



Australian Children's
Education & Care
Quality Authority

NQF Annual Performance Report

National Quality Framework



December 2022

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Foreword from the ACECQA chair | 3 |
| Overview of the education and care sector | 4 |
| Executive summary | 6 |
| Report snapshot | 13 |
| Chapter 1 – Children’s health and safety | 14 |
| Chapter 2 – Educational program and practice | 26 |
| Chapter 3 – Children from vulnerable and disadvantaged backgrounds | 31 |
| Chapter 4 – Workforce | 35 |
| Chapter 5 – Service provider perceptions of the NQF | 46 |

Interactive versions of the charts in this report are available at
[acecqa.gov.au/APR](https://www.acecqa.gov.au/APR)



Australian Children's
Education & Care
Quality Authority

ACECQA acknowledges the Gadigal peoples of the Eora Nation, the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which ACECQA is located. We recognise the unique status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as the First Australians, including their role in the education and care of children. We pay our respects to the past, present and emerging Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia.

Suggested citation: Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) (2022), *National Quality Framework Annual Performance Report*, ACECQA, Sydney.

Foreword from the ACECQA Chair

I am pleased to present the 2022 National Quality Framework (NQF) Annual Performance Report on behalf of the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA).

This year marks several important milestones and achievements for the NQF. In January, we celebrated the 10 year anniversary of our regulatory system – an internationally recognised, integrated and outcomes-based framework for the children's education and care sector.

This year, for the first time, 88% of services are rated Meeting National Quality Standard (NQS) or above. This result is even more impressive when you consider it was only 57% of services when quality ratings were first published in 2013.

It is worth remembering the complex system of overlapping regulatory and quality assurance schemes that preceded the NQF and the significant reform the NQF represented when it was introduced in 2012. Governments committed to work together to provide better educational and developmental outcomes for children and, 10 years on, this reform is yielding results.

This progress could not be achieved without the talents, hard work and dedication of hundreds of thousands of service providers, teachers, educators and other service staff.

Governments, ACECQA and sector stakeholders have long recognised the need for a more comprehensive and collective approach to support our sector workforce, which faces several challenges that have been exacerbated by the ongoing impact of COVID-19.

I am pleased that, following the release of the National Workforce Strategy (2022-2031) last year, the Shaping Our Future: Implementation and Evaluation Plan has been published to address these critical issues.

This year, we also conducted the sixth of our surveys examining approved providers' perceptions of the NQF. While support for the NQF remains very high, the level of burden associated with the administrative requirements of the NQF reported by some providers is something ACECQA and governments will work to address.

On behalf of ACECQA, I would like to acknowledge our government partners and again recognise and thank the service providers, teachers, educators and other staff in our sector who continue to deliver vital education, care and support to children and families in often challenging circumstances.

Annette Whitehead
ACECQA Chair

Overview of the education and care sector

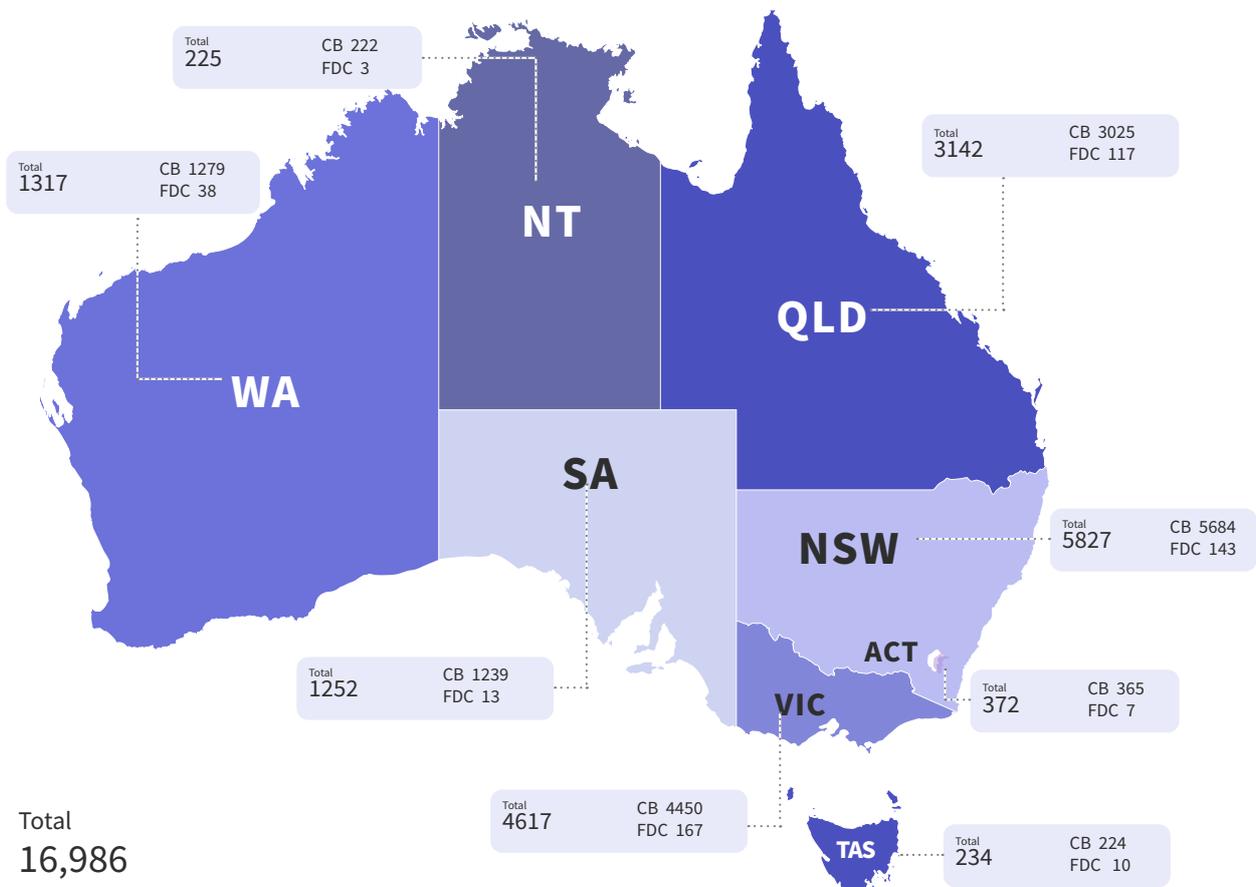
As at 30 June 2022:

- almost 7300 providers are approved to operate children's education and care services under the National Quality Framework (NQF), with 80% of these approved to operate a single service
- in total, providers are approved to operate around 17,000 services, including:
 - » 8556 long day care services (50% of approved services)
 - » 4856 outside school hours care services (29%)
 - » 3074 preschools/kindergartens (18%)
 - » 498 family day care services (3%)
- the 15 largest providers in the country each operate more than 100 services, for a combined total of around 3600 services
- 'private for profit' providers operate more than two-thirds (68%) of long day care services, 62% of family day care services and half (50%) of outside school hours care services, but only 1% of preschools/kindergartens
- half (50%) of preschools/kindergartens are operated by 'private not for profit community managed' providers, with more than a fifth (22%) being 'state/territory and local government managed'
- four-fifths (80%) of services are located in the three most populous states, with more than a third (34%) in New South Wales, more than a quarter (27%) in Victoria and just under a fifth (18%) in Queensland
- almost three-quarters (71%) of services are located in major cities, with just over a quarter (26%) in inner and outer regional Australia, and 2% in remote and very remote Australia
- more than 15,300 services have a published quality rating against the National Quality Standard (NQS), with 88% rated Meeting NQS or above
- of the roughly 1900 services rated Working Towards NQS, more than a third (36%) received the rating due to not meeting only one to three elements of quality
- more than 4100 services are rated Exceeding NQS, with around 1400 services (34%) receiving a rating of Exceeding NQS for all seven quality areas.

Long day care and outside school hours care services, and preschools/kindergartens are collectively referred to as centre-based services.

Tasmanian preschools/kindergartens and most preschools/kindergartens in Western Australia are outside the scope of the NQF, as are other services that are not regulated under the Education and Care Services National Law, for example occasional care services.

Sector profile



| | | |
|---|---|-----------------|
| Total Centre-based (CB) 16,488 (97%) | Total Family day care (FDC) 498 (3%) | Total 16,986 |
|---|---|-----------------|

| Provider management type | Number of services | Proportion of services |
|--|--------------------|------------------------|
| Private for profit | 8636 | 51% |
| Private not-for-profit community managed | 3418 | 20% |
| Private not-for-profit other organisations | 2297 | 14% |
| State/Territory government managed | 1206 | 7% |
| State/Territory government schools | 702 | 4% |
| Independent schools | 496 | 3% |
| Catholic schools | 216 | 1% |
| Not stated/Other | 15 | 0% |
| Total | 16,986 | 100% |

Executive summary

The National Quality Framework (NQF) provides a national approach to the regulation of children's education and care services across Australia. It represents a nationwide commitment to quality education and care for our youngest citizens.

The NQF aims to ensure that all children attending approved services receive educational and developmental benefits, including positive impacts to their health and wellbeing. Other important objectives include promoting continuous improvement in service quality, and improving public knowledge and access to information about service quality.

Governments regulate almost 17,000 services under the NQF, with almost 1.4 million children attending services for anywhere from a handful of irregular hours to more than 50 hours every week.

Making the decision to use an education and care service, and choosing which service to use, can be stressful, particularly for new parents and families who have recently moved to Australia.

The NQF provides assurance and guidance to parents and carers. The *Education and Care Services National Law* and National Regulations govern the minimum standards and requirements that all providers of regulated services must meet. There is also a National Quality Standard (NQS) used by all state and territory governments to assess and rate services.

In 2021/22, education and care service providers, early childhood teachers and educators have continued to respond and adapt to the ongoing and variable impact of COVID-19.

Most of the data used in this report is sourced from the National Quality Agenda IT System (NQA ITS), as at 30 June 2022. The data is also published on ACECQA's website.

Quality over time

Figure 1 shows that the proportion of children’s education and care services rated [Meeting NQS](#) or above by state and territory regulatory authorities has increased every year since the NQF was introduced, both at the overall quality rating level and for each of the seven quality areas.

As at 30 June 2022, 88% of services are rated Meeting NQS or above – an achievement driven by the efforts of hundreds of thousands of service providers, teachers, educators and other service staff.

Figure 1: Proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above by overall rating and quality area

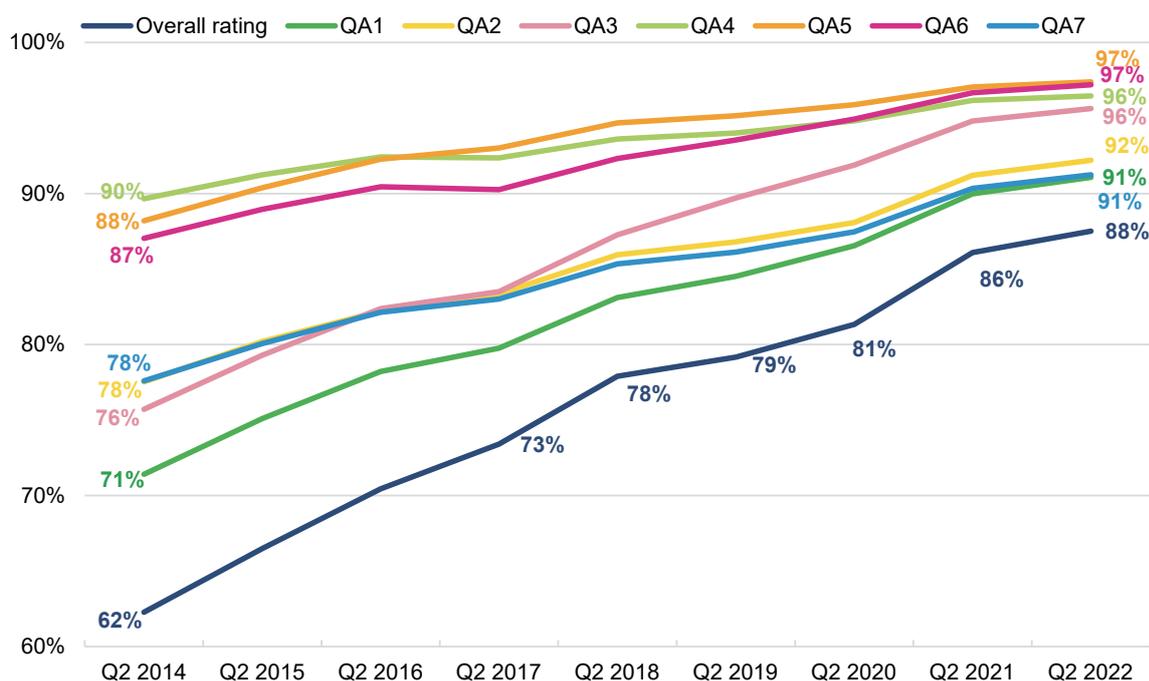


Table 1 examines those services that have been reassessed by state and territory regulatory authorities, and presents the previous overall ratings alongside the reassessed overall ratings.

More than two-thirds (67%) of services rated Working Towards NQS improved their overall quality rating at reassessment, while almost one in six (16%) services rated Meeting NQS improved their overall quality rating to Exceeding NQS.

Table 1: Overall ratings before and after reassessments, as at 30 June 2022¹

| | | Rating after reassessment | | | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------|-------------|---------------|---------------|
| | | Significant Improvement Required | Working Towards NQS | Meeting NQS | Exceeding NQS | Total |
| Rating before reassessment | Significant Improvement Required | 19 | 73 | 15 | 0 | 107 |
| | Working Towards NQS | 47 | 2030 | 3539 | 761 | 6377 |
| | Meeting NQS | 5 | 851 | 3253 | 777 | 4886 |
| | Exceeding NQS | 2 | 312 | 1296 | 1605 | 3215 |
| | Total | 73 | 3266 | 8103 | 3143 | 14,585 |

| | | Rating after reassessment | | | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------|-------------|---------------|------------------|
| | | Significant Improvement Required | Working Towards NQS | Meeting NQS | Exceeding NQS | Improvement rate |
| Rating before reassessment | Significant Improvement Required | 18% | 68% | 14% | 0% | 82% |
| | Working Towards NQS | 1% | 32% | 55% | 12% | 67% |
| | Meeting NQS | 0% | 17% | 67% | 16% | 16% |
| | Exceeding NQS | 0% | 10% | 40% | 50% | - |

A new version of the NQS came into effect from 1 February 2018. In addition to reducing the number of quality standards and elements, the 2018 NQS introduced a new approach to calculating the Exceeding rating and new requirements for the rating to be achieved.

As a result, it became more challenging to achieve a rating of Exceeding NQS from this point onwards.

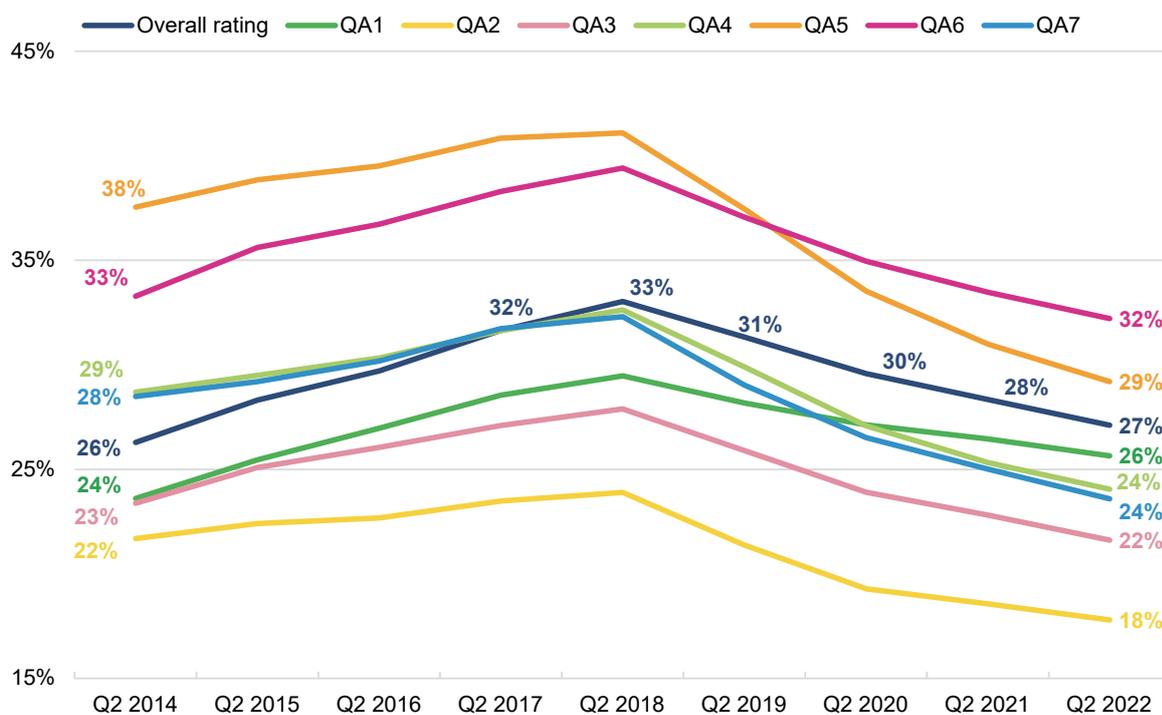
¹ Reassessments include the following processes described in the National Law:

- i. Partial reassessment and re-rating requested by provider; ii. Partial reassessment and re-rating instigated by the regulatory authority;
- iii. Full reassessment and re-rating requested by provider; iv. Full reassessment and re-rating instigated by the regulatory authority.

Figure 2 highlights the higher bar for achieving Exceeding NQS, with the proportion of services rated Exceeding NQS decreasing since 2018, at both the overall quality rating level and for each of the seven quality areas.

ACECQA continues to provide guidance and support regarding the [Exceeding NQS](#) rating, including service type specific case studies.

Figure 2: Proportion of services rated Exceeding NQS or above by overall rating and quality area



01



CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND SAFETY

- The National Quality Framework aims to ensure the health and safety of all children attending approved education and care services. Service providers are responsible for this fundamental objective under the Education and Care Services National Law and National Regulations.
- The proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above for children's health and safety (Quality Area 2 of the National Quality Standard) continues to increase year on year. As at 30 June 2022, it is 92%, up from 91% a year ago and 88% two years ago.
- Almost three-quarters (73%) of family day care services are rated Meeting NQS or above for children's health and safety – the highest proportion for more than seven years.
- The most frequently breached sections and regulations of the National Law and Regulations continue to relate to:
 - » the protection of children from harm and hazards (Section 167)
 - » supervision of children (Section 165)
 - » emergency and evacuation procedures (Regulation 97)
 - » the upkeep of premises, furniture and equipment (Regulation 103).

02



EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM AND PRACTICE

- Improving educational and developmental outcomes for children attending education and care services is one of the six objectives of the National Quality Framework.
- The proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above for educational program and practice (Quality Area 1 of the National Quality Standard) continues to increase year on year. As at 30 June 2022, it is 91%, up from 90% a year ago and 87% two years ago.
- More than two-thirds (69%) of family day care services are rated Meeting NQS or above for educational program and practice – the highest proportion since quality ratings began in mid-2012.
- Of all 15 standards of the NQS, assessment and planning (Standard 1.3) remains the most challenging, with the two most challenging elements of quality within it:
 - » Assessment and planning cycle (Element 1.3.1)
 - » Critical reflection (Element 1.3.2).
- There is a high degree of correlation between performance against educational program and practice, and leadership (Standard 7.2), reflecting the importance of effective leadership that builds and promotes a positive organisational culture and professional learning community.

03



CHILDREN FROM VULNERABLE AND DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS

- Children from more disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to be developmentally vulnerable. They also receive the greatest benefits from attending high quality education and care.
- There has been steady year-on-year improvement in the proportion of children’s education and care services in the most disadvantaged areas of Australia rated Meeting NQS or above – from 76% in 2019 to 84% in 2022.
- However, there remain marked differences in the proportions of services rated Meeting and particularly Exceeding NQS. As at 30 June 2022, almost one-third (31%) of services in the most advantaged areas are rated Exceeding NQS, compared with less than one-quarter (23%) in the most disadvantaged areas.
- At the quality area level, the greatest differences in the proportion of services rated Exceeding NQS in the most advantaged and disadvantaged areas relate to staffing arrangements (Quality Area 4), and educational program and practice (Quality Area 1).
- The Australian Early Development Census provides evidence to support the critical work of the children’s education and care sector in meeting the unique needs of children and their families and developing programs and practice that can improve their developmental and educational outcomes. These include:
 - » building community partnerships
 - » raising awareness of the importance of early childhood development
 - » developing initiatives to support children through understanding the degree and concentration of developmental vulnerability and assessing their needs.

04



WORKFORCE

- Quality outcomes for children depend upon a highly skilled, well supported and professionally recognised workforce.
- As at 30 June 2022, 96% of services are rated Meeting NQS or above for staffing arrangements (Quality Area 4 of the National Quality Standard).
- Most (91%) family day care services are rated Meeting NQS or above for staffing arrangements – the highest proportion for more than seven years.
- As at 30 June 2022, 15% of long day care services hold a staffing waiver, mostly relating to temporary issues meeting early childhood teacher staffing requirements.
- In October 2021, Education Ministers approved the publication of *Shaping Our Future: A ten year strategy to ensure a sustainable, high quality children’s education and care workforce 2022-2031*.
- A complementary implementation and evaluation plan outlining the steps that will be taken to progress, monitor and review the strategy’s 21 actions was published in September 2022.

05



SERVICE PROVIDER PERCEPTIONS OF THE NQF

- One of the objectives of the National Quality Framework is to reduce the regulatory and administrative burden for children’s education and care services.
- Since 2013, ACECQA has conducted six surveys examining approved providers’ perceptions of the NQF.
- In 2022, support for the NQF remained very high among approved providers, at 97%.
- Despite this, half of respondents reported high levels of overall burden associated with the administrative requirements of the NQF.
- Many survey respondents identified quality assessment and rating visits, and quality improvement plans as highly burdensome. Approaching two-thirds of these respondents also indicated that their benefits do not outweigh the burden they create.
- Staff hours/time, diverting attention from other activities, and frustration or stress were frequently cited as reasons for both quality assessment and rating visits, and quality improvement plans being perceived as highly burdensome.
- When asked what would reduce the burden of ongoing administrative requirements under the NQF, survey respondents suggested:
 - » reduced paperwork and documentation requirements
 - » streamlined guidance
 - » increased sector support and collaboration.

Report snapshot

The NQF aims to ensure the health and safety of all children attending approved education and care services

More than 90% of services are rated Meeting NQS or above for educational program and practice

More services than ever in the most disadvantaged areas of Australia are rated Meeting NQS or above

Quality outcomes for children depend upon a highly skilled, well supported and professionally recognised workforce

Support for the NQF remains very high among approved providers of services

Chapter 1

Children's health and safety



Overview

The Education and Care Services National Law and National Regulations govern the minimum standards and requirements that all providers must meet to operate services under the National Quality Framework.

These include several explicit health and safety requirements, such as hygiene and safe food practices; incident, injury, trauma and illness policies and procedures; risk assessments; and emergency and evacuation procedures.

Quality Area 2 (Children's health and safety) of the National Quality Standard reflects the principle that children have a right to be protected and kept safe. Adequate supervision and reasonable precautions to protect children from harm and hazard are important factors in promoting children's safety, health and wellbeing.

Children's health and safety quality ratings

Figure 1.1 compares performance against Quality Area 2 over time, showing the proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above.

As at 30 June 2022, 92% of services are rated Meeting NQS or above – the highest proportion since the introduction of the NQF in 2012.

Figure 1.1: Proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above for children's health and safety

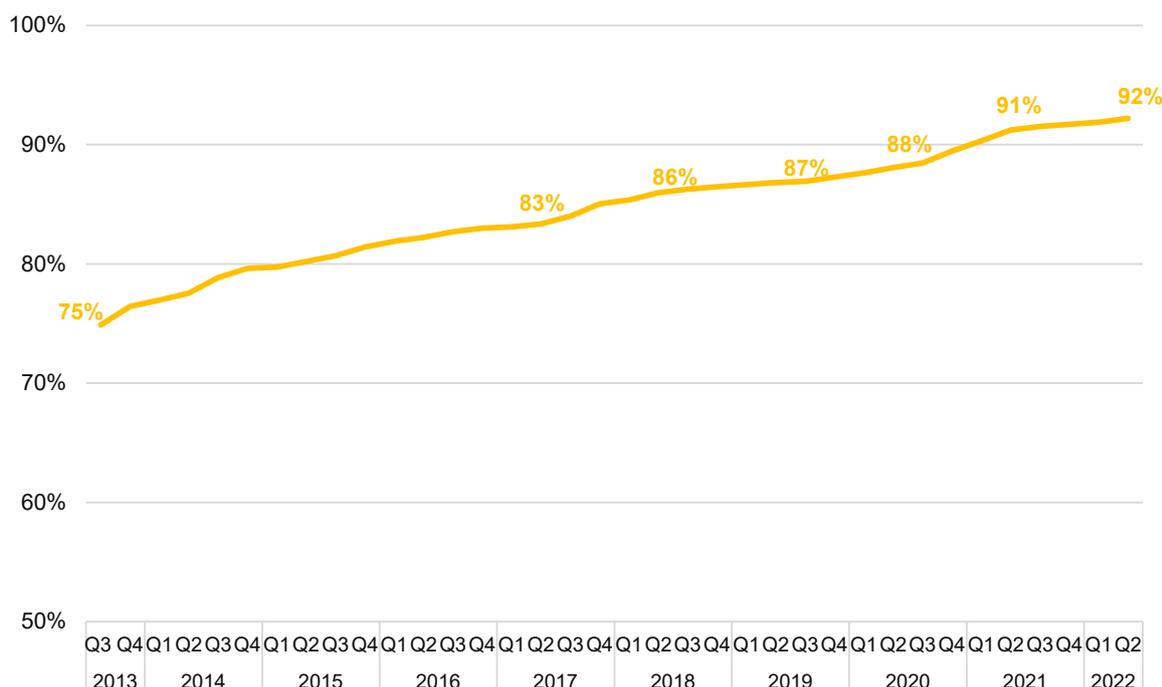


Figure 1.2 shows that preschools/kindergartens continue to have the highest proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above, followed by long day care, outside school hours care and family day care services.

While family day care services continue to have the lowest proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above, almost three-quarters (73%) are rated Meeting NQS or above – the highest proportion for more than seven years.

Figure 1.2: Proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above for children’s health and safety, by service type

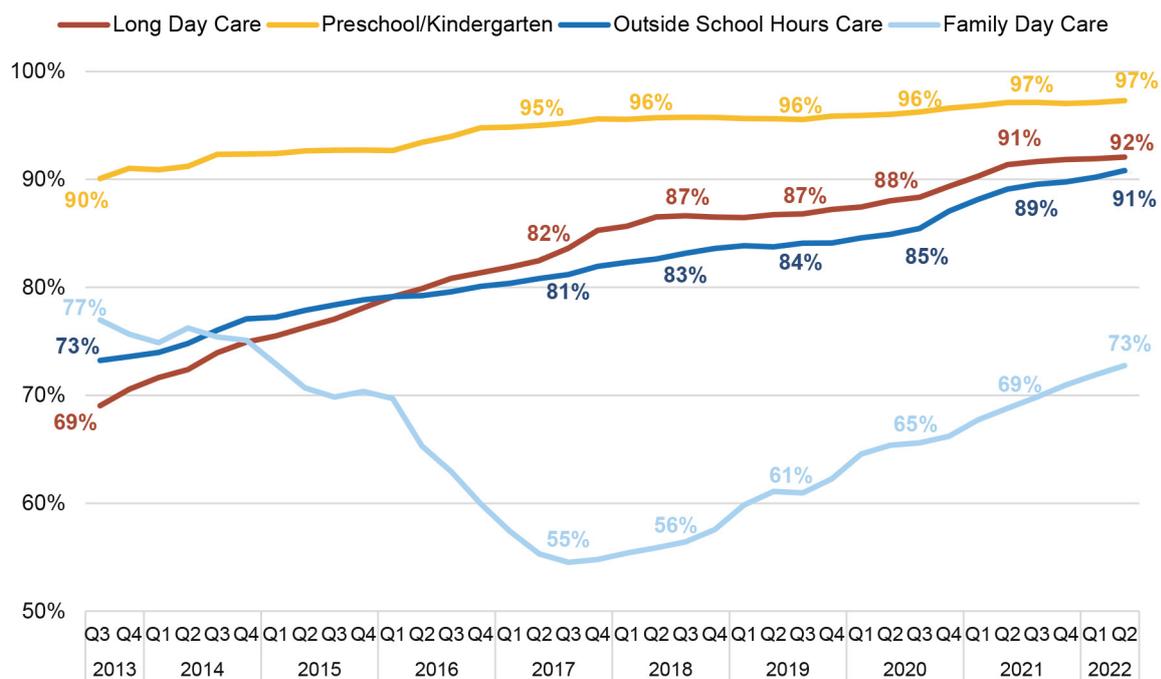
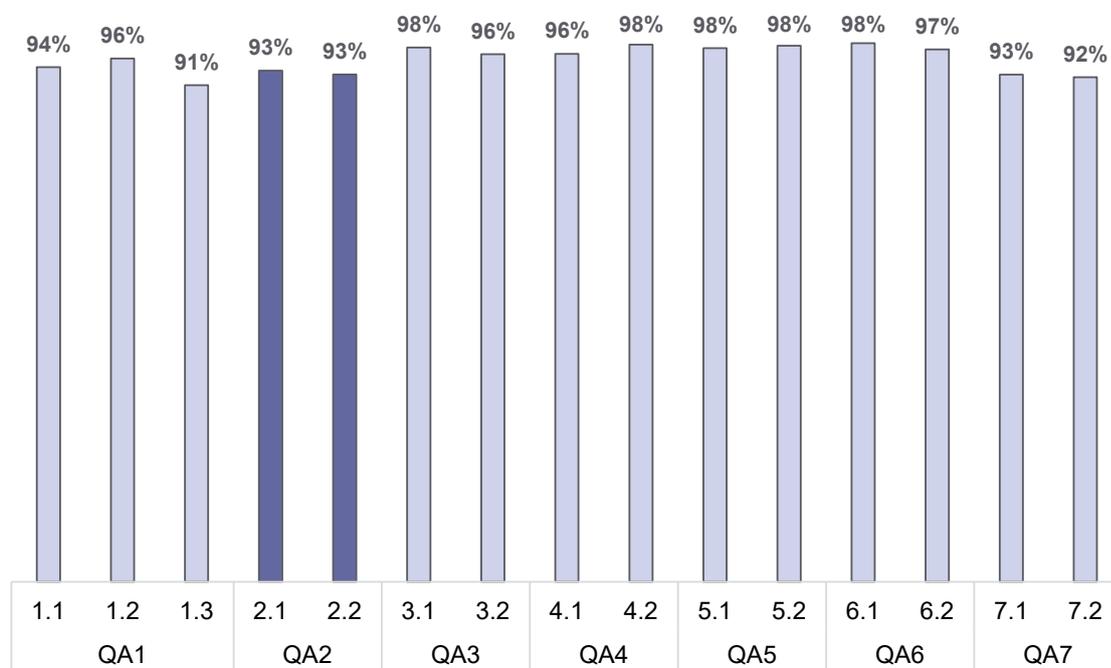


Figure 1.3 shows health (Standard 2.1) and safety (Standard 2.2) continue to be more challenging than most other standards of the NQS.

As at 30 June 2022, 93% of services are rated Meeting NQS or above for the two standards, making them the fourth and fifth most challenging of the 15 standards.

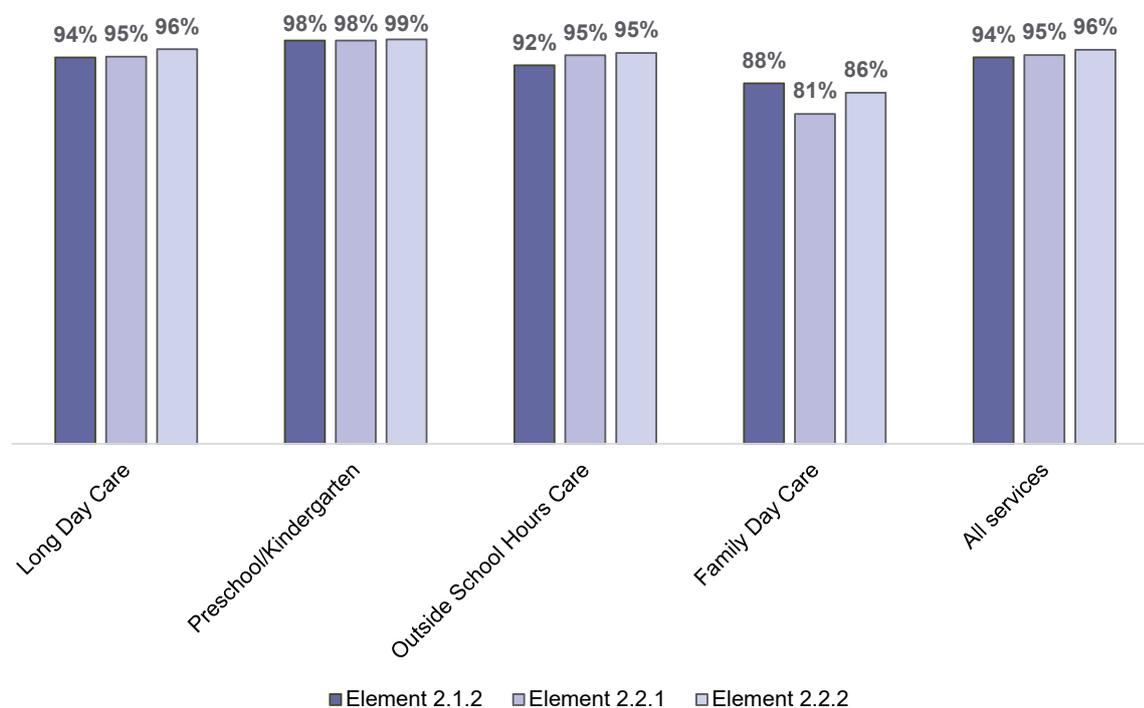
Figure 1.3: Proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above for each standard of the NQS, as at 30 June 2022



Of the 40 elements of the NQS, health practices and procedures (Element 2.1.2) has the fourth highest number of services assessed as Not Met, with supervision (Element 2.2.1) having the sixth highest, and incident and emergency management (Element 2.2.2) having the ninth highest.

Figure 1.4 shows the proportion of services assessed as Met for these three elements of quality.

Figure 1.4: Proportion of services assessed as Met for health practices and procedures (Element 2.1.2), supervision (Element 2.2.1) and incident and emergency management (Element 2.2.2), as at 30 June 2022



Serious incidents

Approved providers are required to notify state and territory regulatory authorities of serious incidents that occur at their services, such as child injury, trauma or illness that requires medical attention or hospital attendance.

Making robust judgments on comparative rates of reported serious incidents, for example across service types or financial years, is challenging. In common with other sectors, dealing with the likely 'over' and 'under' reporting of serious incidents is particularly difficult.

For example, an approved provider might report a relatively high number of serious incidents because of one or more of the following factors:

- Robust and comprehensive reporting mechanisms
- Overly cautious reporting procedures
- Unique child cohorts and service circumstances
- Lack of understanding of what constitutes a serious incident
- Poor health and safety standards.

Equally, an approved provider might report a relatively low number of serious incidents because of one or more of the following factors:

- Exceptional health and safety standards
- Lax reporting procedures
- Lack of understanding of what constitutes a serious incident
- Restrictive learning and development opportunities for children.

Table 1.1 shows that incidents involving injury, trauma or illness continue to account for around 80% of all reported serious incidents.

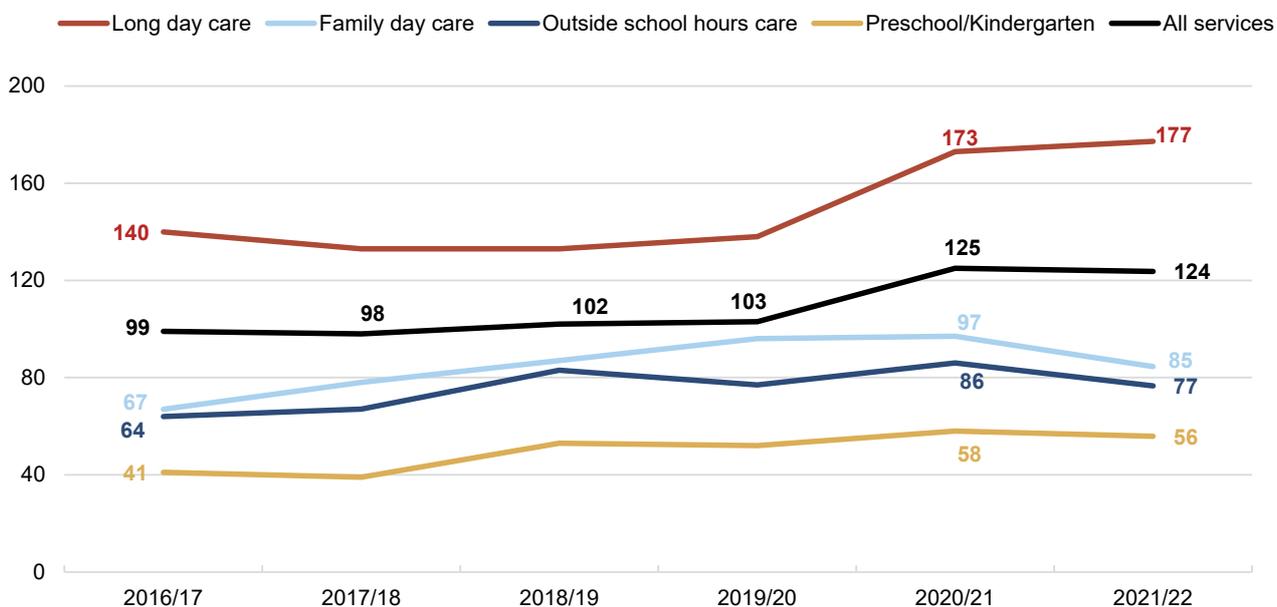
Table 1.1: Proportion of reported serious incidents by incident type

| Incident type | % of all reported serious incidents | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | 2020/21 | 2021/22 |
| Injury/Trauma/Illness | 84.3% | 81.3% | 79.1% | 78.6% | 79.9% | 78.1% |
| Emergency services attended | 9.0% | 10.4% | 12.0% | 12.9% | 11.5% | 12.5% |
| Child missing or unaccounted for | 5.5% | 6.6% | 7.2% | 7.0% | 7.2% | 7.9% |
| Child locked in/out of the service | 0.9% | 1.3% | 1.3% | 1.2% | 1.2% | 1.3% |
| Child taken away or removed | 0.3% | 0.4% | 0.4% | 0.3% | 0.3% | 0.2% |

Figure 1.5 shows that in 2021/22 there was a rate of 124 reported serious incidents per 100 approved services, slightly lower than the rate of 125 in 2020/21.

Long day care services continue to report a much higher rate of serious incidents compared to other service types. This is to be expected given they have more children attending for longer periods of time, with these children also often being younger.

Figure 1.5: Rate of reported serious incidents per 100 approved services²

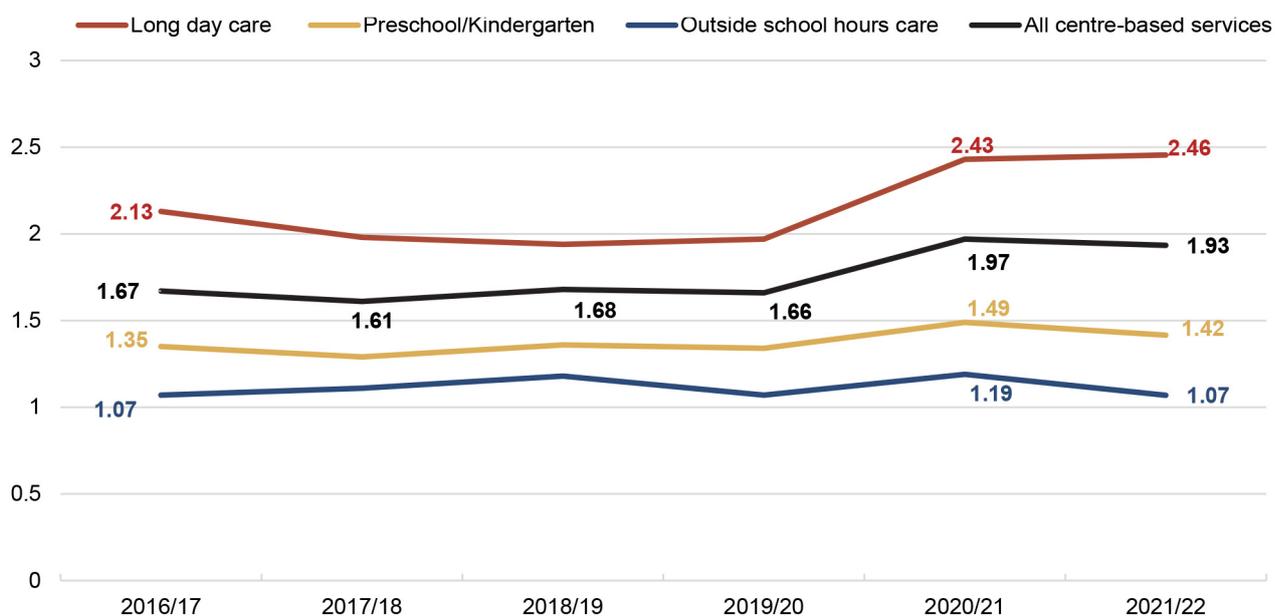


² Rate is calculated by dividing the number of serious incidents during the financial year by the number of approved services as at 30 June (the final day of that financial year), multiplied by 100.

Figure 1.6 shows that in 2021/22 there was a rate of 1.93 reported centre-based service serious incidents per 100 approved places, slightly lower than the rate of 1.97 in 2020/21.

Long day care services again have a much higher rate of reported serious incidents per 100 approved places compared to other centre-based service types. Calculating rates based on approved places rather than approved services may be more robust and meaningful, as it goes some way to accounting for relative service size.

Figure 1.6: Rate of reported centre-based service serious incidents per 100 approved places^{3 4}



It is important to note that neither approach for estimating a rate of reported serious incidents (using number of approved services or number of approved places) accounts for the age of children or the length of time they attend a children’s education and care service.

³ Rate is calculated by dividing the number of serious incidents during the financial year by the number of approved places as at 30 June (the final day of that financial year), multiplied by 100.

⁴ Excludes family day care services as the number of approved places is not recorded for this service type.

Figure 1.7 shows that half of all approved services reported one or more serious incidents in 2021/22. Almost two-thirds (63%) of long day care services reported one or more serious incidents for the second consecutive year.

Figure 1.7: Proportion of services reporting one or more serious incidents

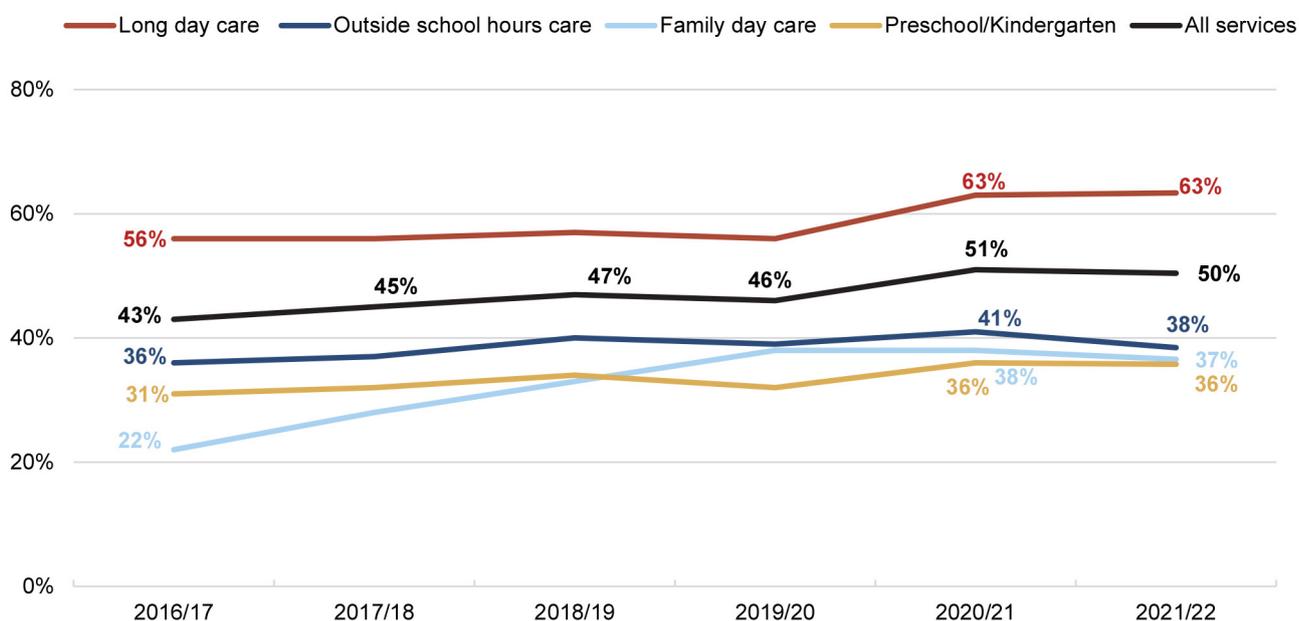


Table 1.2 shows that services with higher quality ratings are consistently more likely to report serious incidents than those with lower quality ratings. In 2021/22, services rated Exceeding NQS had a rate of 133 reported serious incidents per 100 approved services, compared to a rate of 128 for services rated Meeting NQS, and a rate of 106 for services rated Working Towards NQS.

Table 1.2: Rate of reported serious incidents by overall quality rating

| Rating (at end of financial year) | Rate per 100 approved services | | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | 2020/21 | 2021/22 |
| Working Towards NQS | 86 | 93 | 93 | 112 | 106 |
| Meeting NQS | 99 | 102 | 107 | 127 | 128 |
| Exceeding NQS | 114 | 113 | 110 | 136 | 133 |
| All services (including unrated) | 98 | 102 | 103 | 125 | 124 |

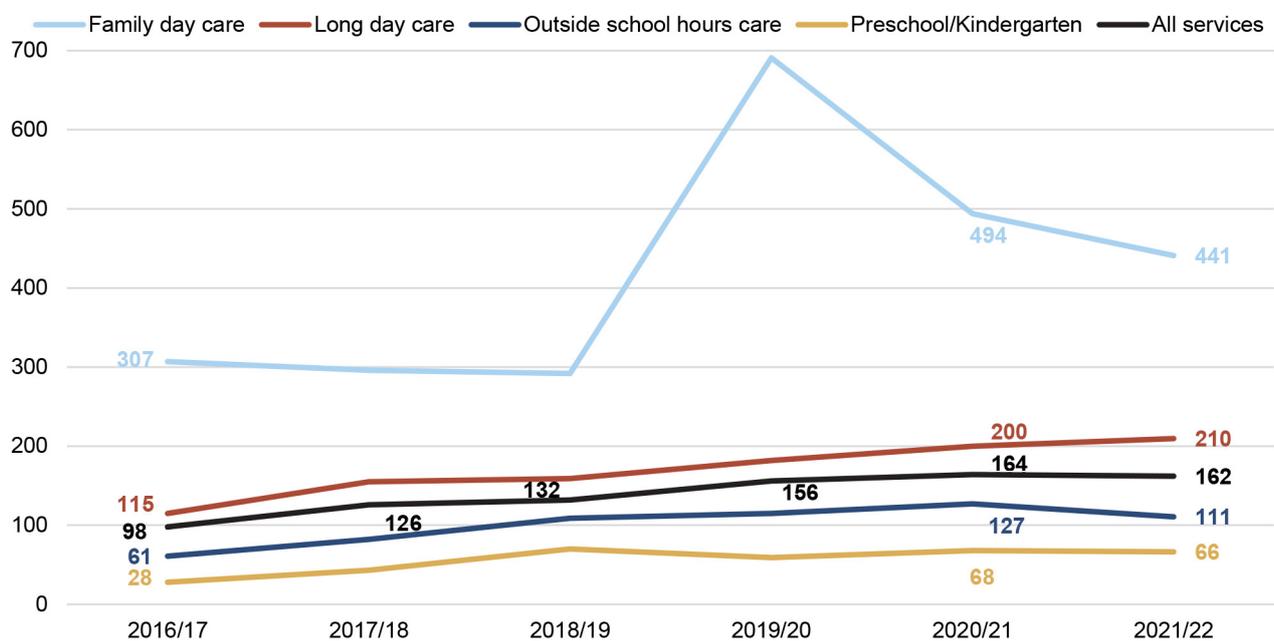
Confirmed breaches

A 'confirmed breach' occurs when a state or territory regulatory authority finds that relevant legislation, regulations or conditions at a children's education and care service have not been abided by.

Not all confirmed breaches represent a risk to children's health and safety, and the degree of risk varies according to the individual circumstances of the breach. For example, a breach may relate to a failure to display prescribed information at the service premises. It is also important to note that multiple confirmed breaches can be the result of a single event.

Figure 1.8 shows that in 2021/22 there was a rate of 162 confirmed breaches per 100 approved services, slightly down from a rate of 164 for 2020/21.

Figure 1.8: Rate of confirmed breaches⁵



⁵ Rate is calculated by dividing the number of confirmed breaches during the financial year by the number of approved services as at 30 June (the final day of that financial year), multiplied by 100.

Figure 1.9 shows that 40% of approved services had one or more confirmed breaches in 2021/22, with long day care (50%) and family day care (40%) services continuing to have the highest proportions.

Figure 1.9: Proportion of services with one or more confirmed breaches

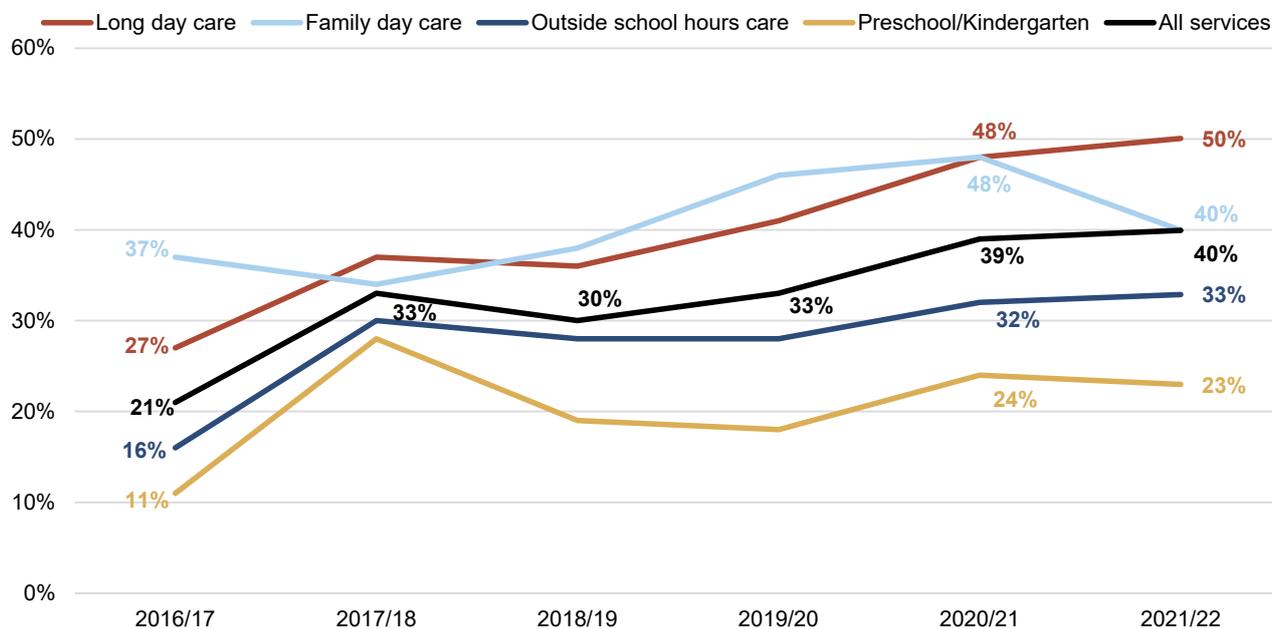


Table 1.3 shows that services with higher quality ratings are consistently less likely to have confirmed breaches than those with lower quality ratings. In 2021/22, services rated Exceeding NQS had a rate of 91 confirmed breaches per 100 approved services, compared to a rate of 160 for services rated Meeting NQS, and a rate of 327 for services rated Working Towards NQS.

Table 1.3: Rate of confirmed breaches by overall quality rating

| Rating (at end of financial year) | Rate per 100 approved services | | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | 2020/21 | 2021/22 |
| Working Towards NQS | 255 | 227 | 333 | 388 | 327 |
| Meeting NQS | 108 | 119 | 118 | 142 | 160 |
| Exceeding NQS | 64 | 71 | 70 | 88 | 91 |
| All services (including unrated) | 125 | 132 | 156 | 164 | 162 |

Table 1.4 shows that the following two sections of the National Law continue to be the most frequently breached:

- The approved provider, nominated supervisor and family day care educator must ensure that every reasonable precaution is taken to protect children from any harm and any hazard likely to cause injury (Section 167)
- The approved provider, nominated supervisor and family day care educator must ensure all children being educated and cared for by the service are adequately supervised at all times (Section 165).

These two sections of the National Law are central to ensuring children’s health and safety. They are also interrelated in that providing adequate supervision significantly contributes to protecting children from harm and hazard. The broad scope of Section 167 also makes it relevant in a wide range of circumstances.

Table 1.4: Most frequently breached sections of the National Law

| Section | Offence | % of all confirmed breaches of the National Law | | | | | |
|---------|---|---|---------|---------|---------|---------|----------------|
| | | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | 2020/21 | 2021/22 |
| 167 | Failure to protect children from harm and hazards | 30% | 29% | 28% | 29% | 29% | 31% |
| 165 | Inadequate supervision of children | 16% | 21% | 20% | 19% | 19% | 22% |
| 172 | Failure to display prescribed information | 7% | 7% | 6% | 6% | 10% | 9% |
| 174 | Failure to notify certain information to the regulatory authority | 10% | 9% | 8% | 7% | 9% | 9% |

Table 1.5 shows that the following two regulations of the National Regulations continue to be the most frequently breached:

- Emergency and evacuation procedures (Regulation 97)
- Premises, furniture and equipment to be safe, clean and in good repair (Regulation 103).

Issues relating to emergency and evacuation procedures that have led to confirmed breaches include:

- lack of documentation for emergency and evacuation rehearsals
- missing or inadequate emergency and evacuation floor plan and instructions, or a failure to prominently display the plan and instructions
- failure to rehearse emergency and evacuation procedures.

Table 1.5: Most frequently breached regulations of the National Regulations

| Reg | Requirement | % of all confirmed breaches of the National Regulations | | | | | |
|-----|--|---|---------|---------|---------|---------|----------------|
| | | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | 2020/21 | 2021/22 |
| 97 | Emergency and evacuation procedures | 7% | 10% | 11% | 13% | 13% | 13% |
| 103 | Premises, furniture and equipment to be safe, clean and in good repair | 11% | 10% | 9% | 9% | 10% | 12% |
| 170 | Policies and procedures to be followed | 5% | 5% | 5% | 5% | 6% | 8% |
| 147 | Staff members (required information and evidence of qualifications and training) | 4% | 5% | 6% | 5% | 5% | 4% |
| 173 | Prescribed information to be displayed | 5% | 5% | 5% | 4% | 3% | 4% |

Chapter 2

Educational program and practice



Overview

There is strong evidence high quality education and care improves a child’s wellbeing and future cognitive, physical, social and emotional outcomes. The impact is greatest for children experiencing economic disadvantage or disability, and for children from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.⁶

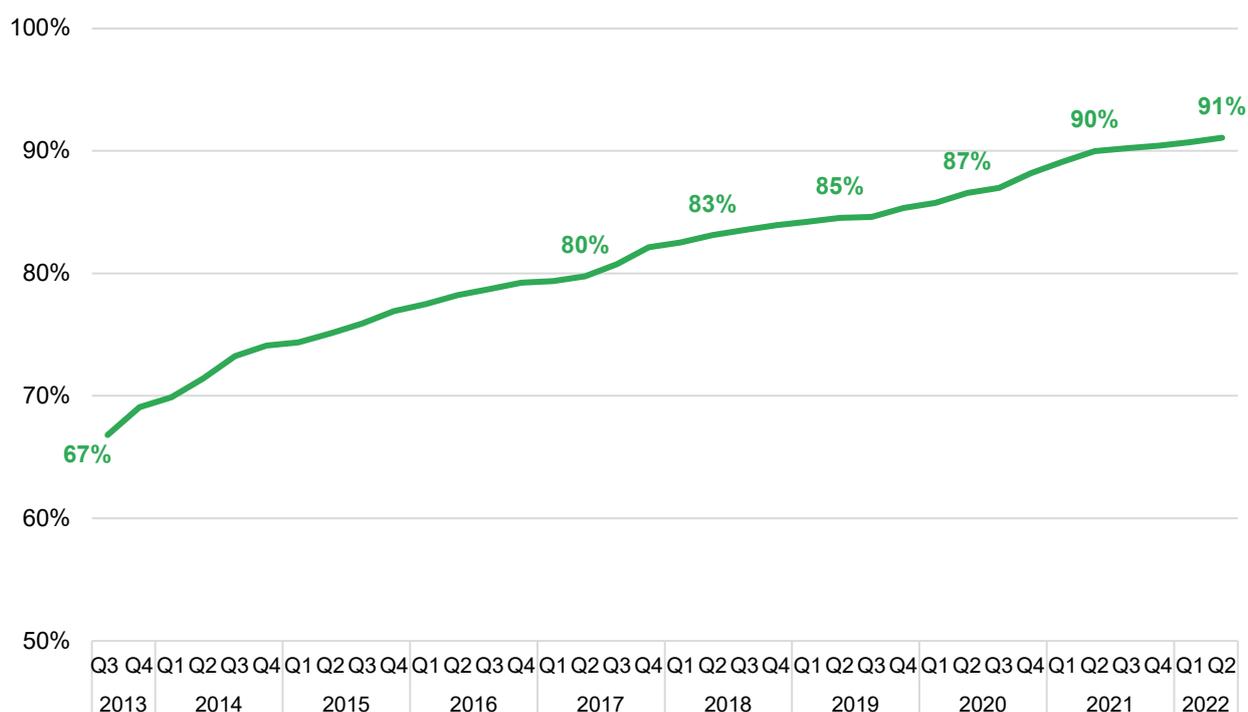
Quality Area 1 (Educational program and practice) of the National Quality Standard focuses on practices that support and promote children’s development and learning.

Educational program and practice quality ratings

Figure 2.1 compares performance against Quality Area 1 over time, showing the proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above.

As at 30 June 2022, 91% of services are rated Meeting NQS or above – the highest proportion since the introduction of the NQF in 2012.

Figure 2.1: Proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above for educational program and practice



⁶ OECD (2021), [Measuring What Matters for Child Well-being and Policies](#), OECD Publishing, Paris.

Figure 2.2 shows that preschools/kindergartens continue to have the highest proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above, followed by long day care, outside school hours care and family day care services.

While family day care services continue to have the lowest proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above, more than two-thirds (69%) are rated Meeting NQS or above – the highest proportion to date.

Figure 2.2: Proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above for educational program and practice, by service type

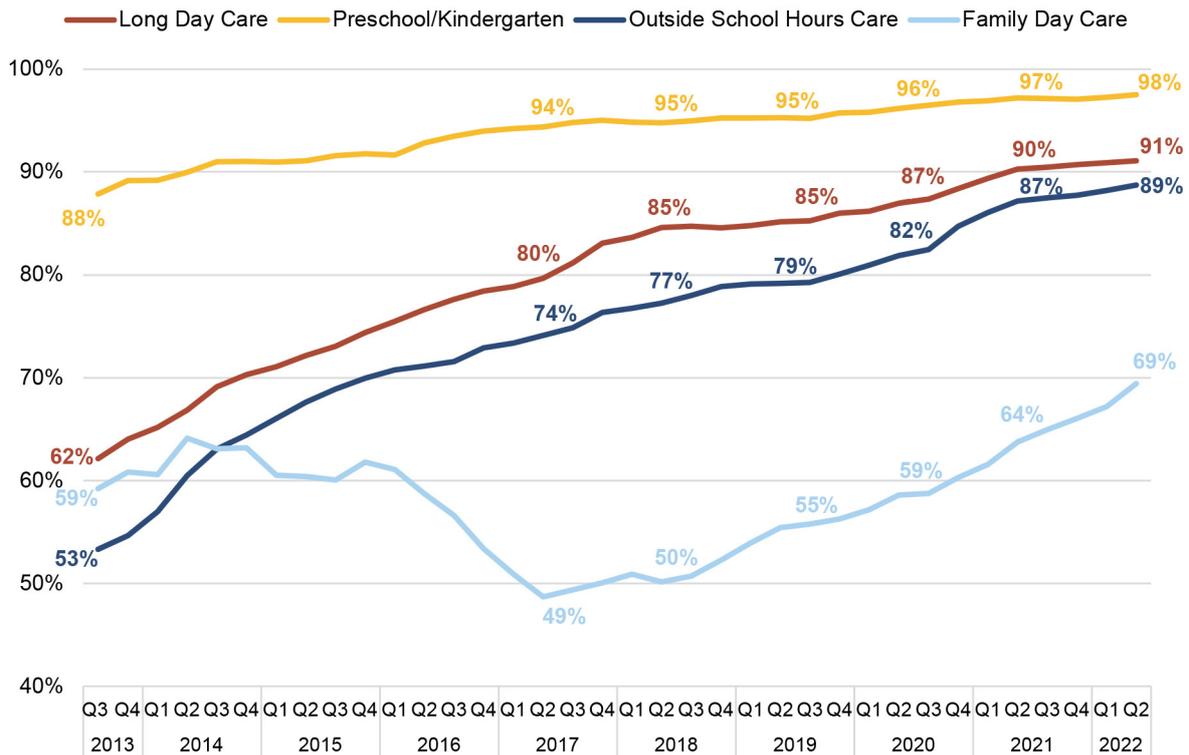
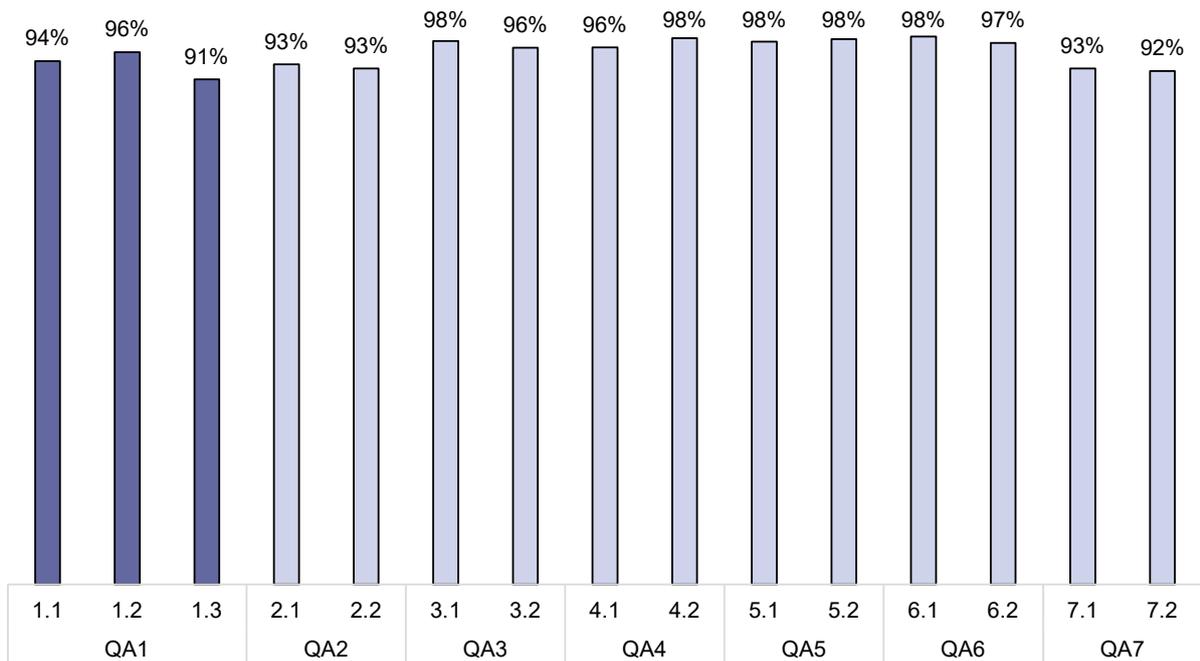


Figure 2.3 shows that the three standards within Quality Area 1 continue to be more challenging than most other standards of the NQS.

As at 30 June 2022, 91% of services are rated Meeting NQS or above for assessment and planning (Standard 1.3), 94% for educational program (Standard 1.1) and 96% for educational practice (Standard 1.2), making them the first, sixth and seventh most challenging of the 15 standards.

State and territory regulatory authorities and ACECQA continue to produce a number of resources for service leaders to assist them in [meeting the NQS](#), with an emphasis on Quality Area 1.

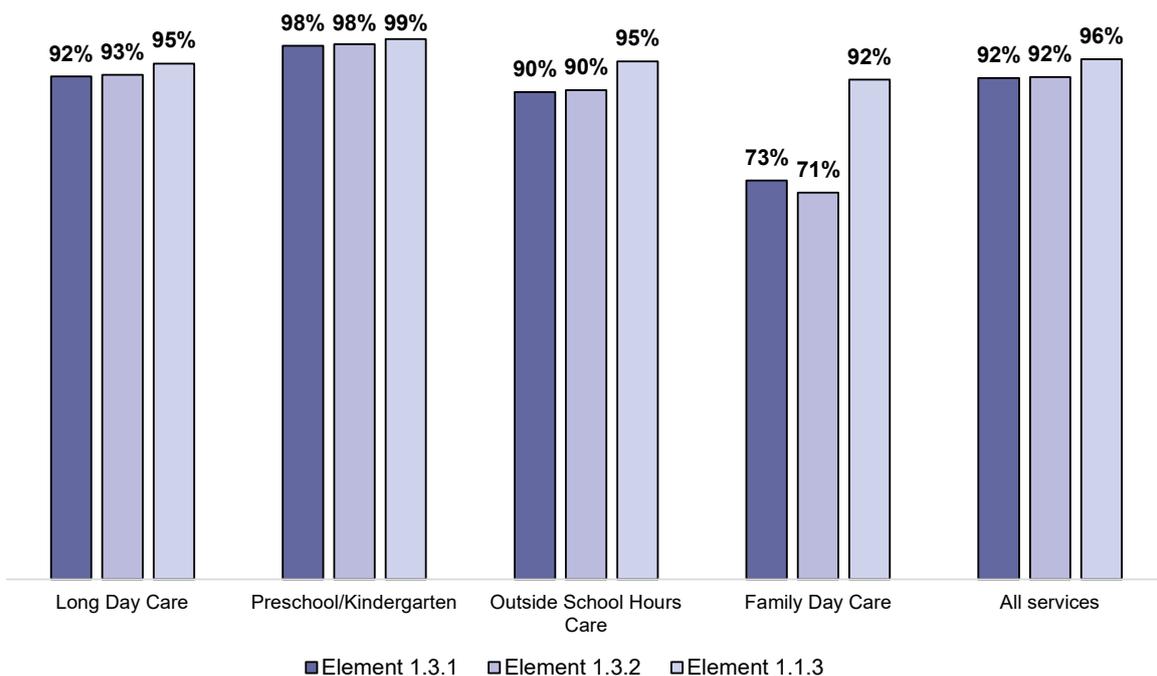
Figure 2.3: Proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above for each standard of the NQS, as at 30 June 2022



Of the 40 elements of the NQS, assessment and planning cycle (Element 1.3.1) has the highest number of services assessed as Not Met, with critical reflection (Element 1.3.2) having the second highest, and program learning opportunities (Element 1.1.3) having the eighth highest.

Figure 2.4 shows the proportion of services assessed as Met for these three elements of quality.

Figure 2.4: Proportion of services assessed as Met for assessment and planning cycle (Element 1.3.1), critical reflection (Element 1.3.2) and program learning opportunities (Element 1.1.3), as at 30 June 2022



Educational leadership

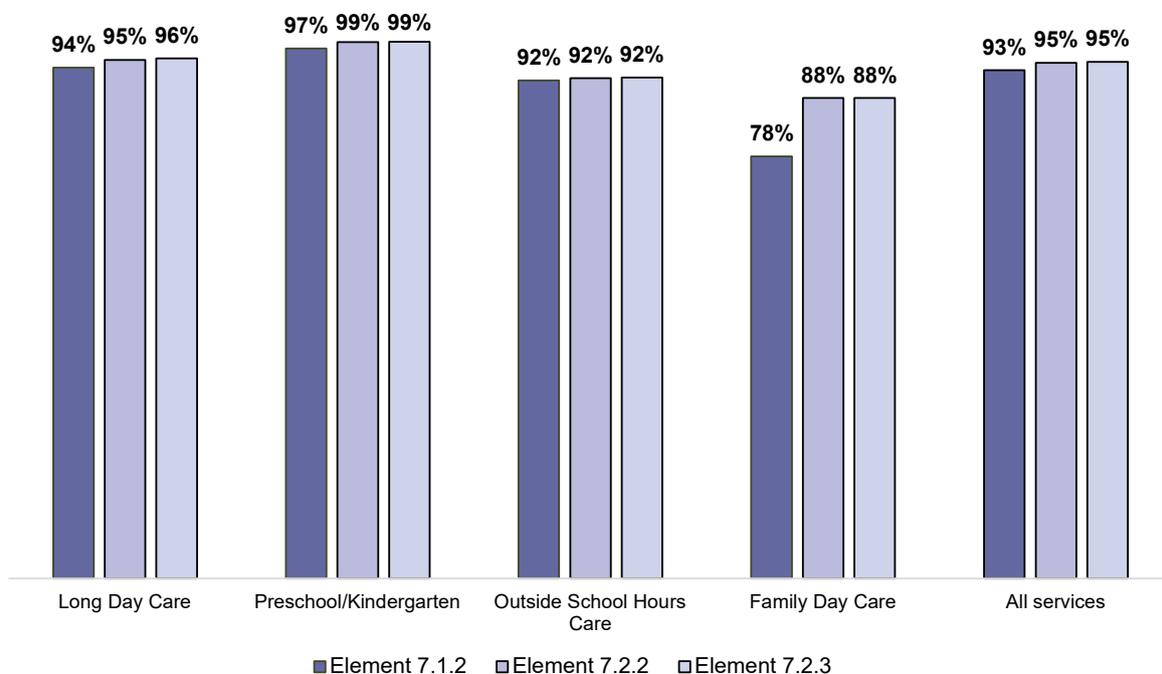
Quality Area 7 of the National Quality Standard addresses governance and leadership, including the role of the service’s educational leader.

As at 30 June 2022, 92% of services are rated Meeting NQS or above for leadership (Standard 7.2) and 93% for governance (Standard 7.1), making them the second and third most challenging of the 15 standards.

Management systems (Element 7.1.2) has the third highest number of services assessed as Not Met, with educational leadership (Element 7.2.2) having the fifth highest and development of professionals (Element 7.2.3) having the seventh highest.

Figure 2.5 shows the proportion of services assessed as Met for these three elements of quality.

Figure 2.5: Proportion of services assessed as Met for management systems (Element 7.1.2), educational leadership (Element 7.2.2) and development of professionals (Element 7.2.3), as at 30 June 2022



A service’s educational leader is responsible for leading the development and implementation of the educational program, and assessment and planning cycle. The educational leader therefore plays a crucial role in supporting a service to meet the standards and elements of Quality Area 1.

The relationship between educational leadership and the components of educational program and practice is confirmed by the correlation analysis in **Figure 2.6**.

Green cells in this figure indicate a higher level of correlation between specified quality areas and standards. In contrast, yellow and orange cells indicate moderate levels of correlation, and red cells indicate relatively lower levels of correlation.

In addition to the expected high degree of correlation between performance at the quality area level and performance against the standards that make up that quality area, there is a high degree of correlation between educational program and practice (Quality Area 1), and leadership (Standard 7.2). There is also a high degree of correlation between relationships with children (Quality Area 5) and educational practice (Standard 1.2), program (Standard 1.1) and professionalism (Standard 4.2).

Figure 2.6: Correlation analysis matrix⁷ (quality areas to standards), as at 30 June 2022

| | QA1 | QA2 | QA3 | QA4 | QA5 | QA6 | QA7 |
|--------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Standard 1.1 | 0.86 | 0.61 | 0.65 | 0.67 | 0.72 | 0.70 | 0.66 |
| Standard 1.2 | 0.87 | 0.60 | 0.64 | 0.67 | 0.73 | 0.70 | 0.64 |
| Standard 1.3 | 0.92 | 0.62 | 0.63 | 0.66 | 0.68 | 0.69 | 0.70 |
| Standard 2.1 | 0.65 | 0.85 | 0.62 | 0.61 | 0.61 | 0.60 | 0.64 |
| Standard 2.2 | 0.63 | 0.91 | 0.62 | 0.60 | 0.57 | 0.58 | 0.65 |
| Standard 3.1 | 0.61 | 0.58 | 0.90 | 0.62 | 0.63 | 0.61 | 0.57 |
| Standard 3.2 | 0.66 | 0.58 | 0.85 | 0.62 | 0.65 | 0.68 | 0.60 |
| Standard 4.1 | 0.65 | 0.57 | 0.62 | 0.92 | 0.67 | 0.67 | 0.63 |
| Standard 4.2 | 0.66 | 0.55 | 0.62 | 0.88 | 0.71 | 0.70 | 0.63 |
| Standard 5.1 | 0.69 | 0.55 | 0.62 | 0.68 | 0.94 | 0.70 | 0.59 |
| Standard 5.2 | 0.68 | 0.55 | 0.62 | 0.67 | 0.93 | 0.69 | 0.58 |
| Standard 6.1 | 0.65 | 0.54 | 0.60 | 0.64 | 0.68 | 0.92 | 0.63 |
| Standard 6.2 | 0.66 | 0.54 | 0.60 | 0.64 | 0.68 | 0.93 | 0.63 |
| Standard 7.1 | 0.66 | 0.66 | 0.60 | 0.66 | 0.61 | 0.67 | 0.90 |
| Standard 7.2 | 0.71 | 0.62 | 0.60 | 0.65 | 0.61 | 0.69 | 0.91 |

Drivers of quality improvement

[Research](#) commissioned by ACECQA in 2019 examined factors that support quality improvement in educational program and practice, and governance and leadership.

The study showed that genuine and sustained quality improvement at the service level is supported by:

- collaboration and shared responsibility
- leadership at all levels
- service philosophy as the foundation
- stakeholder involvement
- meaningful engagement with assessment and rating.

⁷ Higher numbers indicate higher levels of correlation between individual quality areas and standards.

Chapter 3

Children from vulnerable and disadvantaged backgrounds



Overview

High quality education and care benefits all children⁸ and can mitigate educational disadvantages among children from vulnerable and disadvantaged backgrounds.⁹

The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) is a population-based measure of how children have developed by the time they start school. It looks at five areas of early childhood development: physical health and wellbeing; social competence; emotional maturity; language and cognitive skills; and communication skills and general knowledge.

The AEDC provides evidence to support the critical work of the children's education and care sector in delivering the best development opportunities and outcomes for children who attend an approved service. Strategies may include building community partnerships, raising awareness of the importance of early childhood development, and assisting families in their role as children's first teachers.

In particular, the AEDC can help children's education and care services, and schools better understand the degree and concentration of developmental vulnerability and adjust their programs and practice to meet the unique needs of children in their community.

The 2021 AEDC data, which includes children that did not attend early childhood education and care as well as those that did, shows a small increase in the proportion of children who are 'developmentally vulnerable', with 22.0% of children developmentally vulnerable on one or more of the five domains, up from 21.7% in 2018, and 11.4% developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains, up from 11.0%.

Of the five domains, the language and cognitive skills domain saw the most significant shift in 2021. The percentage of children developmentally vulnerable on this domain increased from 6.6% in 2018 to 7.3% in 2021.

These increases emphasise the ongoing importance of maintaining a focus on supporting access to high quality education and care services for children from vulnerable and disadvantaged backgrounds.

8 Productivity Commission (PC). (2014). *Childcare and Early Childhood Learning: Productivity Commission Inquiry Report, No. 73 (Vol. 2)*. Canberra, ACT: PC.

9 Suziedelyte, A., & Zhu, A. (2015) Does early schooling narrow outcome gaps for advantaged and disadvantaged children? *Economics of Education Review*, 45, 76–88. doi:10.1016/j.econedurev.2015.02.001

Quality ratings by socio-economic status of areas

Figure 3.1 compares the performance of children’s education and care services in the most disadvantaged and most advantaged areas of Australia (SEIFA quintiles 1 and 5 respectively).

As at 30 June 2022, 84% of services in the most disadvantaged areas are rated Meeting NQS or above, compared with 89% of services in the most advantaged areas.

Differences in the distribution of quality ratings are most pronounced for Exceeding NQS, with 23% of services in Australia’s most disadvantaged areas rated Exceeding NQS, compared with 31% in the most advantaged areas.

Figure 3.1: Comparison of overall quality ratings between the most disadvantaged and most advantaged areas

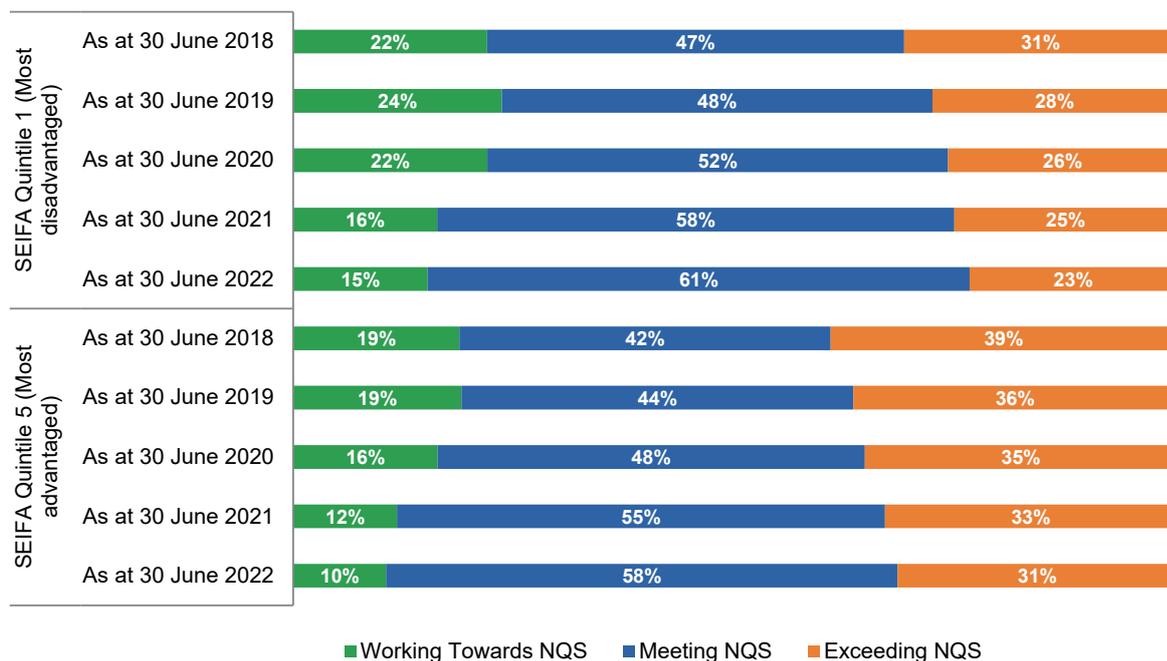


Figure 3.2 shows that there are notable differences between socioeconomic areas by service type. As at 30 June 2022, 42% of family day care services in Australia’s most disadvantaged areas are rated Working Towards NQS, compared with 28% in the most advantaged areas.

The distribution of Exceeding NQS ratings varies considerably among preschools/ kindergartens and long day care services. Less than half (47%) of preschools/kindergartens in the most disadvantaged areas are rated Exceeding NQS, compared with two-thirds (67%) in the most advantaged areas.

Furthermore, less than one-fifth (19%) of long day care services in the most disadvantaged areas are rated Exceeding NQS, compared with almost one-third (31%) in the most advantaged areas.

Figure 3.2: Comparison of overall quality ratings between the most disadvantaged and most advantaged areas by service type, as at 30 June 2022



While services in the most disadvantaged areas are less likely to be rated Exceeding NQS, there are services in these areas achieving exceptional quality that have been awarded the Excellent rating. Two such examples are SDN Riverwood Children’s Education and Care in New South Wales, and Eagleby Kids Early Learning Centre in Queensland.

SDN Riverwood Children’s Education and Care (New South Wales)

[SDN Riverwood Children’s Education and Care Centre](#) in Sydney was [awarded the Excellent rating](#) by ACECQA in October 2021. Almost one-third of families at the service are classified as vulnerable or disadvantaged. Additionally, many families are below the national median household wage and have English as a second language.

Examples of exceptional practice at the service include:

- empowering families to build support systems through a buddy system initiative that partners similar families together.
- partnering with a local community organisation that helps to feed, clothe and support families facing hardship or disadvantage. The service also provides meals and fresh fruit for their community every week.
- fostering inclusion of children with additional needs by seeking expert advice from organisations such as the Shepherd Centre, and the Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children.
- sharing practices with the wider education and care sector through mentoring and publications.

Eagleby Kids Early Learning Centre (Queensland)

[Eagleby Kids Early Learning Centre](#) was [awarded the Excellent rating](#) in April 2022. Approximately 80% of families have a Māori cultural background.

Examples of exceptional practice at the service include:

- establishing a targeted Māori program to support children, educators, families and the community through practices that reflect the Māori culture, language and way of life. For example, each room has an educator fluent in Te Reo Māori.
- establishing a cultural leader role responsible for coaching and mentoring all staff to successfully embed strategies that respect and celebrate cultural diversity, focusing on embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives.
- undertaking a kindness project based on research that shows kindness, compassion and giving are associated with positive mental health and improved positive relationships.

Chapter 4

Workforce



Overview

The [Alice Springs \(Mparntwe\) Education Declaration](#) acknowledges that the early years provide the foundation for learning in school and beyond. Building on this, the [National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy \(2022-2031\)](#) recognises that the children's education and care workforce is critical to the success of the NQF.

The strategy represents a long-term commitment to the workforce by Australian governments and sector stakeholders. It acknowledges the complexity of the workforce challenges faced by the sector and provides a call to action for all stakeholders to work towards ambitious goals.

Higher qualifications and close relationships with children are strongly associated with improved child outcomes. Appropriately qualified educators and teachers who have regular and consistent contact with children are better able to understand their interests and needs, involve them in stimulating programs, and use a range of strategies to extend and support learning and development.

While a highly skilled workforce is integral to the provision of high-quality children's education and care across all aspects of the National Quality Standard, Quality Area 4 (Staffing arrangements) specifically focuses on staffing.

In August 2022, the Australian Government released the results from the [2021 Early Childhood Education and Care National Workforce Census](#). Over 15,000 children's education and care services took part in the census, the highest response rate since the collection commenced in 2010.

Key findings include:

- 92% of the children's education and care sector workforce is female, with the median age being 36 years and the average years of experience in the sector being seven years
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers comprise 2.9% of the workforce
- 85% of paid contact staff hold a children's education and care qualification, while almost one in four are currently undertaking further study
- 58% of all paid staff receive the award wage, with one in five paid up to 10 per cent above the award, 5% paid between 10 and 25 per cent above the award, and 2% paid more than 25 per cent above the award.¹⁰

¹⁰ 14% of respondents selected 'don't know' in response to this question.

Staffing arrangements quality ratings

Figure 4.1 compares performance against Quality Area 4 over time, showing the proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above.

As at 30 June 2022, 96% of services are rated Meeting NQS or above – the highest proportion since the introduction of the NQF in 2012.

Figure 4.1: Proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above for staffing arrangements

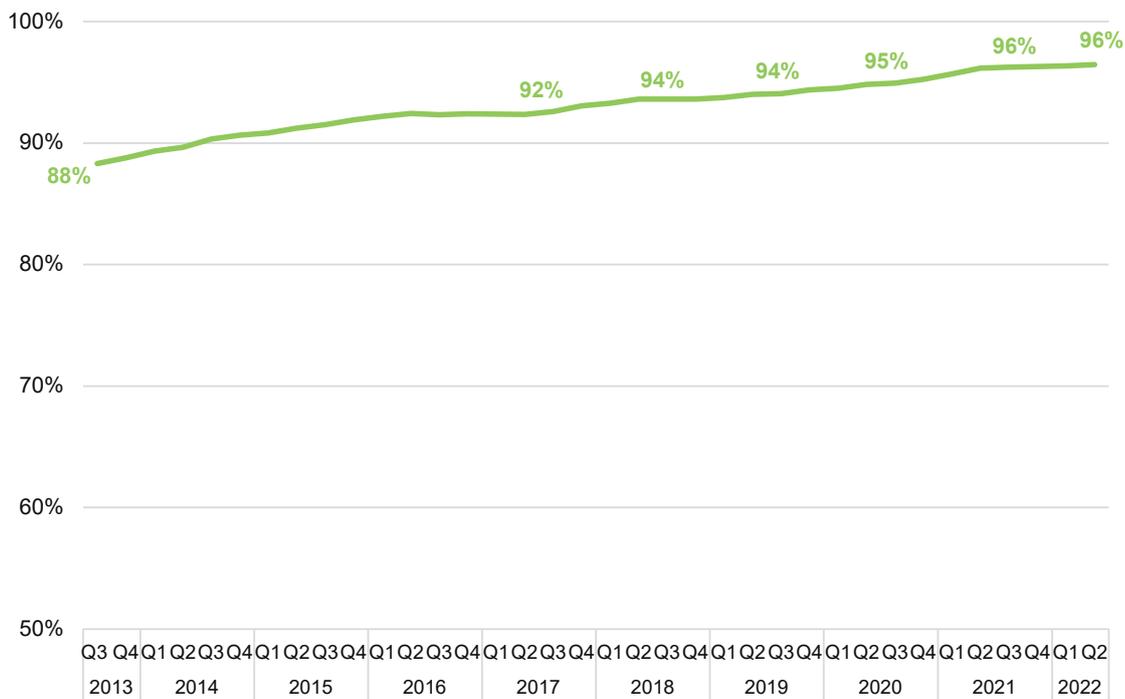
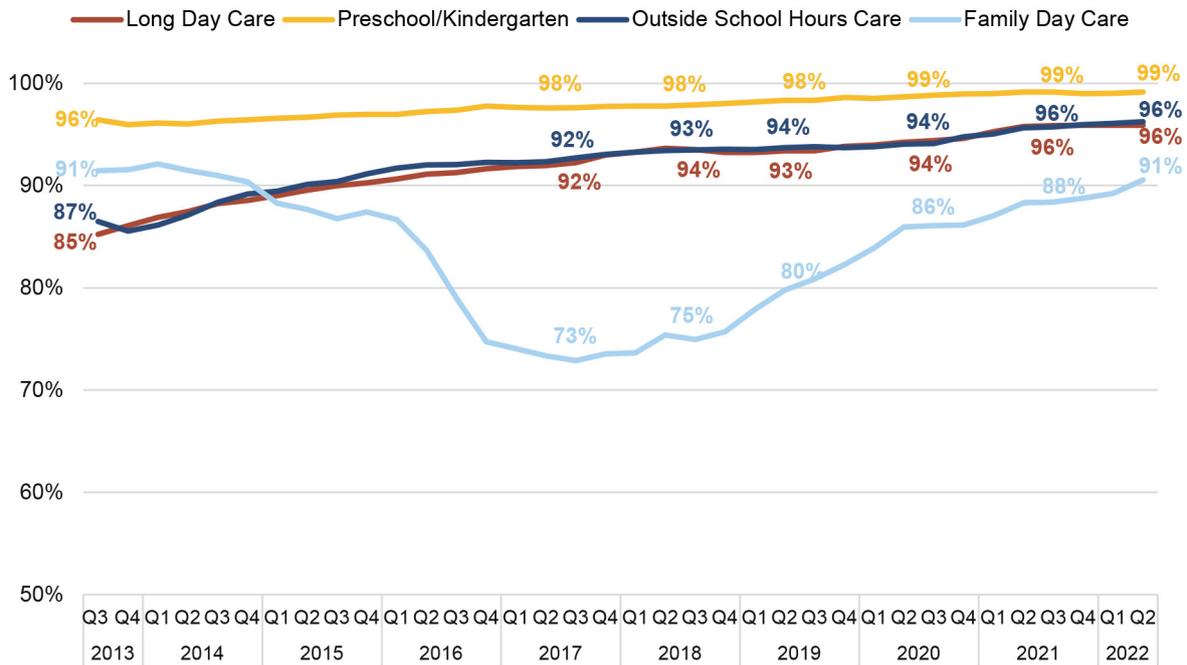


Figure 4.2 shows that preschools/kindergartens continue to have the highest proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above, followed by outside school hours care, long day care and family day care services.

While family day care services continue to have the lowest proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above, 91% of family day care services are rated Meeting NQS or above – the highest proportion for more than seven years.

Figure 4.2: Proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above for staffing arrangements, by service type



Vocational education data

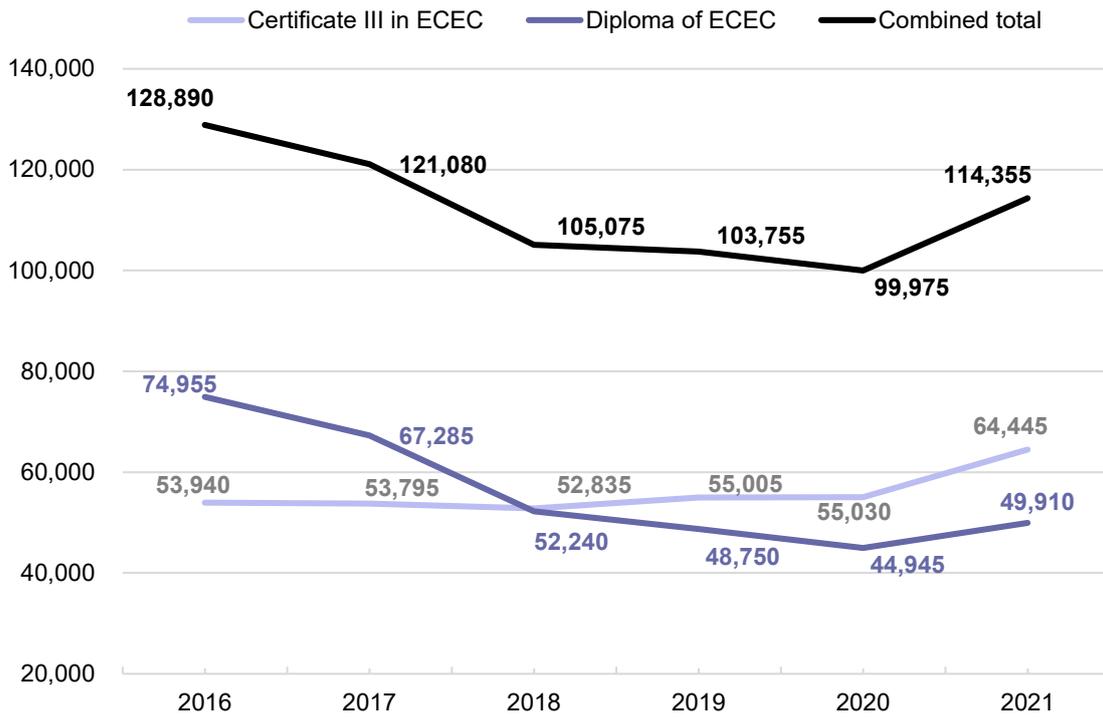
The majority of educators in the children’s education and care sector hold vocational education and training (VET) level qualifications, typically at a certificate III or diploma level. More than 300 Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) are approved to deliver the nationally recognised children’s education and care qualifications.

Figure 4.3 shows the total enrolments in the two major early childhood VET courses between 2016 and 2021. The number of enrolments in the Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) has remained above 50,000, increasing to a high of almost 65,000 in 2021.

In contrast, the number of enrolments in the Diploma of ECEC has decreased from just under 75,000 in 2016 to less than 50,000 in 2019, 2020 and 2021.

The combined total enrolments across the two qualifications was almost 115,000 in 2021, the highest figure since 2017.

Figure 4.3: Vocational education enrolment numbers¹¹

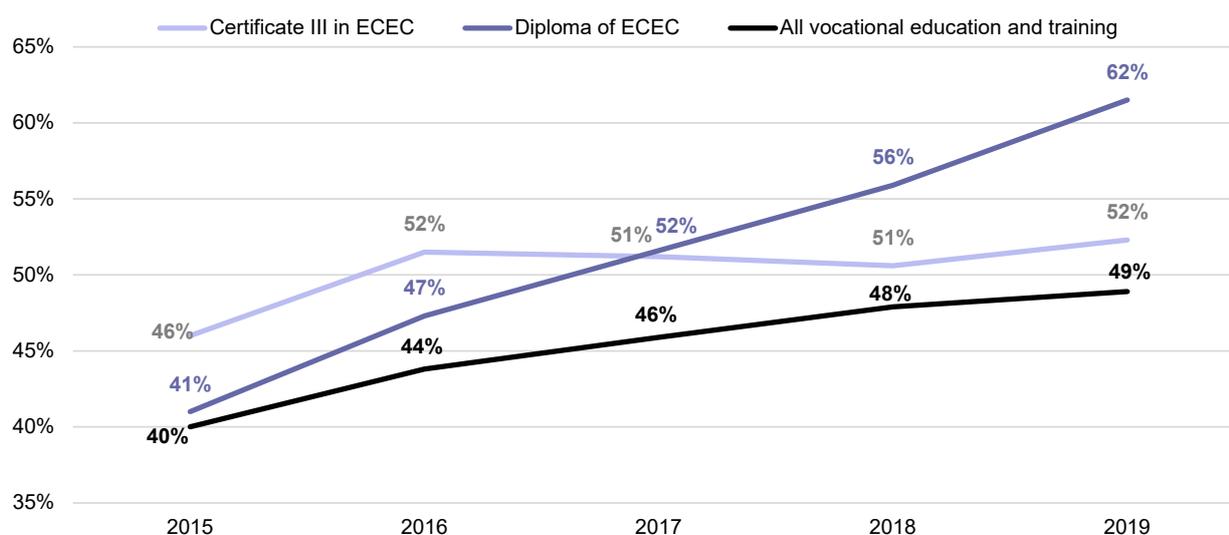


As well as recording enrolment numbers, the National Centre for Vocational Education and Research (NCVER) tracks vocational education completion rates using the unique student identifier.

Figure 4.4 shows that completion rates for both the Certificate III in, and Diploma of, ECEC are above the national average for all vocational education and training courses. Most notably, completion rates for students undertaking the Diploma of ECEC are forecast to grow year on year. Almost two-thirds (62%) of students who enrolled in the Diploma of ECEC are expected to complete their qualification.

¹¹ NCVER, [Total VET students and courses](#) - historical data is refreshed each year.

Figure 4.4: Vocational education completion rates¹²



Higher education data

Figure 4.5 shows the number of students commencing early childhood and primary initial teacher training degrees at Australian higher education institutions from 2009 to 2020.

Commencement numbers for early childhood initial teacher training degrees have increased from 3,187 in 2009 to 4,288 in 2020, the highest number since 2015.

Commencement numbers for primary initial teacher training degrees have fluctuated across the overall period, from 8,806 in 2009, to a high of 10,868 in 2017, to 9,379 in 2020.

¹² NCVER, customised unpublished completion rates as of 20 September 2022. 2015–2016 completion rates are actual (observed), while 2017–2019 completion rates are projected. Completion rates for 2020 not reported due to limitations with the methodology and the reliability of resulting estimates.

Figure 4.5: Early childhood and primary initial teacher training degree commencement numbers

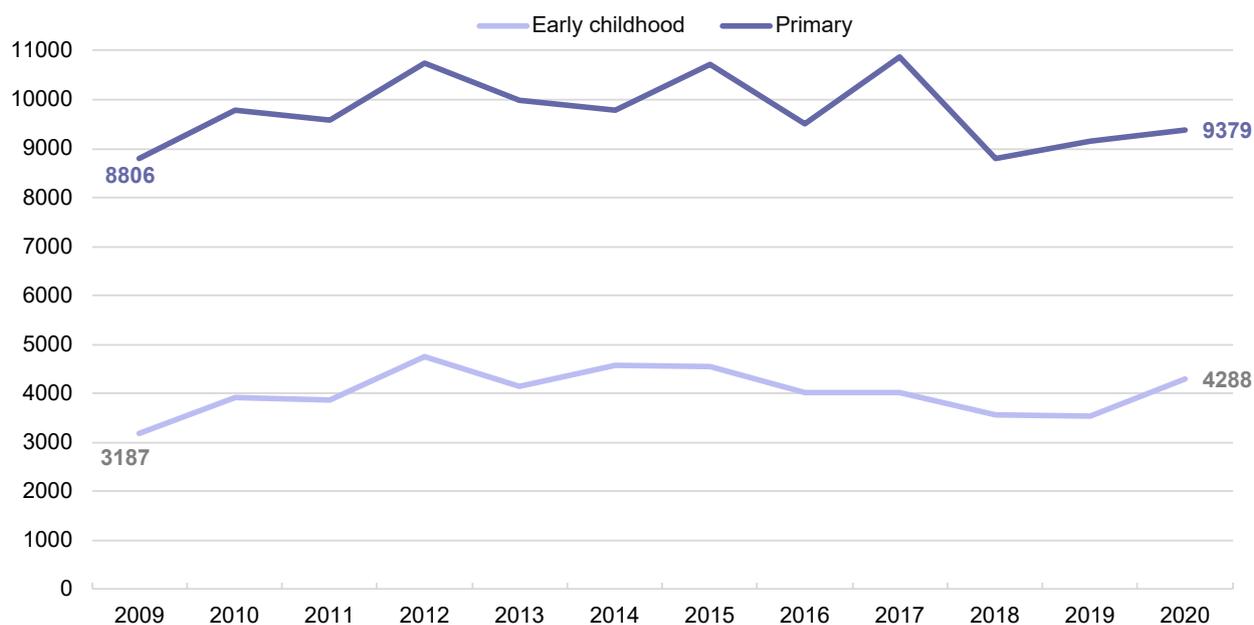


Figure 4.6 shows the proportion of early childhood teaching programs by age focus approved by ACECQA since the NQF was established in 2012.

While some primary teaching degrees only qualify graduates to teach in schools, most NQF approved early childhood teaching qualifications cover birth to eight years or birth to 12 years, qualifying graduates to teach across the early childhood and primary school age range.

These programs must meet both ACECQA’s requirements and the Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education Programs in Australia: Standards and Procedures endorsed by Education Ministers and implemented by state and territory teacher regulatory authorities.

ACECQA also publishes [quarterly data](#) detailing applications received from individuals for NQF qualification approval. The volume of applications has increased in 2022, when compared to 2021 and 2020, driven by an increase in overseas trained applicants.

Figure 4.6: Age focus of early childhood teaching programs approved by ACECQA

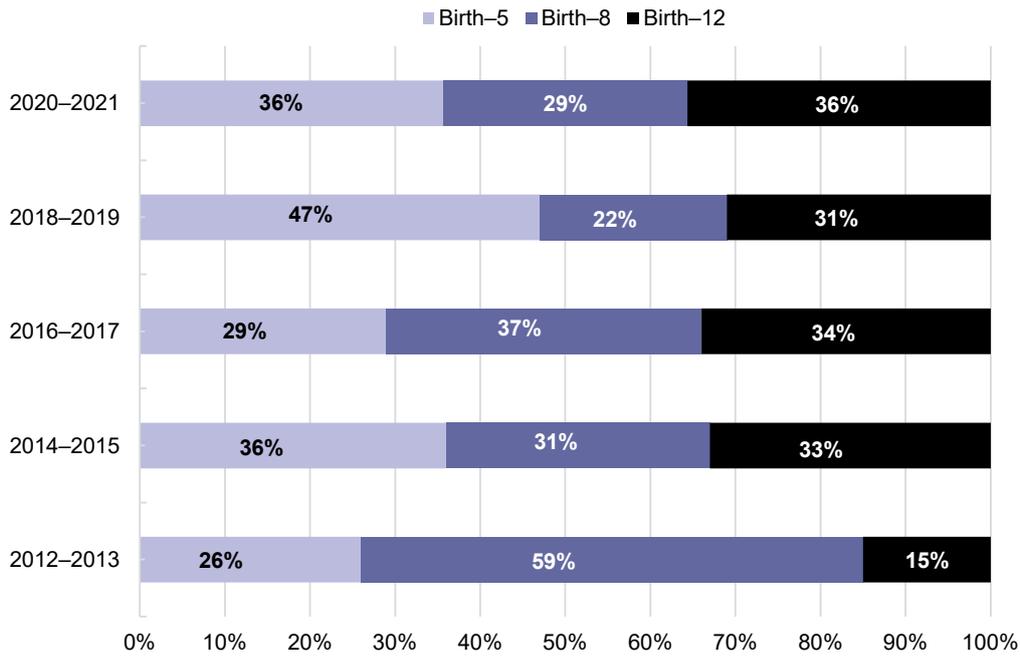
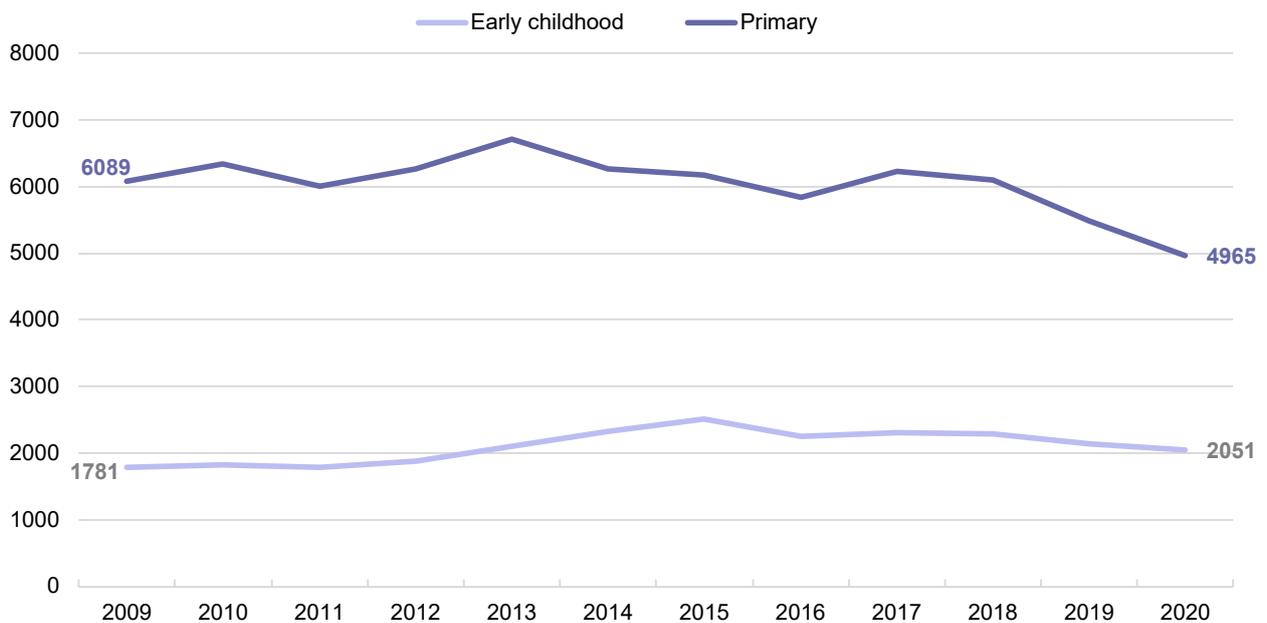


Figure 4.7 shows the number of students completing early childhood and primary initial teacher training degrees at Australian higher education institutes from 2009 to 2020.

While completion numbers for early childhood initial teacher training degrees have increased from 1,781 in 2009 to 2,051 in 2020, the 2020 figure is the lowest since 2012.

Completion numbers for primary teaching degrees have decreased across the same period, from 6,089 in 2009 to 4,965 in 2020.

Figure 4.7: Early childhood and primary initial teacher training degree completion numbers

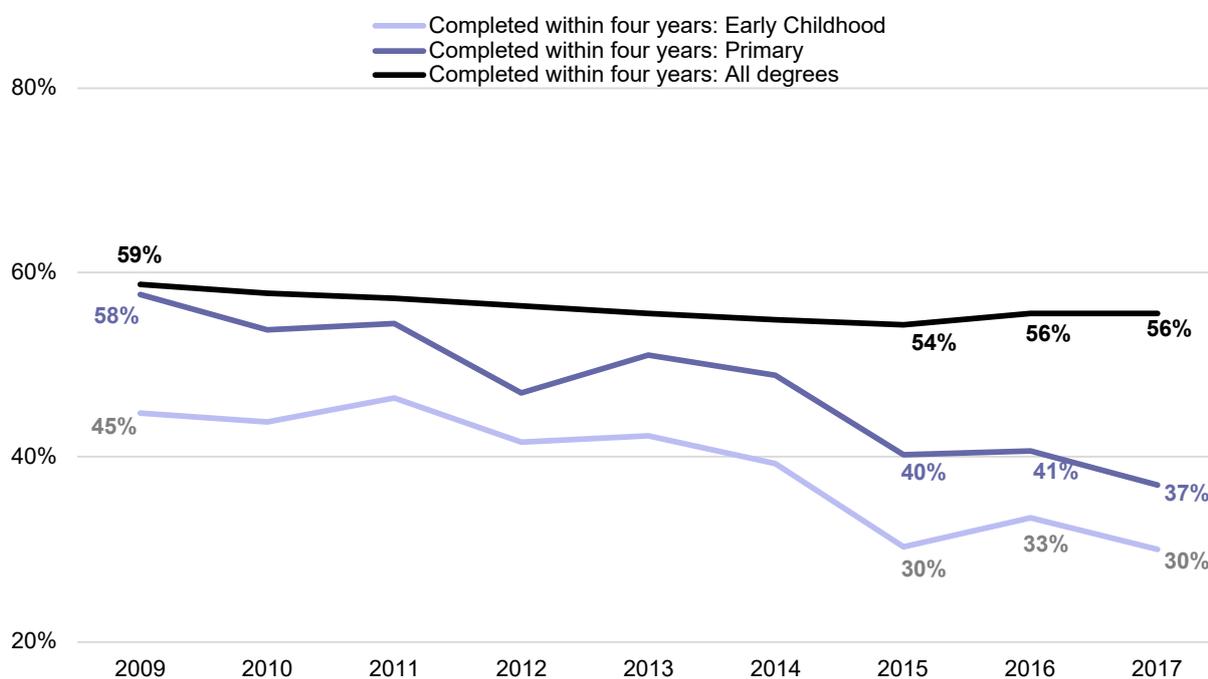


In addition to decreasing numbers of students completing early childhood and primary initial teacher training degrees, students are taking longer to complete their studies than in previous years.

Figure 4.8 shows that less than one third (30%) of early childhood initial teacher education students who commenced their studies in 2017 completed their studies within four years, compared to approaching half (45%) of students who commenced in 2009. This may in part be due to an increased proportion of students completing their studies part-time while they are employed in the sector, as part of the ‘actively working towards’ provisions in the National Regulations.¹³

The four-year completion rates for both early childhood and primary initial teacher training degrees are markedly lower than the completion rate for all higher education degrees.

Figure 4.8: Early childhood and primary initial teacher training degree four-year completion rates¹⁴



¹³ Actively working towards (regulation 10) can apply under regulations 126(1) and 127 of the National Regulations.

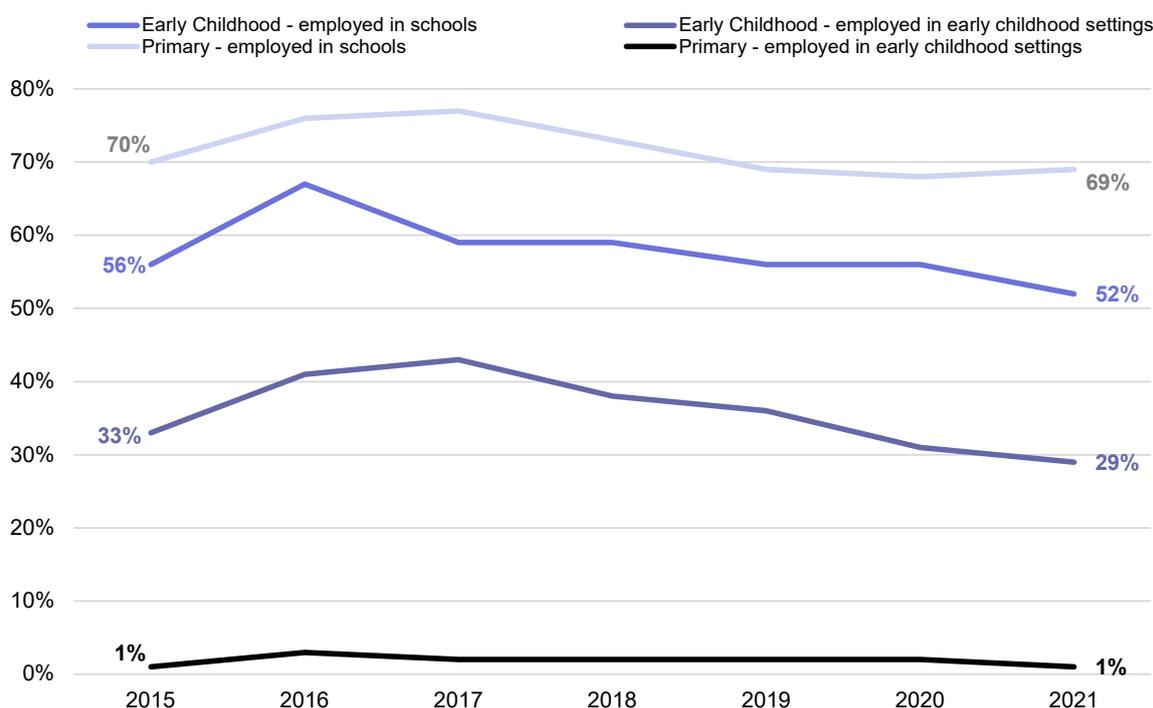
¹⁴ Australian Government, customised data, Commencing ITE students: 4-year completion rates as at September 2022.

Figure 4.9 shows that the majority (52%) of early childhood graduates continue to seek employment in schools, with less than one third (29%) obtaining employment in early childhood settings. Conversely, only a very small proportion of primary graduates obtain employment in early childhood settings.

Comparatively lower pay and less favourable conditions continue to contribute to attrition of qualified early childhood educators and teachers to other sectors, notably the school sector.

In addition, there remains a perception in parts of the broader community that early childhood teachers are less qualified than school teachers, with children’s education and care being viewed as an inferior teaching career.

Figure 4.9 Higher education graduate outcomes¹⁵



Staffing waivers

State and territory regulatory authorities may issue a waiver if an approved provider can demonstrate difficulty meeting staffing requirements at a children’s education and care service.

Approved providers can apply for a service waiver, where an issue is likely to be ongoing, or a temporary waiver, where the issue can be addressed within 12 months. The vast majority of staffing waivers are temporary arrangements to help with short term staffing challenges, particularly in relation to early childhood teacher staffing requirements.

¹⁵ Australian Department of Education, Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching, Graduate Outcomes Survey.

Figure 4.10 shows that, as at 30 June 2022, 8.5% of services hold a staffing waiver.

Previous increases in the proportion of services with staffing waivers reflect the short term difficulties some providers had in meeting new staffing requirements that came into effect on 1 January 2014 and 1 January 2016.

The recent high proportions follow the introduction of new staffing requirements on 1 January 2020 and the ongoing impact of COVID-19.

Figure 4.10: Proportion of services with a staffing waiver¹⁶

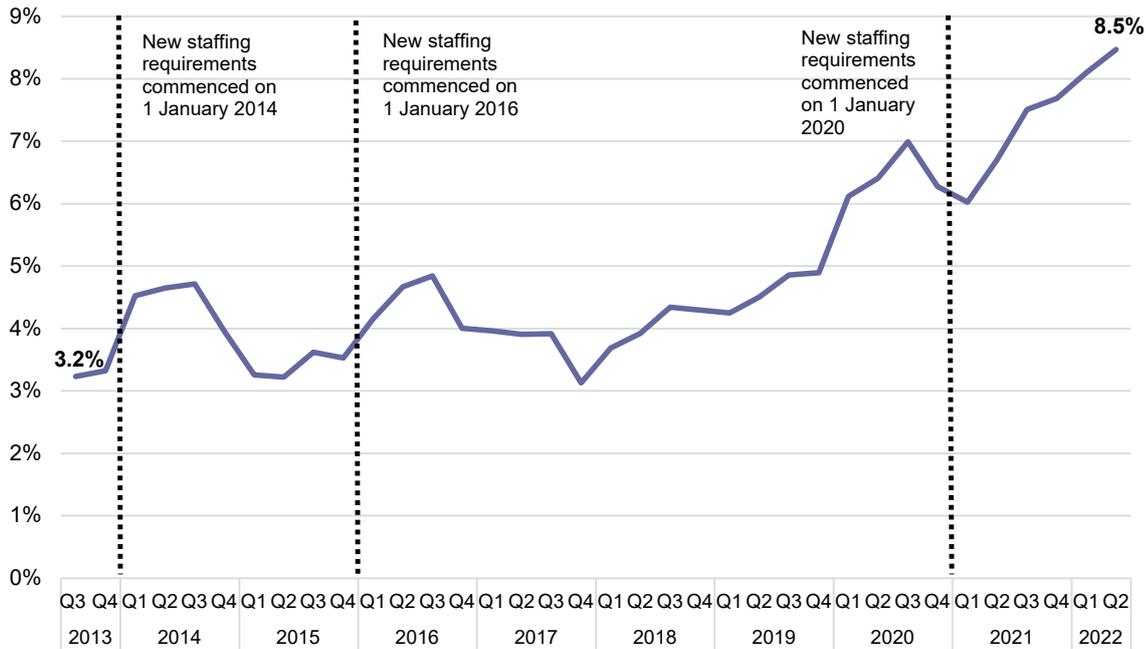
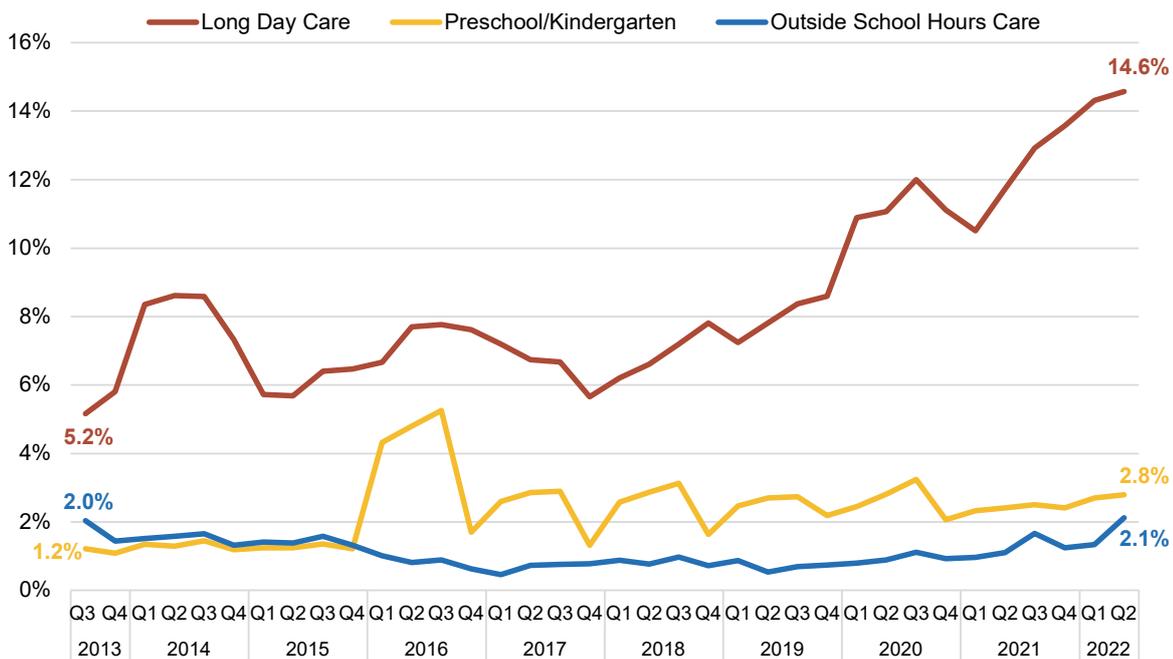


Figure 4.11 shows the proportion of staffing waivers for each of the three types of centre-based service.

As at 30 June 2022, 15% of long day care services hold a staffing waiver, compared with 3% of preschools/kindergartens and 2% of outside school hours care services.

¹⁶ Description of the [2014 requirements](#), [2016 requirements](#) and [2020 requirements](#).

Figure 4.11: Proportion of services with a staffing waiver, by centre-based service type



Children’s education and care national workforce strategy

National sector stakeholders and all Australian governments have closely collaborated to co-design Shaping Our Future, a ten-year workforce strategy to help ensure a sustainable, high-quality children’s education and care workforce.

In October 2021, Education Ministers approved the publication of the strategy and requested work commence on an implementation and evaluation plan to guide collaborative efforts to achieve the strategy’s objectives. The [Shaping Our Future: Implementation and Evaluation Plan](#) was endorsed by Education Ministers in August 2022.

The Implementation and Evaluation Plan outlines the steps that will be taken to progress, monitor and review all 21 actions in Shaping Our Future. It supports and complements areas of action and commitments outlined in other national strategies, including those which support the Closing the Gap Agreement such as the [Early Childhood Care and Development Sector Strengthening Plan](#).

Chapter 5

Service provider perceptions of the NQF



Overview

Governments have been committed to monitoring and reducing unnecessary burden associated with the National Quality Framework since its introduction in 2012.

ACECQA's research focuses on measuring the perceptions of providers of education and care services, particularly regarding the administrative requirements of the NQF.

In June 2022, ACECQA invited all approved providers to participate in the sixth survey on this topic. Overall, 2073¹⁷ approved providers responded, equating to a response rate of 32%. Respondents were broadly representative of provider characteristics, with single service providers moderately underrepresented and medium sized providers (those operating 2-24 services) moderately overrepresented.

Overall support for the NQF

Overall support for the NQF has been above 95% across all six surveys over a ten year period.

Table 5.1 shows that overall support for the NQF has remained at 97% for the three most recent surveys.

Table 5.1: Overall support for the NQF

| | Number of respondents | % of respondents that were supportive of the NQF |
|-------------|-----------------------|--|
| 2013 survey | 2,257 | 98.1% |
| 2014 survey | 2,623 | 97.9% |
| 2015 survey | 1,335 | 99.3% |
| 2017 survey | 2,362 | 97.1% |
| 2018 survey | 2,178 | 96.8% |
| 2022 survey | 1,814 | 96.9% |

¹⁷ The denominator for individual questions varies according to whether respondents chose to answer that question.

Overall perception of burden under the NQF

Respondents rated their perception of administrative burden using a scale from 0 (not at all burdensome) to 5 (very burdensome).

Figure 5.1 shows there has been an increase in the proportion of respondents selecting a rating of very burdensome over the three most recent surveys, from 15% in 2017 to 21% in 2022.

Figure 5.1: Overall perception of burden under the NQF

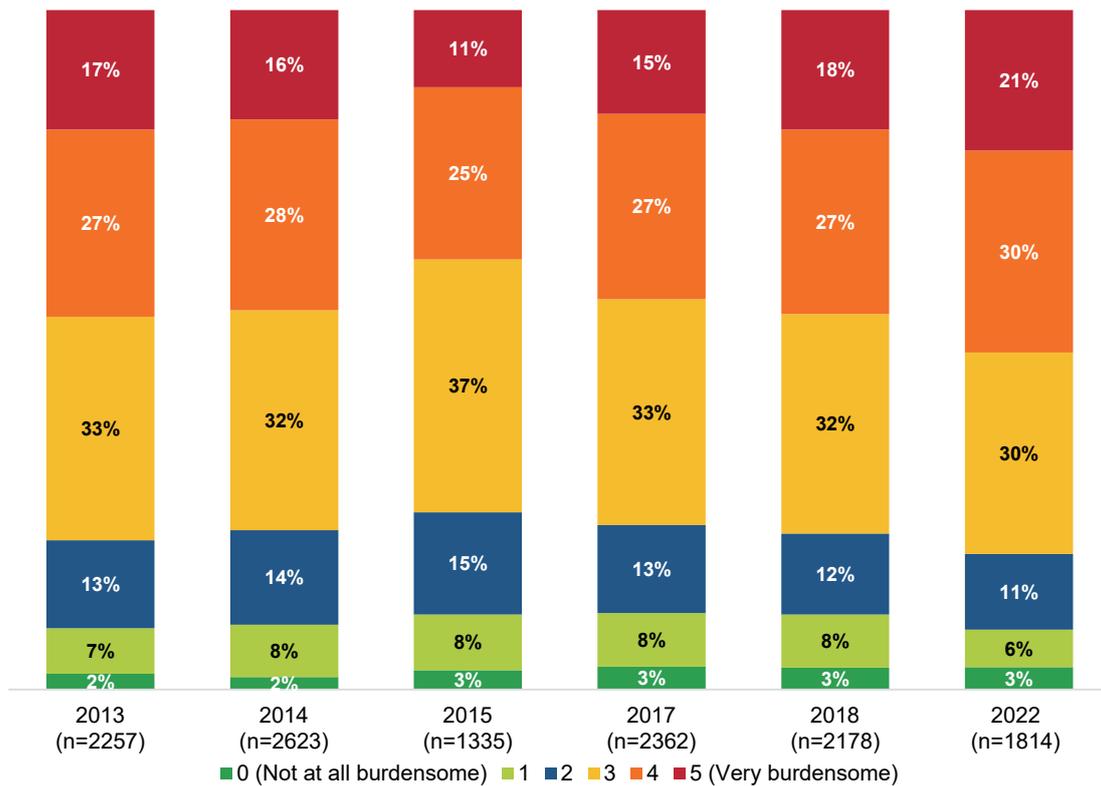


Table 5.2 compares respondents' perceptions by service type and provider size, with a high perception of burden defined as 4 or 5 on the scale from 0 to 5.

The proportion of respondents who reported high overall burden increased by five percentage points between 2018 (45%) and 2022 (50%).

For the third consecutive survey, perceived burden was highest among providers of outside school hours care (54%), closely followed by providers of preschool/kindergarten (53%) and long day care (50%).

Among single service providers, just under half (48%) of respondents reported high overall burden, compared with 56% of medium-sized providers and almost two-thirds (64%) of large providers. The perception of burden among large providers has fluctuated markedly over the most recent three surveys, likely impacted by the relatively small sample sizes.

Table 5.2: Respondents with a high perception of burden, by service type and provider size

| Service type | 2017 | | 2018 | | 2022 | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|---|-----------------------|---|-----------------------|---|
| | Number of respondents | High perception of burden ¹⁸ | Number of respondents | High perception of burden ¹⁸ | Number of respondents | High perception of burden ¹⁸ |
| Outside school hours care | 600 | 46% | 558 | 47% | 259 | 54% |
| Preschool/Kindergarten | 578 | 44% | 695 | 46% | 380 | 53% |
| Long day care | 1,234 | 43% | 1,210 | 44% | 1,064 | 50% |
| Family day care | 250 | 28% | 160 | 28% | 111 | 37% |
| Total | 2,362 | 42% | 2,178 | 45% | 1,814 | 50% |

| Provider size | 2017 | | 2018 | | 2022 | |
|---|-----------------------|---|-----------------------|---|-----------------------|---|
| | Number of respondents | High perception of burden ¹⁸ | Number of respondents | High perception of burden ¹⁸ | Number of respondents | High perception of burden ¹⁸ |
| Large (25 or more approved services) | 45 | 58% | 31 | 35% | 44 | 64% |
| Medium (2–24 approved services) | 507 | 44% | 403 | 43% | 443 | 56% |
| Small (one approved service) | 1,810 | 41% | 1,744 | 45% | 1,327 | 48% |
| Total | 2,362 | 42% | 2,178 | 45% | 1,814 | 50% |

¹⁸ High perception of burden = 4 or 5 on a scale of 0-5.

Burden associated with specific administrative requirements of the NQF

In the 2022 survey, approved providers were again asked about the burden associated with specific requirements of the NQF, with a high perception of burden again defined as 4 or 5 on the scale from 0 to 5.

Figure 5.2 shows that quality assessment and rating visits, and quality improvement plans continue to be considered highly burdensome. Almost two-thirds (64%) of respondents indicated quality assessment and rating visits were highly burdensome, up from around half (53%) in 2018. The high perception of burden may be partly driven by service providers feeling that they are continually required to prepare, and be prepared, for a quality assessment and rating visit, and a review of their quality improvement plan.

Providers of family day care services were significantly less likely to indicate quality assessment and rating visits were highly burdensome (42% compared to 64% for all services). And providers of preschools/kindergartens were significantly more likely to indicate quality improvement plans were highly burdensome (64% compared to 56% for all services).

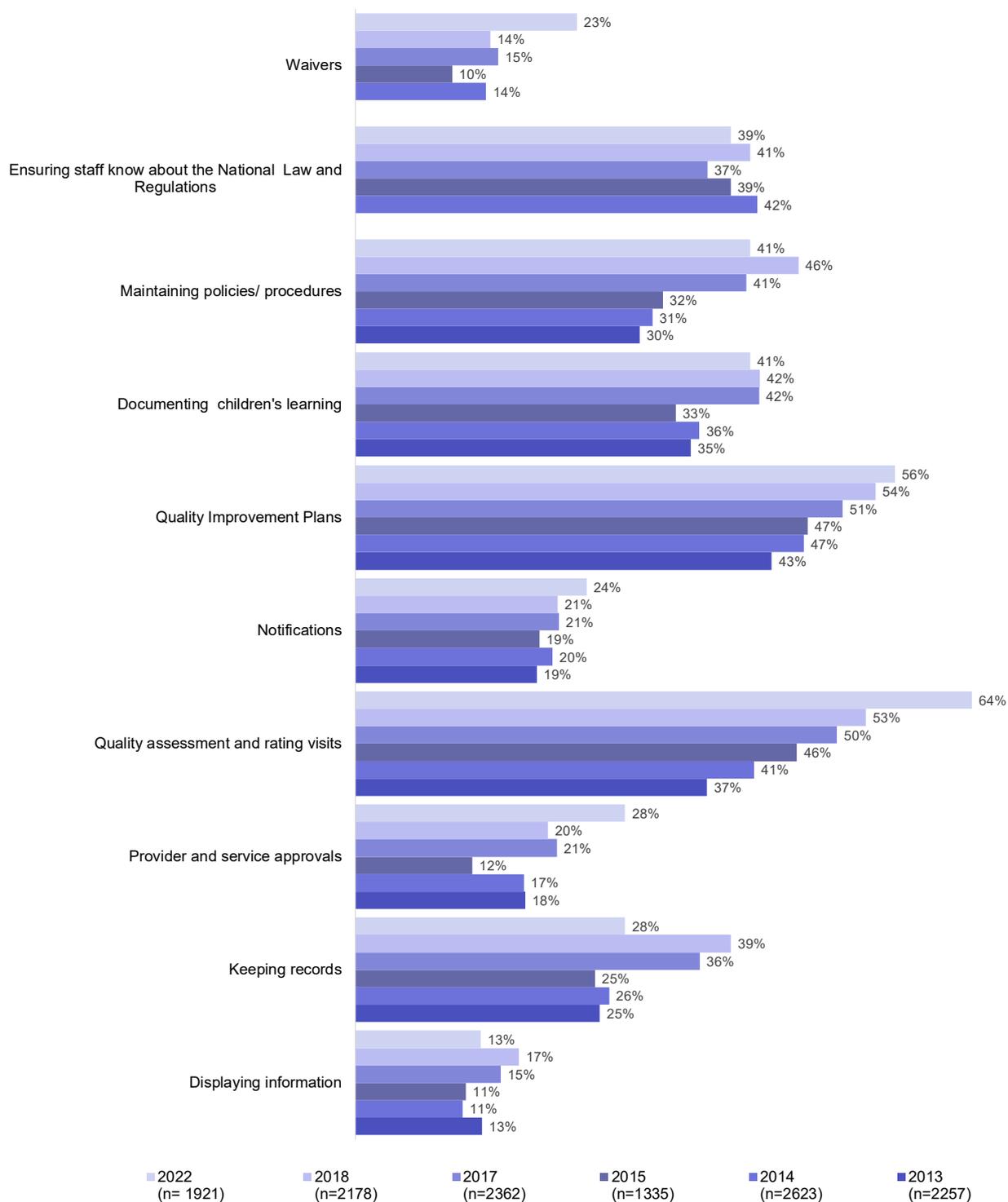
The two other administrative requirements with the highest increase in perceived burden between the two most recent surveys were:

- waivers (a nine percentage point increase)
- provider and service approvals (an eight percentage point increase).

The three administrative requirements with the most substantial decrease in perceived burden were:

- keeping administrative records (an 11 percentage point decrease)
- maintaining policies/procedures (a five percentage point decrease)
- displaying information (a four percentage point decrease).

Figure 5.2: Proportion of approved providers reporting high perceptions of burden with specified administrative requirements of the NQF¹⁹



¹⁹ Approved providers were not asked about 'ensuring staff know about the National Law and Regulations' or 'waivers' in the 2013 survey.

Respondents who indicated they found a specified administrative requirement highly burdensome were then asked whether they felt that the benefits accrued from that requirement outweighed the burden associated with it.

Table 5.3 shows that, just as in 2018 and 2017, respondents considered five of the requirements more beneficial than burdensome and the other five more burdensome than beneficial.

The following five requirements were considered more beneficial than burdensome by the majority of respondents:

- Ensuring staff know about the National Law and Regulations
- Maintaining policies and procedures
- Keeping administrative records
- Documenting children’s learning
- Provider and service approvals.

While the majority of respondents considered the below five requirements more burdensome than beneficial:

- Displaying information
- Quality Improvement Plans
- Quality assessment and rating visits
- Notifications to regulatory authorities
- Waivers.

Table 5.3: Proportion of providers who considered the benefit of specified NQF administrative requirements outweighed the associated burden²⁰

| NQF Requirement | 2017 | 2018 | 2022 |
|--|-------|-------|-------|
| Ensuring staff know about the National Law and Regulations (n=733) | ● 71% | ● 70% | ● 67% |
| Maintaining policies and procedures (n=764) | ● 66% | ● 65% | ● 61% |
| Keeping administrative records (n=533) | ● 59% | ● 57% | ● 59% |
| Documenting children’s learning (n=764) | ● 58% | ● 54% | ● 54% |
| Provider and service approvals (n=524) | ● 55% | ● 53% | ● 54% |
| Notifications to regulatory authorities (n=455) | ● 46% | ● 49% | ● 42% |
| Quality assessment and rating visits (n=1206) | ● 49% | ● 46% | ● 37% |
| Waivers (n=431) | ● 39% | ● 49% | ● 36% |
| Quality Improvement Plans (n=1059) | ● 46% | ● 46% | ● 35% |
| Displaying information (n=251) | ● 44% | ● 44% | ● 30% |

²⁰ The number of respondents differed for each question as providers were only asked this question if they identified the specified requirement as burdensome. The 2022 denominator is shown in brackets

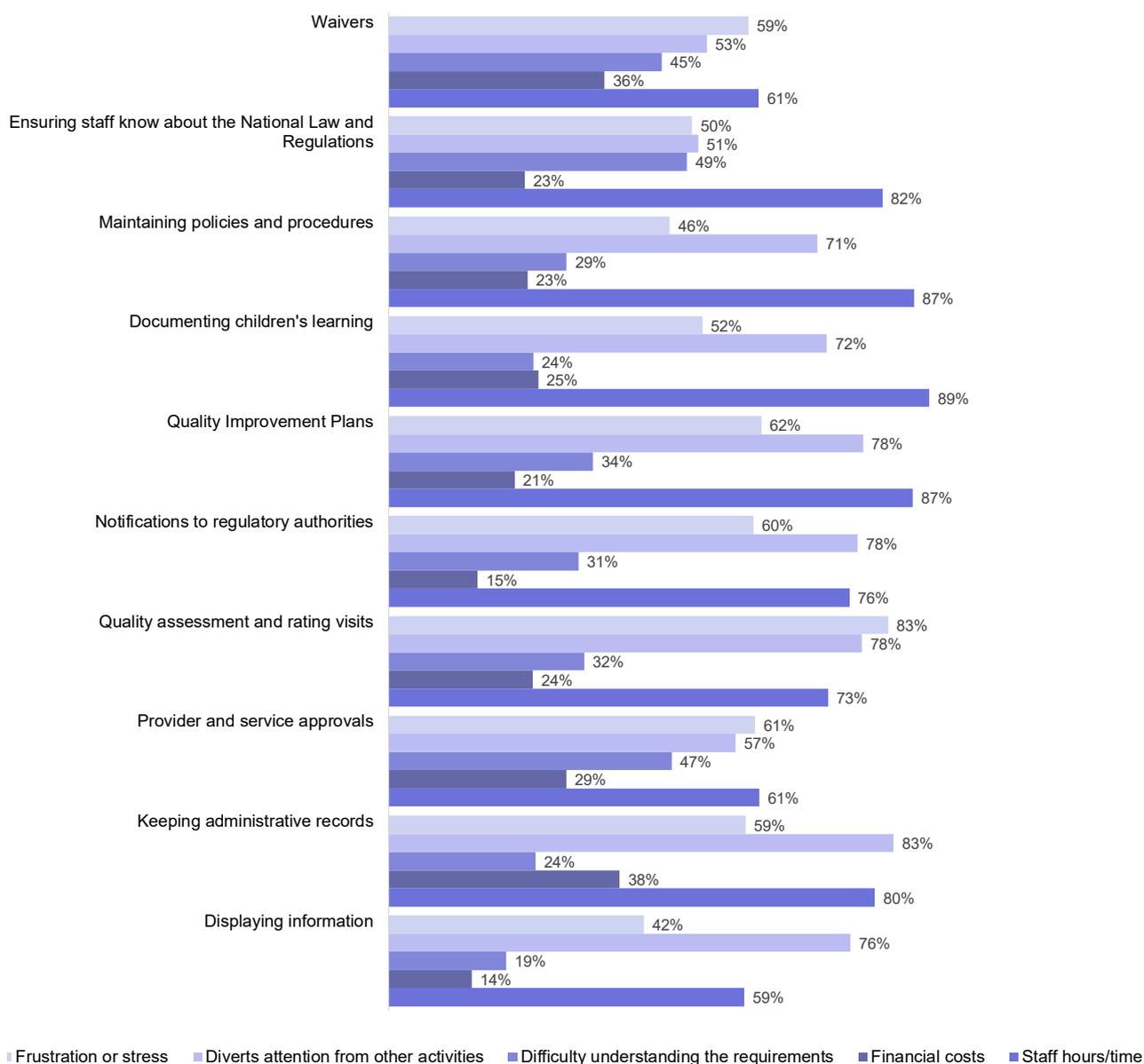
Respondents were also asked which factors contributed to a specific requirement being highly burdensome.

Figure 5.3 shows that, across all requirements, respondents frequently cited staff hours/time, diverting attention from other activities, and frustration or stress as reasons for the high perception of burden.

Looking at the four requirements that respondents were most likely to identify as highly burdensome:

- **Quality assessment and rating visits** – most common reasons were frustration or stress (83%), diverting attention from other activities (78%) and staff hours/time (73%)
- **Quality Improvement Plans** – most common reasons were staff hours/time (87%) and diverting attention from other activities (78%)
- **Maintaining policies and procedures** – most common reasons were staff hours/time (87%) and diverting attention from other activities (71%)
- **Documenting children’s learning** – most common reasons were staff hours/time (89%) and diverting attention from other activities (72%).

Figure 5.3 Reasons respondents provided to explain why they perceived specific administrative requirements to be highly burdensome²¹



²¹ Respondents who selected 4 or 5 on a scale of 0–5, where 0 was ‘not at all burdensome’ and 5 was ‘very burdensome’. This figure has been calculated differently to some previous years to account for multiple responses

Examining perceptions of burden associated with quality assessment and rating visits

As noted in **Figure 5.2**, almost two-thirds (64%) of respondents reported quality assessments and rating visits as highly burdensome in this year's survey, up from 53% in 2018.

Table 5.4 compares respondents' perceptions by Service type and provider size.

For the third consecutive survey, perceived burden was highest among providers of preschool/ kindergarten (68%), closely followed by long day care (64%) and outside school hours care (63%).

Levels of perceived burden were highest among medium-sized providers (67%) followed by single service providers (63%) and large providers (57%).

Table 5.4: Respondents with a high perception of burden associated with quality assessment and rating visits, by service type and provider size

| Service type | 2017 | | 2018 | | 2022 | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|---|-----------------------|---|-----------------------|---|
| | Number of respondents | High perception of burden ²² | Number of respondents | High perception of burden ²² | Number of respondents | High perception of burden ²² |
| Preschool/Kindergarten | 578 | 56% | 695 | 59% | 399 | 68% |
| Long day care | 1,234 | 49% | 1,210 | 51% | 1,133 | 64% |
| Outside school hours care | 600 | 52% | 558 | 53% | 272 | 63% |
| Family day care | 250 | 36% | 160 | 38% | 117 | 42% |
| Total | 2,362 | 50% | 2,178 | 53% | 1,921 | 64% |

| Provider size | 2017 | | 2018 | | 2022 | |
|---|-----------------------|---|-----------------------|---|-----------------------|---|
| | Number of respondents | High perception of burden ²² | Number of respondents | High perception of burden ²² | Number of respondents | High perception of burden ²² |
| Medium (2–24 approved services) | 507 | 53% | 403 | 52% | 465 | 67% |
| Small (one approved service) | 1,810 | 49% | 1,744 | 53% | 1,409 | 63% |
| Large (25 or more approved services) | 45 | 44% | 31 | 45% | 47 | 57% |
| Total | 2,362 | 50% | 2,178 | 53% | 1,921 | 64% |

²² High perception of burden = 4 or 5 on a scale of 0-5

Summary of open-ended responses

When asked what, if anything, would reduce the burden of ongoing administrative requirements under the NQF, survey respondents raised the following:

- Reduced paperwork and documentation requirements overall, with many citing the quality assessment and rating process, development and maintenance of the Quality Improvement Plan, and documenting children’s learning specifically
- Streamlined guidance about the NQF, including guidance that is:
 - » clear and specific
 - » simple, concise and easy to understand
 - » tailored to the service context
 - » accessible and adaptable.
- Increased sector support and collaboration, including:
 - » regular communication with state and territory regulatory authorities
 - » relationship-building with regulatory authority staff, for example with the authorised officers who undertake quality assessment and rating visits
 - » more frequent service visits, for reasons other than quality assessment and rating
 - » training and professional development opportunities, with a focus on workforce quality.



Australian Children's
Education & Care
Quality Authority

© 2022 Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority.

Copyright in this resource (including, without limitation, text, images, logos, icons, information, data, documents, pages and images) ("the material") is owned or licensed by us.

Copyright in material provided by Commonwealth, State or Territory agencies, private individuals or organisations may belong to those agencies, individuals or organisations and be licensed to us.

Subject to any contrary statement on relevant material, you may use any of the material in this resource for your personal and non-commercial use or use on behalf of your organisation for non-commercial purposes, provided that an appropriate acknowledgement is made (including by retaining this notice where the whole or any part is reproduced or used without material alteration), and the material is not subjected to derogatory treatment.

Apart from any other use as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968 (Cth), all other rights are reserved.

Requests and enquiries concerning further authorisation should be addressed to:

The Copyright Officer, ACECQA PO Box A292, SYDNEY NSW 1235 or emailed to copyright@acecqa.gov.au.

Comments and suggestions regarding this publication are welcomed and should be forwarded to ACECQA.

Published by ACECQA

ABN 59 372 786 746

Level 6, 175 Liverpool Street, Sydney NSW 2000

Web: www.acecqa.gov.au

Email: enquiries@acecqa.gov.au

Media enquiries: media@acecqa.gov.au