

NQF

1 THE WHAT

What does my service most need to know?

Disclaimer: As the national Regulations are still in draft form, the content of this fact sheet is subject to change.

THE NEW NATIONAL QUALITY FRAMEWORK (NQF) COMMENCES FROM THE BEGINNING OF 2012.

This fact sheet, the first of a series produced for children's services by the Professional Support Co-ordinator's Alliance, summarises the basics that services need to know about the NQF.

THE IMPORTANT PARTS OF THE NQF FOR SERVICES TO KNOW ABOUT ARE:

- ▶ The National Quality Standard (7 quality areas)
- ▶ The ratings system (5 possible ratings)
- ▶ The new regulatory system

THE NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD

The new National Quality Standard (NQS or 'the Standard') is designed to help children's services provide the best possible level of childhood education and care by outlining the factors that best support a child's development. It outlines what a service can do to provide the highest quality education and care for a child.

The National Quality Standard is divided into seven areas. These areas have been identified by research as being the most important to get right to ensure the safety, health and wellbeing of children attending education and care services as well as improving their educational and developmental outcomes.

The Standard consists of guiding principles, quality areas, standards and elements. From 1 January 2012, most long day care, family day care, outside school hours care services and preschools/ kindergartens will be rated against the NQS.



The seven quality areas are:

1. Educational program and practice;
2. Children's health and safety;
3. Physical environment;
4. Staffing arrangements;
5. Relationships with children;
6. Collaborative partnerships with families and communities;
7. Leadership and service management.

A NEW RATINGS SYSTEM

The Quality Assurance systems that many children's services have been accredited under, will not exist beyond December 2011. Under the National Quality Framework, children's services will be rated against the National Quality Standard. It is proposed that they will receive a rating against each quality area of the Standard and an overall service rating. There are five separate ratings. The highest rating of excellent can only be conferred by ACECQA. It is proposed that the ratings will be published on the MyChild website and services will need to display their rating at their service.

A NEW REGULATORY SYSTEM

The majority of children's services will now be subject to the same nationally consistent regulatory system, no matter where they operate in Australia. This means that some of the rules or laws that we have to follow as children's services will change from January 2012. The new regulatory system replaces the separate state licensing and national accreditation systems that have existed to date.



WHAT CHANGES WILL IT MEAN FOR SERVICES?

The main proposed changes that your service will face are:

- ▶ **Implementing a new framework for learning** – Belonging, Being and Becoming: the Early Years Learning Framework and/or My Time Our Place, the Framework for School Age Care in Australia (currently in draft).
- ▶ **Ratios** – Improvements to educator–child ratios for preschools, long day care and family day care services. There are no changes to regulated ratios for outside school hours care services at this stage.
- ▶ **Qualifications** – Early childhood services will be required to ensure all their educators working directly with children have or are working towards a minimum of Certificate III in Children’s Services. They will also be required to employ a set proportion of educators with higher qualifications including early childhood teacher qualifications. There are no changes to qualifications for outside school hours care services at this stage.
- ▶ **Changes to licenses** – Existing licensing systems for children’s services will be replaced by a system of provider approvals and service approvals. All children’s services which are currently licensed by their state or territory may be granted a Provider Approval and a Service Approval. These approvals are national approvals and are ongoing. You will need to pay an annual fee for your service approval and becoming an approved provider is a pre-condition to operating one or more education and care service. A service approval relates to the operation of a service at a particular centre-based premise or the operation of a particular family day care scheme.
- ▶ **Different laws to operate under** – on 1 January 2012, the National Quality Framework will be established under an applied system comprising the Education and Care Services National Law and Regulations. A National Law and Regulations will mean some changes to the way your service operates on a day-to-day basis.
- ▶ **Quality service provision** – The National Quality Standard sets out what constitutes quality outcomes in the provision of an education and care service. Services need to assess themselves and will be assessed against the Standard.
- ▶ **Rating** – Services are likely to be rated against the National Quality Standard every 1–3 years. This rating process replaces the previous accreditation process that many service types had to undertake.

Please remember that these changes are designed to improve the quality of education and care received by children in children’s services. Most family day care schemes, outside school hours care services, long day care services and most preschools/kindergartens are covered by the National Quality Framework.

HOW WILL MY SERVICE BE RATED?

Services will be assessed against the National Quality Standard by a Regulatory Authority in their state or territory. Your service will undertake a self assessment and then prepare a Quality Improvement Plan – outlining the quality areas of the National Quality Standard your service will be improving. It is proposed that the regulator will examine this and make a visit to your service to observe typical practice at your service to determine a rating against each quality area and an overall rating (a draft template is available on the DEEWR website).

WHEN DOES IT ALL HAPPEN?

The NQF starts on 1 January 2012. Many of the changes that the NQF requires services to undertake have a much longer lead time. Qualifications requirements, for example, do not come in until 2014. Some of the ratios changes do not come in until 2016, although some occur earlier. Services will be assessed progressively against the National Quality Standard from January 2012, but this does not mean every service will have an assessment next year.

PREPARING FOR THE NQF

There are many things children’s services can do to prepare for the National Quality Framework.

The Professional Support Co-ordinator’s Alliance suggests the following as good basic preparations:

- 1** Ensure you are implementing the appropriate learning framework (Early Years Learning Framework and/or My Place, Our Time) into your service. During the ratings trials that were conducted, services that had successfully implemented the frameworks scored higher ratings.
- 2** Ensure your service is familiar with the National Quality Standard. Read the Standard and the Draft Guide to the National Quality Standard. Both of these can be found at www.deewr.gov.au/Earlychildhood/Policy_Agenda/

WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THE NATIONAL QUALITY FRAMEWORK?

GO TO: www.deewr.gov.au/Earlychildhood/Policy_Agenda
or www.pscalliance.org.au

The PSC Alliance has prepared a series of NQF Fact Sheets as well as newsletters and e-tips which your service can receive

by email. To find out more or to get copies please contact your state or territory Professional Support Co-ordinator.

