another or the move from one activity to the next.