

Overview of the Assessment and Rating Process Development

The purpose of this paper is to alert early childhood education and care services to the latest developments in implementing the National Quality Framework and to alert them to the:

- the availability of draft documents supporting the assessment and ratings process for comment.
- the opportunity to attend information forums on the National Quality Framework, including an overview of the legislative framework and the development of the assessment and rating process against the National Quality Standard . Information on times and venues for the public forums can be found at http://www.deewr.gov.au/EarlyChildhood/Policy_Agenda/Quality/Pages/home.aspx#5

Background

On 7 December 2009 COAG signed the National Partnership Agreement on the National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care (National Partnership). A copy of which is available at the following link: http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-12-07/docs/nap_national_quality_agenda_early_childhood_education_care.pdf

Under the National Partnership, all States and Territories and the Australian government agreed to establish a jointly governed, uniform National Quality Framework (NQF) for early childhood education and care that covers long day care centre based services, preschools, family day care schemes and outside school hours care services including vacation care services.

The new NQF will replace state and territory licensing arrangements and the quality assurance process by the National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC). It was agreed that the National Quality Framework will commence on 1 January 2012.

A key milestone for implementing the NQF was achieved on 12 October 2010 with the enactment of the Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 in Victoria. The NQF is being implemented through a national applied law scheme, under which the national law is passed in a host jurisdiction (in this case Victoria) and other jurisdictions adopt the legislation by reference except Western Australia which will pass corresponding legislation.

- A copy of the Act can be downloaded from <http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/>

Developing and testing the ratings and assessment process for the National Quality Standard

One of the core elements of the NQF was to establish a national quality rating system based on the National Quality Standard. It will enable services to continuously improve the quality of service provided while providing parents with more information about the education and care provided to their child.

- Part 5 of the National Law Act provides that under the National Quality Framework, services will be assessed by the Regulatory Authority against seven quality areas, and will be given one of five rating levels for each quality area and an overall rating

The release of draft documentation about the assessment and ratings process coincides with the field testing of assessment and rating process with around 200 services across service types covered by the National Quality Framework.

This second phase of testing, builds upon an initial field test of the process with 21 long day care services during June 2010. The feedback from that field test was used to inform and revise the process and documentation for the second phase. Initial feedback indicates that assessors and services are excited by the direction in which the new assessment and rating process is moving, in particular the focus on outcomes for children and improving the standard of quality in services across Australia.

Further refinements to the draft assessment and ratings process will occur based on this phase of assessment.

The assessment and rating process

In the current phase of assessment, services are given at least three weeks to undertake a self-assessment and provide a draft Quality Improvement Plan to the regulator. The assessors will then review the Quality Improvement Plan and any other relevant information about the service such as compliance history, accreditation history (where relevant), complaints or other feedback about the service.

At the site visit, assessors will have the opportunity to observe typical practice and to talk to educators and review documents if required. The assessors will prepare a report after the visit which provides a rating for each quality area and an overall rating and describes supporting evidence for the ratings. Services will have an opportunity to comment on the report prior to its finalisation.

Documentation available for comment

1. Draft Guide to the National Quality Standard

This document provides a detail explanation of the NQS for services. It assists services to undertake their self assessment against each element of the NQS and sets out how the service may be assessed. Assessors also use this document as a reference for assessment purposes.

Prior to finalisation, the guide will be aligned with the regulations made under the *Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010* which are currently under development

2. Draft Self Assessment and Quality Improvement Planning Process document

This document provides an overview of the requirements for development of a Quality Improvement Plan and provides a template for the QIP that services may use.

3. Draft NQS Assessment and Rating Instrument

This document is used by assessors during the site visit to the service to record observations and evidence to support the assessment. It is also used as the pro-forma for completion of the post assessment report. Services are also free to use it as they undertake their self assessment.

Next Steps in the development of the ratings and assessment process

The ratings and assessment process and documentation will be evaluated based on feedback from each of the services and the wider sector. In addition the Australian Council for Educational Research is conducting a detailed analysis of the development work thus far.

Drawing on all the information from the evaluation process, final refinements will be made to the process and supporting documentation (including training of assessors). Feedback will also be used to guide the development of the sector communication and training strategy.

Feedback from the phase two assessment process will be finalised by early 2011 with a view to having a finalised assessment and rating process agreed by May 2011.

Other work underway

The development of the assessment and ratings process sits alongside a number of other projects to ensure the smooth transition to the new system on 1 January 2012.

Draft regulations are currently being developed. An exposure draft of the regulations is expected to be available for comment in late December 2010. A formal information and consultation process is planned for February 2011.

Other areas of work include the setting up of the new national Authority – the Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority, a national IT system and the development of communications and training for the sector.

Feedback

We welcome feedback on each of the documents in terms ease of use and understanding, particularly in relation to:

- The rating terminology – particularly whether ‘Operating Level’ should be changed to ‘Foundation’, and ‘High Quality’ should be changed to ‘Advanced’
- How best to structure the Guide to the National Quality Standard to take in account some service provide a single type of care (eg Outside schools hours care) while others provide integrated services.
- how we can support the sector transition to the new system.

Feedback can be emailed to ececquality@deewr.gov.au or you can contact the ECEC quality hotline on 1800 181 088

Feedback can also be posted to:

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Please provide feedback by the end of January 2011.