



NATIONAL QUALITY FRAMEWORK ASSESSMENT AND RATING PROCESS

Key to the National Quality Framework is continuous quality improvement. Authorised officers from each state and territory Regulatory Authority will be responsible for assessing and rating education and care services in their jurisdictions against the new National Quality Standard.

When does rating and assessment commence?

The first requirement of the national quality rating and assessment process is for every provider to develop a Quality Improvement Plan for each approved service.

With the new system commencing on 1 January 2012, all governments recognise that this will be a busy time for services as they engage with the new National Law and National Regulations, including the new national quality rating and assessment process.

Providers of services in existence before 1 January 2012 have until 1 May 2012 to develop their Quality Improvement Plan. The Quality Improvement Plan needs to be available on request by the Regulatory Authority. During this development time, no assessment visits will occur. From 1 January 2012, newly approved providers must submit a Quality Improvement Plan to the Regulatory Authority within 3 months of the grant of service approval.

The first assessment visits to services are expected to commence in mid-June 2012. This will give providers and services time to understand the National Quality Standard and national quality rating and assessment process, and prepare for the assessment visit.

What are the steps in the process?

The following table outlines the national quality rating and assessment process for evaluation of services against the National Quality Standard and National Regulations. It is designed to be a cooperative process with opportunities for services to discuss how they are meeting the National Quality Standard and enhancing outcomes for children.

*Note that the timeframes given in the table reflect the minimum period of time involved in each step.

Step 1 Start* Six weeks to refresh Quality Improvement Plan	Providers of services selected for assessment and rating will receive advice that the assessment and rating process has started. This will include a request to submit a Quality Improvement Plan and advice about the process. Providers will have six weeks to submit the Quality Improvement Plan to the Regulatory Authority. At the same time, the Regulatory Authority authorised officer will start an analysis of the available information about the service, including such things as the compliance history and National Childcare Accreditation Council accreditation history where relevant.
Step 2 Week 6 Notice of visit	Providers will receive advice confirming receipt of the Quality Improvement Plan and notifying the service of the date for the site visit. Providers will be informed of what will happen at the site visit.
Step 3 Week 12	The site visit occurs. Some on-the-spot feedback may be provided at this time.
Step 4 Week 15 Three weeks to comment on draft report	The provider will be sent the draft assessment report, including the proposed rating. The provider will have the opportunity to provide comment, discuss the report and seek further clarification if necessary. Providers will be given the opportunity to make minor adjustments to the service operation within specified areas and timeframes to address concerns identified at the time of the visit. If these adjustments are made, the provider's rating may improve.
Step 5 Week 18	Feedback on the report is considered by the Regulatory Authority.
Step 6 Week 20	The report is finalised and final rating determined. The report is sent to provider.

Once the report is finalised and received by a provider, the 14-day period in which a review can be requested commences.

What support will be available?

Providers and services are encouraged to become familiar with the National Law and National Regulations. A range of information material is available for:

- the National Law and National Regulations
- the process for self-assessment and developing a Quality Improvement Plan
- the national quality rating and assessment process, including expectations, responsibilities and requirements
- the National Quality Standard, including a guide to help providers to identify which practices they can, or should, improve.

Is there a Quality Improvement Plan template?

A Quality Improvement Plan template and guidance on how to prepare a Quality Improvement Plan are available.

However, providers can choose to develop their own plan (including using an existing plan), as long as the plan includes the required information and addresses all seven Quality Areas of the National Quality Standard.

When can I expect to be notified of the commencement of my rating and assessment process?

Providers will start to be notified from mid-March 2012 that the national quality rating and assessment process has commenced. The earliest site visits will start in mid-June 2012.

All services will be scheduled for an assessment during 2012–15. Priority will be given to education and care services that are currently covered by the National Childcare Accreditation Council but are not yet accredited or were due for accreditation in 2011–12.

A cross-section of service types from both centre-based and family day care services will be scheduled for the first rating and assessment visits.

How long will a rating and assessment visit take?

The duration of the rating and assessment visit will depend on a number of priorities, including:

- the approved capacity of the service
- the type of service—family day care or centre-based service
- the number of educators at the service

- the number of different age groups at the service
- whether the service is session based, such as before and after school, or provides whole-day care.

The final timeframe will be a decision for the Regulatory Authority. All services can expect that the authorised officer undertaking the assessment will have an opening and closing discussion with the person in day-to-day charge of the service, view the entire service, observe each age group catered for (for example, birth to 24 months; 25 to 36 months) or a number of sessions, observe interactions inside and outside, talk to educators and review some documentation.

How many authorised officers will visit?

In determining whether one or more authorised officers will visit, the Regulatory Authority will consider:

- the size and complexity of the service
- configuration—for example, number of discrete rooms
- the number of educators at the service
- safety issues—for example, when driving long distances, two authorised officers are required to travel together
- whether a more experienced authorised officer needs to attend to train or observe a less experienced authorised officer
- any other relevant factors.

What type of minor adjustments will a provider be able to make to a service?

Services may be given the opportunity to make minor adjustments within specified areas and timeframes to address concerns raised at the assessment visit. Guidance on what this may include will be provided in the supporting material.

Contact your state or territory Regulatory Authority for further information on rating and assessment. The contact details for your Regulatory Authority are available on the Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority’s website at www.acecqa.gov.au.