

NQF

5 FOR MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES/BOARDS

What the National Quality Framework means for YOUR service

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.

At the December 2009 Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting, all Australian Governments agreed to a **National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care**. This will mean some changes to the way your service operates.

The **National Quality Agenda** is the overarching name given to the range of reforms designed to improve the quality of early education and care services.

The **National Quality Framework (NQF)** refers to the overall national quality framework and its new National Quality Standard and ratings system. It incorporates a new National Quality Standard, including the **Early Years Learning Framework**, and/or **Framework for School Age Care** new rating system and the associated regulatory system.

THE NQF CONSISTS OF:

- ▶ The National Quality Standard (7 quality areas);
- ▶ A new rating system (each service to be given 1 of 5 possible ratings ranging from excellent to unsatisfactory);
- ▶ A new streamlined regulatory system which is nationally consistent.

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD

These are the seven areas in which your service will have to demonstrate how it provides quality.

Reflect upon your service and consider how your service implements these standards to the best quality.

- ▶ Educational program and practice;
- ▶ Children's health and safety;
- ▶ Physical environment;

(Almost) everything a community-based management committee of a children's service needs to know about the National Quality Framework for children's services.



- ▶ Staffing arrangements;
- ▶ Relationships with children;
- ▶ Collaborative partnerships with families and communities;
- ▶ Leadership and service management.

These are also the seven areas against which your service will be assessed. You will be rated against each of these seven areas and your performance in each area will be combined to determine your overall service rating.

The NQF also delivers us a new 'single streamlined national regulatory system to regulate and enforce the National Quality Standard'. What this means is that there will be one National law and set of consistent regulations for services across the country.

These will replace existing separate licensing and quality assurance processes and will be administered by the respective community services or education departments in each state or territory, under the guidance of a new national body (ACECQA).

Essentially, for previously accredited services, this means that the 'accreditation system' has been replaced by the National Quality Framework. For preschools, it will mean having to undergo an assessment and rating process for the first time.



WHAT CHANGES WILL YOUR SERVICE HAVE TO MAKE?

As well as enhancing quality education and care for your children, the aim of the National Quality Framework is also to provide clearer and more comprehensive information through the quality ratings system to families about the quality of education and care at their service.

It will provide more information to families about what makes quality education and care – what quality education looks like.

The main changes that your service will be implementing are:

- ▶ **A new framework for learning** – the Early Years Learning Framework and/or the Framework for School Aged Care.
- ▶ **Changes to licenses** – As a licensed service, you will be granted a provider approval under the National Quality Framework which will be a continuing approval.
- ▶ **Regulation** – national regulation will mean some changes to the way your service operates on a day-to-day basis. It is these regulations which will prescribe detailed regulatory requirements for services in much the same way that respective regulations currently operate in each state or territory. Draft regulations are currently on the DEEWR website and regulations are expected to be finalised later this year.

FOR EARLY YEARS SERVICES THERE ARE ALSO CHANGES TO:

- ▶ **Ratios** – improvements to staff/child ratios. From January 2012 in centre-based services, the ratio for babies (birth to 24 months) will be 1:4, and from 2016, the toddlers (24 to 36 months) ratio will be 1:5 and preschoolers (36 months to preschool age) ratio will be 1:11 (committees should check for specific state/territory requirements).
- ▶ **Qualifications** – by 2014, at least 50 per cent of educators are to have (or be actively engaged in working towards) a Diploma level qualification or above. Other educators are to have (or be actively working towards) a Certificate III. Services that are not currently required to employ an early childhood teacher may need to employ one 'in attendance some of the time' (please check for specific state/territory requirements).

Please remember that these changes are designed to improve the quality of education and care received by children in children's services. Although some of the changes may initially seem challenging, they will result in access to better quality education and care for all children at your service.

Your service Director or Co-ordinator will probably have been to information sessions about the National Quality Framework. They will have a good idea of what may need to change at your service to ensure you comply with the National Quality Standard and receive a positive rating against the standard, but here is a bit more information.

INFORMATION AND TRAINING

Your educators may need to access professional development to make sure they develop an understanding the requirements of the National Quality Framework and have in-depth knowledge of the Learning Framework's. Your director/co-ordinator may require time away from the service to plan for the introduction of these changes and to prepare experiences for educators to ensure understanding.

RATIOS

For early years services, the changes to ratios may mean employing more educators, or changing how your existing educators are deployed.

QUALIFICATIONS

Your early childhood education and care service may need to employ more qualified educators or your existing educators may need to upgrade their current qualifications. Every educator directly working with children will need at least a Certificate III qualification, and half of your educators will require a diploma or teaching degree by 2014. You may want to assist your educators to obtain the required qualifications through increasing study leave or inquiring about existing working traineeships (including government funding) and recognition of prior learning pathways.

POLICIES

You may need to amend and update your policies and procedures so that they comply with the requirements outlined in the National Regulations, once finalised.

PREPARATION FOR RATING AGAINST THE NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD

As indicated earlier, all services will be rated against the National Quality Standard and that rating will be published on the Commonwealth Government's MyChild website. It is important to understand that the new standard is not a minimum standard but a standard we expect all services to achieve over time. The current draft documentation proposes a five-point rating scale:

- ▶ Excellent;
- ▶ High Quality;
- ▶ National Quality Standard;
- ▶ Foundation;
- ▶ Unsatisfactory.



Services will be rated at one of the four levels: Unsatisfactory, Foundation, National Quality Standard or High Quality. If you are rated as 'High Quality', you can then apply under a separate process to be recognised as 'Excellent'.

For long day care services, FDC schemes, Out of School Hours Care this system replaces the current accreditation system. For preschools/kindergartens this is a new process. State-based regulators in each state or territory will be undertaking the rating of your service – your first rating will occur sometime between 2012 and 2015.

Until this time your service will be rated as Foundation (Not Yet Assessed).

QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

As part of the rating process, your service will need to complete a self assessment and an annual Quality Improvement Plan. The Quality Improvement Plan allows you to identify which parts of your service delivery you feel are working well and those which can be improved in line with the National Standard. This is a small plan – a maximum of 15 pages – so preparation should not be too onerous. Your staff and committee may also need additional meetings and time to prepare this document.

WANT MORE INFORMATION?

There is a lot of information that you could read at this time to give you more information about the National Quality Framework.

Probably the most important information you can read are the Early Years Learning Framework and the National Quality Standard (National Quality Standard for Early Childhood Education and Care and School Age Care). This provides general information regarding the National Quality Framework and the introduction of the new National Quality Standard and rating system.

WHO IS GOING TO FUND IT ALL?

There is no specific funding available at this stage from the Commonwealth or state/territory governments. Government representatives have said: 'Because these changes will be put in place over a number of years, and services will have time to adjust, there should not be a sudden increase in the cost of services. Providers will continue to make their own business decisions about the level of service they provide.'

There was an extensive cost analysis performed by the Council of Australian Governments prior to the changes being approved. This acknowledged that fees in services will need to increase to pay for the changes but, generally, only by a small amount. Access Economics have estimated for example that the average out-of-pocket cost for parents of children in long day care services will be \$8.67 per week by 2014–2015.

When considering cost increases, it is important to remember that those things that will cost the most, such as improved ratios and more qualified educators, are those that enhance quality and ensure better outcomes for children.

YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES

Management Committee members' responsibilities under the NQF are similar to what they are under the existing licensing system. You should become familiar with the draft regulations now and the final when they come out. You should be aware that one of the standards under which your service is assessed is Leadership and Service Management. You will need to be able to show that your service is effectively managed: for example, the management and administrative systems in your service enable the effective provision of a quality service. Your committee will also need to show strong leadership in supporting your educators to make the changes required under the National Quality Framework. Your committee may wish to learn more about the National Quality Framework by consulting the websites below.

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.

