

NQF

3 THE HOW

How will my service be rated?

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.

THE IMPORTANT PARTS OF THE NQF ASSESSMENT AND RATINGS PROCESS ARE:

- ▶ Self Assessment
- ▶ The Quality Improvement Plan
- ▶ The assessment visit
- ▶ The ratings system (5 possible ratings)

ASSESSMENT AND RATING PROCESS – THE SUMMARY

Services will be assessed against the National Quality Standard by a Regulatory Authority in your state and territory. Your service will need to reflect on the practices with respect to the seven quality areas and then prepare a Quality Improvement Plan – outlining your strengths and areas of the National Quality Standard you will be working on to improve. The regulator will examine this and make a visit to your service to observe typical practice at your service to determine your rating.

SELF REFLECTION: Services are encouraged to reflect on their practices in relation to the seven quality areas and identify their strengths and weaknesses, as well as the key areas you will be seeking to improve. There is no set format for the self reflection and the self assessment does not need to be submitted to the regulator.

THE QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN: Based on the self reflection, services need to prepare a Quality Improvement Plan. The Quality Improvement Plan essentially lists the strengths and therefore your focus will be to maintain what you are doing and, more importantly, those quality areas you believe you could improve in. This will then become your roadmap for the next year as you work to improve

This fact sheet, the third of a series produced for children's services by the Professional Support Co-ordinator's Alliance, summarises the proposed assessment process that services will undergo under the NQF.

your quality in these areas. You are required to submit your Quality Improvement Plan prior to the assessment visit and your service needs to update it annually.

THE ASSESSMENT VISIT: The assessment visit is designed to observe typical practice at your service. An assessor will come out to your service (if centre-based) and assess the service. Your rating is determined by a review of your Quality Improvement Plan, your compliance history, assessment history and the practices observed during the assessment visit. Family day care schemes will have their assessment visits to the service and one or more carers depending on the size of the scheme.

THE RATINGS SYSTEM (5 POSSIBLE RATINGS):

There is a 5 point rating scale under the NQF. Your service will have a rating for each quality area of the National Quality Standard (NQS) and an overall service rating.

The ratings and what they mean:

- ▶ **Excellent** – A service is recognised as having exemplary practice in one or more quality areas – it is an outstanding education and care service.
- ▶ **High Quality/Advanced** – A service exceeds the National Quality Standard.
- ▶ **National Quality Standard** – A service is meeting the National Quality Standard.
- ▶ **Foundation/Operating** indicates that a service did not meet a quality area or areas but this does not pose significant risk to the safety, health or wellbeing of a child. Foundation is also the level that services are at prior to being assessed.
- ▶ **Unsatisfactory** indicates that a service did not meet a standard/s in a way that poses a significant risk to a child's safety, health and wellbeing.

YOUR OVERALL RATING: The NQS consists of 7 **quality areas**, 23 **standards** and 65 **elements**. When your service is assessed, the **elements** of the NQS are assessed as met or not met. The **Standard** is rated on the basis of how many of the **elements** a service has met.

To be rated at National Quality Standard (or above) for a Standard, a service needs to meet all the elements in that standard. Quality areas are rated with the rating derived from the ratings of the standards in that quality area. To be rated at 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. The overall service rating is determined by the rating for each of the quality areas.

It is proposed a service will get an overall rating of:

Unsatisfactory rating: if it is given a rating of Unsatisfactory in any quality area.

Foundation/Operating rating: if it is given a rating of Foundation in any quality area.

National Quality Standard rating: if it gets a rating of National Quality Standard for all quality areas. A service will also get a National Quality Standard if the majority of its ratings are National Quality Standard and the rest are High Quality.

High Quality rating: If it gets at least four High Quality ratings with all others being National Quality Standard. Two of the High Quality ratings must be from the following quality areas:

Quality area 1. Educational program and practice;

Quality area 5. Relationships with children;

Quality area 6. Collaborative partnerships with families and communities; or

Quality area 7. Leadership and service management.

To get an **Excellent** rating, a service must achieve a High Quality rating for all quality areas and then must apply separately to the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority. NB: Final names of ratings are still subject to review.

WHEN DOES IT ALL HAPPEN?

Services will begin to be rated from January 2012. With up to 20,000 education and care services across Australia to be assessed, it may take some time for every service to have their initial assessment.

Once a service has received their initial rating, how often it happens again depends on their rating. Higher rated services will be assessed less often (e.g. approximately every three years), lower rated services assessed more often (e.g. approximately annually). Services will also be subject to ongoing monitoring (e.g. spot checks).

REVIEW OF RATING DECISION

If your service is not satisfied with your rating, you can seek a review. The National Law provides for an initial internal review by your state or territory Regulatory Authority and, if needed, a further review by a Ratings Review Panel established by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority.

PREPARING FOR ASSESSMENT

There are many things children's services can do to prepare for assessment at this stage.

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

1. Do a draft self assessment against the National Quality Standard.
2. Review your policies and practices against the National Quality Standard and the draft Regulations. (Both of these can be found at www.deewr.gov.au/EarlyChildhood/Policy_Agenda)
3. 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.

WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THE NATIONAL QUALITY FRAMEWORK ASSESSMENT AND RATINGS PROCESS?

FIND THESE AT: www.deewr.gov.au/Earlychildhood/Policy_Agenda
or www.pscalliance.org.au

Read the *Draft Assessment and Ratings Instrument* – assessors used this draft during the trial at service's site visits to record observations and evidence to support the assessment and rating. Read the *Draft Self Assessment and Quality Improvement Planning Process* document – this document was developed to explain the self-assessment process and expectations for completing a draft Quality Improvement Plan prior to the assessment visit. It also provides a template for the Quality Improvement Plan.

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.

