



Australian Children's
Education & Care
Quality Authority

NQF Annual Performance Report

National Quality Framework

December 2020

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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, the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the Lands on which ACECQA is located. We also acknowledge and pay our respects to the Traditional Custodians and Elders, past and present, and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of all lands across Australia. We recognise and celebrate the contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of Australia, including their role in the education and care of children. We recognise the rich and diverse cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and the valuable contribution this diversity brings.

Suggested citation: Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) (2020), *National Quality Framework Annual Performance Report*, ACECQA, Sydney.

Foreword from the ACECQA Chair

On behalf of the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA), I am pleased to present the 2020 National Quality Framework (NQF) Annual Performance Report.

The past year has been dominated by the global coronavirus pandemic. COVID-19 has had an immense impact across the world, causing rapid changes unimaginable a relatively short time ago.

In Australia, the year began with another emergency – the devastating bushfires that reached their peak in December and January. Like many other sectors, education and care service providers and regulators rapidly adopted new strategies to protect children, staff and families from the risks presented by the bushfires and COVID-19.

The pandemic in particular brought a number of major changes, with many children not attending education and care services for portions of 2020. Service providers increasingly used technology to provide ongoing learning and support to children and families. Governments and ACECQA worked together to assist service providers and their staff by prioritising regulatory functions that targeted immediate risks to the health, safety and wellbeing of children and staff; changing funding models to ensure services were able to continue to operate; and enhancing communications to ameliorate confusion and uncertainty.

The vital role the early years play in the education system is acknowledged in the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration released in 2019. Since then, there has been a growing recognition of education and care as an 'essential service' – an appreciation of our sector's role in supporting children's learning, development and wellbeing, while enabling parents and carers to continue working where possible.

The pandemic has made clear our challenges, including workforce sustainability, educator wellbeing, provider and service viability, and the diverse nature of our sector where one size can't fit all. These challenges require ongoing attention and action by all stakeholders. However, the NQF has proven itself a solid framework for navigating major crises, with the best interests of children at its core.

On behalf of ACECQA I would like to acknowledge the work of our government partners and offer my sincere thanks to service providers, teachers, educators and staff for their outstanding efforts this year. They have been there for children and families showing remarkable resilience, fortitude and courage. It is our hope that this report reflects these challenges and is a record of these successes.

Judy Hebblethwaite
ACECQA Chair

Overview of children's education and care sector

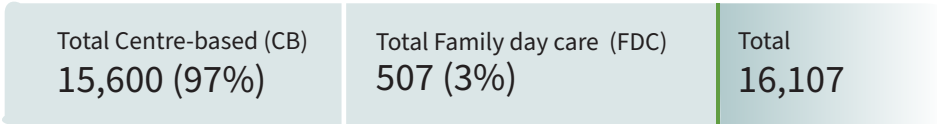
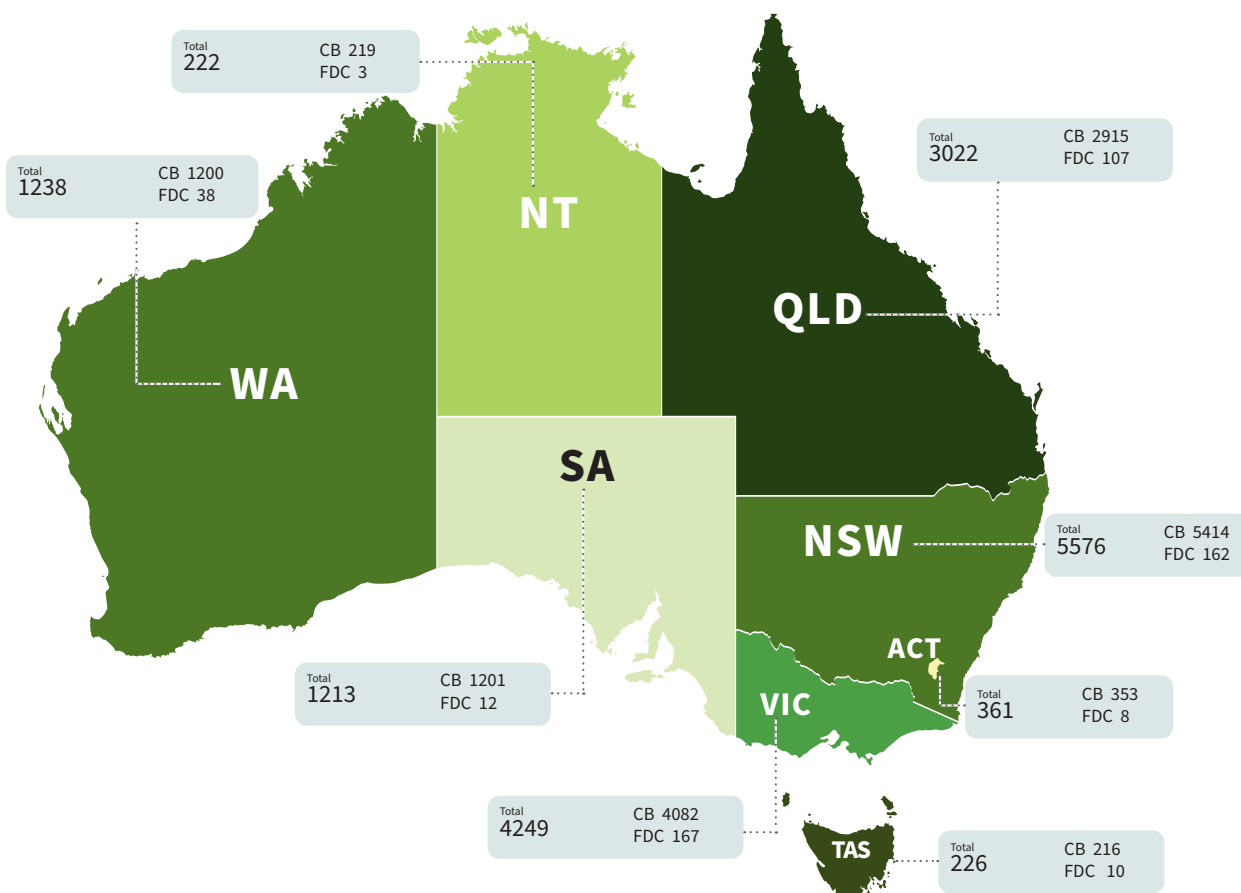
As at 30 June 2020:

- more than 16,100 children's education and care services are approved to operate under the National Quality Framework (NQF), including:
 - » 8035 long day care services (50% of approved services)
 - » 4504 outside school hours care services (28%)
 - » 3058 preschools/kindergartens (19%)
 - » 507 family day care services (3%)
- more than 7200 providers are approved to operate children's education and care services, with 81% of these approved to operate a single service
- the 13 largest providers in the country each operate more than 100 services, and a combined total of around 3500 services (22% of all approved services)
- 'private for profit' providers operate two-thirds (67%) of long day care services, 61% of family day care services and almost half (48%) of outside school hours care services, but only 2% of preschools/kindergartens
- 'private not for profit community managed' providers operate half of preschools/kindergartens, with more than a fifth (21%) 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 (35%) in New South Wales, more than a quarter (26%) in Victoria and just under a fifth (19%) in Queensland
- almost three-quarters (72%) of centre-based services are located in major cities, with a quarter (25%) in inner and outer regional Australia, and 2% in remote and very remote Australia
- more than 15,000 services have a published quality rating against the National Quality Standard (NQS), with 81% rated Meeting NQS or above
- of the roughly 2800 services rated Working Towards NQS, a third (33%) received the rating due to not meeting only one to three elements of quality
- more than 4400 services are rated Exceeding NQS, with more than 1400 services receiving a rating of Exceeding NQS for all seven quality areas.

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

Preschools in Tasmania, and most preschools in Western Australia, are outside the scope of the NQF, as are some other types of services nationally, such as occasional care services.

Sector profile



Provider management type	Number of services	Proportion of services
Private for profit	7868	48.8%
Private not for profit community managed	3413	21.2%
Private not for profit other organisations	2209	13.7%
State/Territory and Local Government managed	1217	7.6%
State/Territory government schools	700	4.3%
Independent schools	497	3.1%
Catholic schools	188	1.2%

Executive summary

The National Quality Framework (NQF) represents a nationwide commitment to quality education and care for our youngest citizens.

Ensuring their health, safety and wellbeing is the first and foremost objective of the NQF. Other important objectives include improving their educational and developmental outcomes, and promoting continuous improvement in the quality of services.

Governments regulate more than 16,000 services under the NQF, with individual 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 a stressful and emotive experience, 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 in order to operate. There is also a National Quality Standard (NQS) used by all state and territory governments, which sets a high national benchmark against which to quality assess and rate services.

The NQS quality ratings are published to share good practice, promote continuous quality improvement, and provide key information to existing and prospective users of regulated education and care.

In 2020, education and care service providers adopted new strategies to support and protect children, staff and families, in response to the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Providers and their staff have demonstrated the essential role they play in supporting children before, during and after major incidents, emergencies and disasters.

They also often enable parents and carers to continue working during these exceptional periods of time, making a vital contribution towards economic viability and recovery.

Most of the data used in this report is sourced from the National Quality Agenda IT System (NQA ITS), as at 30 June 2020 and also published on [ACECOA's website](#). Data from other sources is specifically referenced throughout.

Due to rounding, individual percentages in the tables and figures may not add up to 100%.

Quality over time

The proportion of children's education and care services rated Meeting NQS or above has increased every year since the NQF was introduced, both at the overall quality rating level and for each of the seven quality areas (see **Figure 1**).

An updated NQS came into effect from 1 February 2018, reducing the number of quality standards and elements, and introducing a new approach to calculating the Exceeding rating.

As a result of these changes, it is more challenging for a service to achieve a rating of Exceeding NQS. While there was a steady increase between 2014 and 2018, the proportion of services rated Exceeding NQS has decreased in the last two years, both at the overall quality rating level and for each of the seven quality areas (see **Figure 2**).

With more than 11,000 reassessments of children's education and care services completed by state and territory regulatory authorities, there is increasingly strong evidence of continuous quality improvement.

Almost two-thirds (65%) of services rated Working Towards NQS improve their quality rating to Meeting NQS (51%) or Exceeding NQS (14%) following a reassessment (see **Table 1**).

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

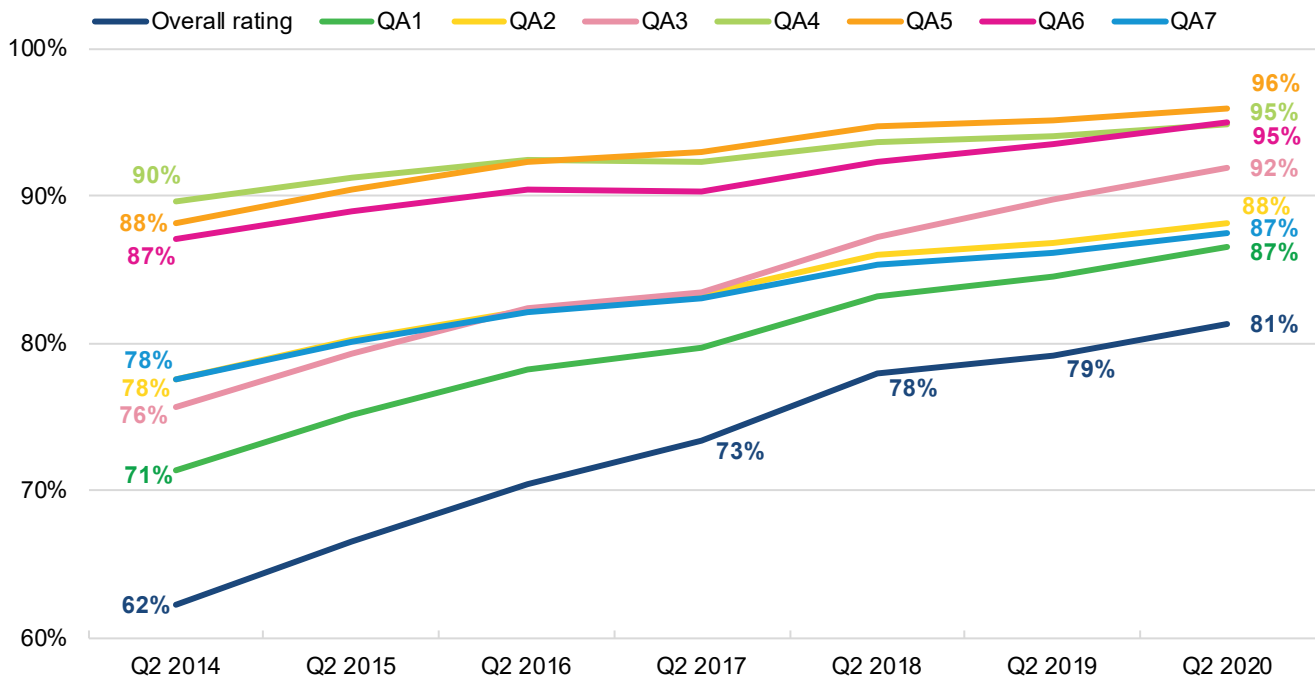


Figure 2: Proportion of services rated Exceeding NQS or above by overall rating and quality area

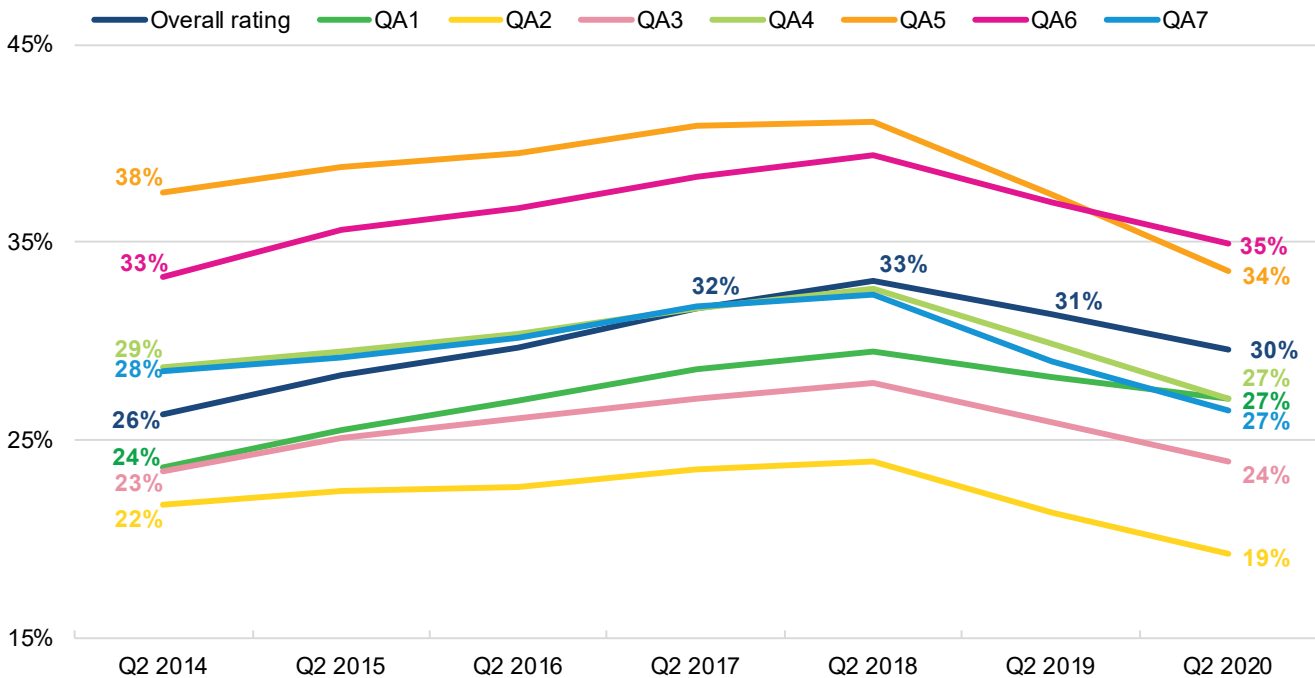


Table 1: Overall ratings before and after reassessments, as at 30 June 2020

		Rating after reassessment				Total
		Significant Improvement Required	Working Towards NQS	Meeting NQS	Exceeding NQS	
Rating before reassessment	Significant Improvement Required	19	58	11	0	88
	Working Towards NQS	32	1692	2531	695	4950
	Meeting NQS	3	723	2428	638	3792
	Exceeding NQS	1	249	844	1110	2204
Total		55	2722	5814	2443	11,034
		Rating after reassessment				Improvement rate
		Significant Improvement Required	Working Towards NQS	Meeting NQS	Exceeding NQS	
Rating before reassessment	Significant Improvement Required	22%	66%	13%	0%	78%
	Working Towards NQS	1%	34%	51%	14%	65%
	Meeting NQS	0%	19%	64%	17%	17%
	Exceeding NQS	0%	11%	38%	50%	-

Chapter summary

Below is a brief summary of the five chapters of this year's report.

Chapter 1 – Impact of COVID-19 and natural disasters

Children's education and care service providers and staff have demonstrated considerable and prolonged resilience, commitment and innovation in response to the significant challenges they have faced throughout 2019-20, including catastrophic bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic. They have also demonstrated the vital role they play in supporting children to continue their early development and education in the face of these challenges, and in enabling parents and carers to continue to work where possible.

As Australia recovers from COVID-19, access to high quality education and care will be very important, particularly for vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

Sector wide issues, such as workforce sustainability, educator wellbeing, provider and service viability, and skilled migration, will also require ongoing monitoring and attention by all stakeholders.

Chapter 2 – Children's health and safety

Ensuring the health and safety of children attending education and care services is the first and most important objective of the NQF. Almost nine out of ten (88%) services are rated Meeting NQS or above for Quality Area 2 (Children's health and safety).

The most challenging elements of quality continue to relate to health practices and procedures, supervision, and incident and emergency management.

The rate of serious incidents and confirmed breaches increased in 2019/20. While the rate of serious incidents was slightly higher than in 2018/19, it has remained steady over the last four years.

The continued year on year increase in confirmed breaches reflects an ongoing focus by state and territory regulatory authorities on compliance with the requirements of the National Law and Regulations.

Chapter 3 – Educational program and practice

The second objective of the NQF is to improve the educational and developmental outcomes of children attending education and care services.

Since the introduction of the NQF, Quality Area 1 (Educational program and practice) has consistently been the most challenging of the seven quality areas for services to meet. Approaching nine out of ten (87%) services are rated Meeting NQS or above.

The most challenging elements of quality continue to relate to the assessment and planning cycle, and critical reflection.

Research commissioned by ACECQA in 2019 found that genuine and sustained quality improvement is a shared responsibility, with approved providers, service and educational leaders, teachers and educators all playing a vital role. The findings emphasise the need for strong and effective leadership at all levels of service delivery to improve educational program and practice.

Chapter 4 – Children from vulnerable and disadvantaged backgrounds

Children from more disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to be developmentally vulnerable, and receive the greatest benefits from attending high quality education and care.

There is likely to be a significant increase of potentially vulnerable children in Australia as a result of the immediate and continued impact of COVID-19.

There's a growing gap between the quality of services in the most disadvantaged and most advantaged areas. There is also a marked difference in the proportion of high quality services, with services in the most advantaged areas notably more likely to achieve the Exceeding NQS rating.

Chapter 5 – Workforce

Improved educator to child ratios and educator qualifications, stipulated under the National Law and Regulations, contribute to higher quality education and care.

Updated versions of the vocational education and care qualifications, including the Certificate III and Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care, are expected to be available for registered training organisations to implement from 2021.

While a growing proportion of early childhood initial teacher education graduates gain employment in early childhood settings, the majority of graduates gain employment in schools.

One in ten long day care services hold a staffing waiver, with most of these waivers relating to the early childhood teacher requirements of the National Regulations.

Services in remote areas continue to have the highest proportion of staffing waivers, reflecting the increased difficulty of recruiting and retaining teachers and educators in those locations.

In December 2019, Education Ministers endorsed the development of a new national workforce strategy to support the recruitment, retention, sustainability and quality of the children's education and care workforce.

The new strategy is anticipated to be finalised and published in the second half of 2021.

Report snapshot



Service providers and staff have demonstrated considerable and prolonged resilience, commitment and innovation

Chapter 1
Impact of COVID-19 and natural disasters



Ensuring the health and safety of children attending services is the first and most important objective of the NQF

Chapter 2
Children's health and safety



The most challenging elements of quality continue to relate to the assessment and planning cycle, and critical reflection

Chapter 3
Educational program and practice



There is a growing gap between the quality of services in the most disadvantaged and most advantaged areas

Chapter 4
Children from vulnerable and disadvantaged backgrounds



A new ten-year national workforce strategy is being developed in 2020/21

Chapter 5
Workforce



Key messages

- Education and care service providers and staff play an essential role in supporting children before, during and after major incidents, emergencies and disasters. They also often enable parents and carers to continue working during these exceptional periods of time, a vital contribution towards economic viability and recovery.
- Like many other sectors, education and care service providers adopted new strategies to support and protect children, staff and families in 2020, in response to the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. This is in keeping with the first and most important objective of the *Education and Care Services National Law* – to ensure the safety, health and wellbeing of children attending education and care services.
- Many providers demonstrated significant innovation in their use of technology to support children’s learning remotely, while also maintaining face-to-face education and care where possible. This reflects both the objective of the National Law to promote continuous improvement in service provision, as well as a guiding principle of the National Law that best practice is expected in service provision.
- Providers and their staff have also demonstrated considerable and prolonged resilience and commitment in response to a range of significant challenges, as well as general uncertainty and risks to health and wellbeing.
- Governments and ACECQA put in place a range of measures to promote the health, safety and wellbeing of children and staff, as well as the continuity of education and care.
- There is likely to be a significant increase of potentially vulnerable children in Australia as a result of the continued impact of COVID-19 on the economic circumstances of families, and related child wellbeing.
- Access to high quality education and care for vulnerable and disadvantaged children in particular will be very important as Australia recovers from COVID-19.
- It is likely that there will also be a number of issues, including workforce sustainability, educator wellbeing, provider and service viability, and skilled migration, that require ongoing monitoring and attention by all sector stakeholders.

Overview
























2019-20 has been an exceptional year for Australia. Catastrophic bushfires were swiftly followed by the ongoing impact of the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic (see **Figure 1.1**).

Children’s education and care service providers and staff have demonstrated considerable and prolonged resilience and innovation in response to these significant challenges. They have also demonstrated the vital role they play in supporting children in the face of these

challenges, and in enabling parents to continue to work where possible.

Major incidents, emergencies and disasters can be stressful for children, with some experiencing ongoing negative impacts on their mental health and wellbeing^{1,2}. Children may be particularly vulnerable to mental health issues after these events because they may have less developed coping strategies and be more dependent on others for support³.

Figure 1.1: 2019-20 timeline

9 Nov		State of emergency declared in Queensland
2 Jan		State of emergency declared in NSW and Victoria
6 Jan		Announcement of establishment of National Bushfire Recovery Agency
17 Jan		Announcement of additional mental health support for children attending education and care in
20 Jan		Announcement of assistance to businesses in bushfire impacted areas
25 Jan		First confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19) in Australia
29 Jan		State of emergency declared in Queensland
31 Jan		State of emergency declared in the ACT
1 Feb		Foreign nationals from mainland China temporarily banned from entering Australia
20 Feb		Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements established
25 Feb		COVID-19 National Communicable Disease Plan activated
15 Mar		State of emergency declared in Western Australia
16 Mar		State of emergency declared in Victoria
19 Mar		State of emergency declared in Tasmania
20 Mar		General restrictions on travel to Australia (except for Australian residents)
27 Mar		Students increasingly learning from home; Schools close in Victoria
29 Mar		National Cabinet gives ' strong guidance ' for people to work/study from home and minimise outings
30 Mar		Prime Minister announces JobKeeper wage subsidy program
2 Apr		Assessment and rating temporarily suspended
2 Apr		Early Childhood Education and Care Relief Package provides free education and care to families
25 May		Majority of students return to onsite education
12 July		Early Childhood Education and Care Relief Package ends
2 Aug		State of disaster declared in Victoria

1. Gibbs, et al (2013), *Research with, by, for and about children: Lessons from disaster contexts*.

2. Williams, et al (2008), *Children, resilience and disasters: recent evidence that should influence a model of psychosocial care*.

3. Cahill, et al (2020), *Research-informed approaches to supporting student wellbeing post-disaster*; Le Brocque, et al (2016), *Schools and natural disaster recovery: the unique and vital role that teachers and education professionals play in ensuring the mental health of students following natural disasters*.

Bushfires

The scale of the 2019-20 bushfires was immense, with more of eastern Australia burnt than during any fire season on record⁴.

Between August 2019 and April 2020, 952 bushfire-related temporary closures were recorded in the National Quality Agenda IT System (NQA ITS) for 693 centre-based services.

More than three-quarters (79%) of these closures were in New South Wales. Nationally, closures affected all centre-based service types on a similar scale, as shown in **Table 1.1**.

The majority (59%) of bushfire-related service closures were notified in the week starting 11 November 2019⁶, and were a result of precautionary action due to extreme or catastrophic bushfire danger.

On 6 January 2020, the Australian Government announced the establishment of the [National Bushfire Recovery Agency](#) to co-ordinate a national response to rebuild communities with initial funding of \$2 billion. This included [grants, concessional loans, and free financial advice](#) for small businesses and not for profit organisations that were directly or indirectly impacted by bushfires in fire-affected local government areas.

As part of the lessons learned from previous bushfires, Victoria provides an example of how the regulatory system has been tailored for service providers in potential emergency situations by applying conditions on service approvals for services in bushfire-at-risk areas. These conditions require service providers in identified areas to submit their bushfire emergency management plans to the regulatory authority within specified timeframes, update the plans regularly, communicate with families at affected services, and enact service closures on designated code red bushfire danger days.

The Victorian regulatory authority contacted all affected services during the bushfire emergency period and provided support through fact sheets and guides related to emergency management. It issued emergency action notices to direct closure of services considered to be at bushfire risk. As there were smoke hazards, health information in relation to air quality and protecting the health of children, staff and families was also provided to education and care services.

Table 1.1: Bushfire-related temporary centre-based service closures⁵ recorded in the NQA ITS, 2019-20

Service type	Bushfire-related temporary service closures		
	Number of services	Number of closures	Proportion of all services closed
Long day care	374	500	5%
Preschool/Kindergarten	156	238	5%
Outside school hours care	163	214	4%
Total	693	952	4%

4. Bureau of Meteorology (2020), [Annual Climate Change Statement 2019](#).

5. Some services closed multiple times.

6. This corresponds with [catastrophic fire danger ratings that week](#) across Greater Sydney and Greater Hunter regions and extreme and severe fire danger ratings elsewhere in NSW.

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

The week after the [Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements](#) was established, the [National Communicable Disease Plan](#) was activated in response to COVID-19.

The [National Cabinet](#) was created to coordinate action between the Australian and state and territory governments in response to the pandemic⁷.

COVID-19 has presented a major health and safety risk to the global community. Like many other sectors, education and care service providers have adopted a number of [new strategies](#) to protect children, staff and families against the risk of contracting and spreading the virus.

The Australian Health Protection Principal Committee has maintained the position that pre-emptive closures of education and care services would not be effective as a public health intervention to prevent community transmission of COVID-19⁸.

Nevertheless, many children who usually attend education and care services did not attend for portions of 2020.

Impact of COVID-19 on children and families

COVID-19 dramatically changed the context of education and care, as well as work, for many children and families in 2020.

The pandemic and associated lockdowns meant many children and families stayed at home, including working from home and being educated remotely.

A range of surveys suggest the following:

- [60% of Australians worked from home](#) during the pandemic, compared to 7% beforehand, with 26% of parents using approved care, compared to 52% beforehand⁹
- The drop in use of approved care was fairly consistent across children's age groups, with the most significant decline for school age children ([6% used approved care during the pandemic](#), compared to 32% beforehand)⁹
- [76% of parents](#) kept their children home from school or education and care due to COVID-19 in early May 2020¹⁰
- Findings from a survey of 117 New South Wales educators estimated that around 30% of children are unlikely to attend the standard 600 hours of early learning in the year before school in 2020 (with those attending preschool/kindergarten more likely to miss out than those attending long day care)¹¹
- An estimated 750,000 extra children are living in [families experiencing employment stress](#) in 2020 as a result of COVID-19 related unemployment and underemployment¹².

Many education and care service providers demonstrated significant innovation in their use of technology to support children's learning remotely, while also maintaining face-to-face education and care where possible.

New South Wales educators who responded to the Community Early Learning Australia (CELA) survey reported that remote learning had a mixed impact, with some families and children able to engage and benefit more than others¹³.

7. The National Cabinet is advised and supported by the [Australian Health Protection Principal Committee](#), an ongoing body composed of federal, state and territory Chief Medical Officers.

8. This advice was issued in [March](#), [April](#) and [May 2020](#) based on the observation that children made up a very small proportion of cases, there was limited evidence of transmission between children, and studies suggesting that alternative care arrangements may offset the potential reduction in community transmission.

9. Australian Institute of Family Studies (2020), [Families in Australia Survey, Life during COVID-19, Report no. 1: Early Findings](#).

10. Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020), [Household Impacts of COVID-19 Survey](#), Canberra.

11. Community Early Learning Australia (2020), [Broadside – How children are faring in their year before school](#).

12. Noble, K., Hurley, P. & Macklin, S. (2020), [COVID-19, employment stress and student vulnerability in Australia](#). Mitchell Institute for Education and Health Policy, Victoria University.

13. The Front Project (2020), [Early Learning and COVID-19: Experiences of teachers and educators at the start of the pandemic](#).

Nearly half of those surveyed had observed impacts on children’s development as a result of missing early learning. Educators raised concerns relating to the following areas of children’s development:

- *emotional maturity*: less stability in the relationship between children and educators, with challenges relating to children’s increased anxiety and lower levels of confidence and resilience
- *social learning*: difficulties re-establishing routines, farewelling family members, rebuilding friendships, playing in groups, sharing and taking turns
- *physical wellbeing, communication, and language and cognitive skills*: negative impacts on children’s attention, and fine and gross motor skills.

Educators also raised specific concerns that children experiencing disadvantages and vulnerabilities are the most likely to fall behind and lose the gains they have made in preschool.

Between 6 April and 12 July 2020, the Australian Government’s [Early Childhood Education and Care Relief Package](#) supported families by funding education and care services directly in lieu of the Child Care Subsidy (CCS) and the Additional Child Care Subsidy (ACCS). This meant families were not charged fees for education and care during this time.

This operated in tandem with fortnightly [JobKeeper](#) payments for eligible staff members, and [exceptional circumstances supplementary payments](#) to address gaps. Services were required to remain open and charge no fees to be eligible for these payments, while prioritising available capacity for children of essential workers. During this period, states and territories established additional funding streams to support education and care services where possible, including payments to services ineligible for JobKeeper (such as council-run services).

From 13 July 2020, the CCS and ACCS recommenced together with a number of new measures to support providers and families, including temporary changes to the activity test.

Impact of COVID-19 on service providers and staff

While the impacts of the pandemic on the education and care sector continue to unfold, to date, there has been limited impact on the number of providers approved to operate. As at 30 June 2020, there were 7258 approved providers of education and care services under the National Quality Framework, compared to 7294 providers a year earlier – an annual decline of just 36.

A recent survey of teachers and educators found the education and care workforce adapted rapidly in response to changes arising from COVID-19, including:

- emerging health and safety issues
- heightened emotional needs of children, families and colleagues
- fluctuations in attendance.

Teachers and educators reported opportunities arising from these changes, such as:

- strengthened relationships with colleagues, families and children
- shifts in practice, such as transitioning to online learning to support playbased learning at home
- more time for professional development
- delivery of higher quality practice
- reduction in administrative duties, allowing more time for meaningful interactions with children.

The survey also highlighted a number of key issues for the sector, particularly in relation to:

- *job security*: confidence about long-term employment security declined from 91% before COVID-19 to 67%
- *work conditions*: while 78% agreed the education and care system worked well before COVID-19, 88% believed it was vulnerable during COVID-19, with emphasis placed on simplifying a complex system to make it more intuitive for both providers and families
- *value of early learning*: the majority consider respect and recognition an ongoing challenge facing the sector.

These survey findings accord with themes arising from ACECQA's discussions with a range of education and care service providers during early 2020, who reported a range of innovative and flexible responses to the new operating conditions.

These include a greater focus on maintaining contact with vulnerable families, modifying workplace practices to improve safety for children, families and staff, and new approaches to responding to a range of emergency scenarios.

The following case studies showcase innovative practice during the COVID-19 pandemic:

Mentoring families through home learning

Children's attendance at [John Brotchie Nursery School](#) in Botany, Sydney dropped dramatically as the COVID-19 pandemic escalated in Australia. The [Excellent rated service](#) quickly adopted innovative online practices to support children and families.

The service mentored and guided families through home learning, including:

- producing virtual educational experiences based on their pedagogical philosophy
- developing demonstration videos for families that discuss appropriate teaching strategies and ways to implement them at home
- producing story time videos based on children's book requests
- ensuring families had access to the service's books, toys, play equipment and resources
- regularly contacting each family to:
 - » support their health and wellbeing
 - » respond to feedback about children's learning progress and provide ideas to support it
 - » enable children to give feedback to their educators
 - » record children's routines and experiences, and share them with their peers to help them stay connected with each other (in response to children's feedback).

Sharing ideas from the sector

The Australian Capital Territory regulatory authority released a special edition of its [Talking Quality newsletter](#) to highlight innovative practices during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The newsletter outlined the challenges service providers faced, and some of their creative and innovative practices to support families, children and educators.

For example, [Burgmann Anglican Preschools and Early Learning Centre](#) supported families by developing take home packs of sensory resources such as clay and playdough, as well as recording group times and reading sessions to share with families.

[Conder Early Learning Centre](#) supported children by using planned experiences to provide them opportunities to focus on emotions and share their feelings, and used science experiences to demonstrate the effectiveness of handwashing.

[Amazing Family Day Care](#) supported their multicultural workforce by sourcing health information in a range of languages, participating in online COVIDSafe training and using this knowledge to develop new policies and procedures.

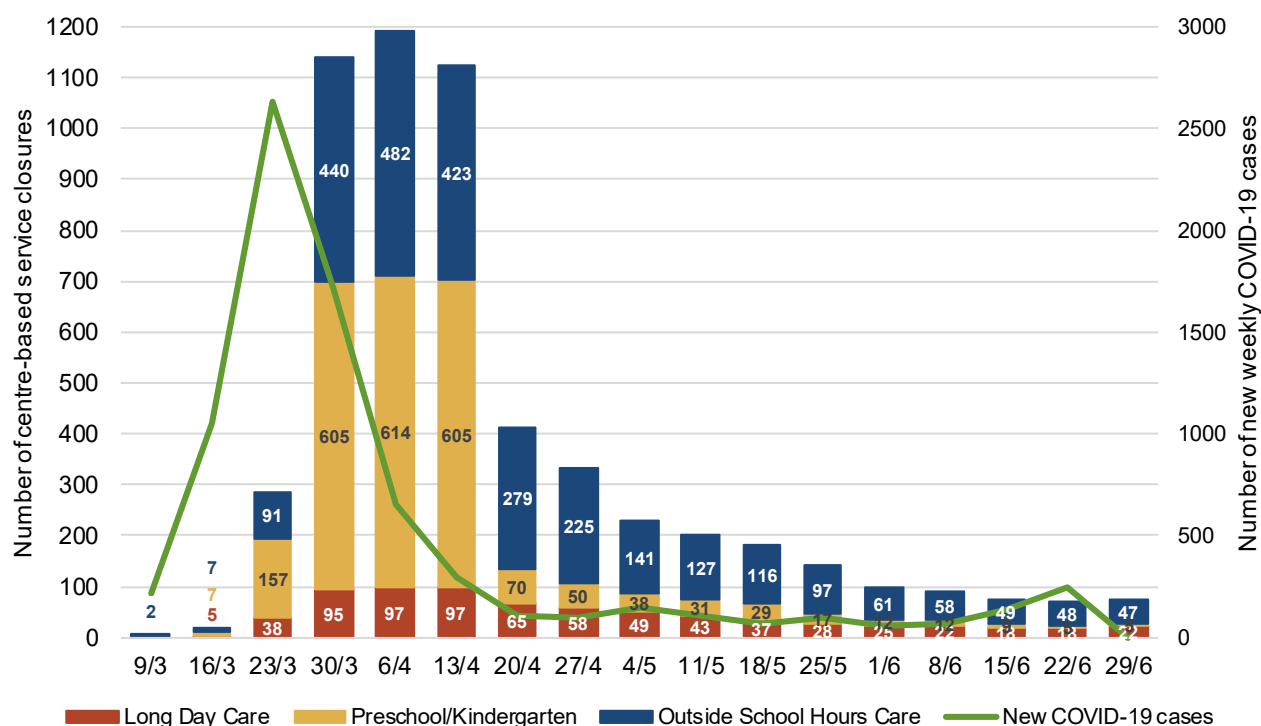
As shown in **Figure 1.2**, more than 1,100 centre-based service closures related to the impact of COVID-19 were recorded in the NQA ITS at the start of three consecutive weeks (Monday 30 March; Monday 6 April; Monday 13 April), with most of the closures being services in Victoria.

This corresponded with a period when Australians were strongly advised to work and study from home, coming immediately after a spike in the number of new weekly COVID-19 cases.

The most commonly cited reasons for temporary service closure were:

- *decreasing child attendance or enrolment* (more than half of all closures)
- *co-located school closure* (a frequent factor in outside school hours care service closures)
- *precautionary action*.

Figure 1.2: Number of centre-based service closures recorded in the NQA ITS at the start of each week, related to the impact of COVID-19¹⁴



Support for service providers, staff and families

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, governments and ACECQA have worked together to support education and care service providers and their staff. State and territory regulatory authorities prioritised regulatory functions that target immediate risks to the health and safety of children, and enhanced communications to the sector, including via telephone or online methods.

While there was some initial confusion around different health advice, notably between the school and children's education and care sector as well as different levels of government, inter-government communications increased significantly. This collaboration allowed governments and ACECQA to raise and resolve critical issues quickly and collectively. A range of education and care service providers have also reported that collaboration and cooperation with state and territory regulatory authorities has been enhanced during 2020.

The following measures endorsed by Education Council were implemented from March 2020:

- *Time limited regulatory action*, including:
 - » waiving of fees and charges for COVID-19 related applications
 - » fast-tracking qualification waivers
 - » suspending assessment and ratings
 - » making other rapid operational adjustments as required¹⁵.
- *Enhancements to the NQA ITS*, including:
 - » system changes that enable approved providers to categorise a range of activities and applications as being related to emergency management, including COVID-19.
- *Support for early childhood initial teacher education students*, including:
 - » a modification to the ACECQA Board's supervised professional experience requirements for final year students in 2020.

14. COVID-19 case data was sourced from covid19data.com.au.

15. Education Council (2020), *Communiqué*.

Governments and ACECQA also set up dedicated COVID-19 webpages and regularly updated information and guidance, including:

- [Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment](#) sector specific COVID-19 and relief package information
- [COVID-19 webpage](#) and [service and temporary closure mapping tool](#) on the ACECQA website
- National family helpline to support families to find education and care services open near them. This was in addition to established state and territory government helplines
- State and territory advice and sector support (such as Victoria's [Learning from Home](#) webpages and [COVID-19 information](#) for NSW education and care services).

Due to the continued impact of COVID-19, there is likely to be a significant increase of potentially vulnerable children in Australia¹⁶. Access to high quality education and care for vulnerable and disadvantaged children in particular will be very important as the nation recovers from COVID-19.

It is also likely that there will be a number of issues, such as workforce sustainability, educator wellbeing, provider and service viability, and skilled migration that require ongoing monitoring and attention by all sector stakeholders.

16. Noble, K., Hurley, P. & Macklin, S. (2020), *COVID-19, employment stress and student vulnerability in Australia*. Mitchell Institute for Education and Health Policy, Victoria University.



Key messages

- The National Quality Framework (NQF) aims to ensure the health and safety of all children attending education and care services. This is the first and most important objective under the *Education and Care Services National Law*.
- In 2020, education and care service providers implemented new strategies to maintain the health and safety of children, staff and families, and protect against the risk of coronavirus (COVID-19).
- Quality Area 2 of the National Quality Standard (NQS) provides a detailed assessment of a service's health and safety practices and procedures, with the NQS setting a high national benchmark for early childhood education and care, and outside school hours care services in Australia.
- As at 30 June 2020, 88% of services are rated Meeting NQS or above for Quality Area 2, up from 87% in 2019, 86% in 2018 and 83% in 2017.
- Almost two-thirds (65%) of family day care services are rated Meeting NQS or above – the highest proportion for more than four years.
- Standard 2.2 (Safety) and 2.1 (Health) are the third and fifth most challenging of all 15 standards of the NQS, with the two standards including three of the most challenging elements of quality:
 - » Health practices and procedures (Element 2.1.2)
 - » Supervision (Element 2.2.1)
 - » Incident and emergency management (Element 2.2.2).
- The rate of serious incidents and confirmed breaches increased in 2019/20. The continued year on year increase in confirmed breaches reflects an ongoing focus by state and territory regulatory authorities on compliance with the requirements of the National Law and Regulations. While the rate of serious incidents was slightly higher than in 2018/19, it has remained steady over the last four years.
- The most frequently breached sections and regulations of the National Law and Regulations relate to the protection of children from harm and hazards, supervision of children, emergency and evacuation procedures, and the upkeep of premises, furniture and equipment.

Overview

The National Quality Framework aims to ensure the health and safety of all children attending education and care services. This is the first and most important objective of the *Education and Care Services National Law*.

The National Law and Regulations include several explicit requirements and obligations related to children's safety, health and wellbeing, such as health, hygiene and safe food practices, incident, injury, trauma and illness policies and procedures, emergency and evacuation procedures, and risk assessments.

While health and safety related considerations are embedded throughout the National Quality Standard, they are the focus of Quality Area 2 (Children's health and safety).

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has presented a major health and safety risk to the global community. Like many other sectors, education and care service providers have had to adopt a number of new strategies to protect children, staff and families against the risk of contracting and spreading the virus.

Recommendations from the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee published in April 2020 include:

- excluding staff, children and visitors who are unwell, returned from overseas or have been in contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19
- enhancing personal hygiene for children, staff and parents

- adhering to stringent cleaning guidelines
- reducing mixing of children by separating cohorts
- limiting excursions
- requiring influenza vaccination for children, staff and parents
- encouraging parents to seek medical advice for highly vulnerable children.

Children's health and safety quality ratings

Figure 2.1 compares performance against Quality Area 2 over time, showing the proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above.

As at 30 June 2020, 88% of services are rated Meeting NQS or above, up from 87% as at 30 June 2019, 86% as at 30 June 2018 and 83% as at 30 June 2017.

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 (see **Figure 2.2**).

While family day care services continue to have the lowest proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above, 65% of family day care services are rated Meeting NQS or above – the highest proportion since 31 March 2016.

Figure 2.1: Proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above for Quality Area 2

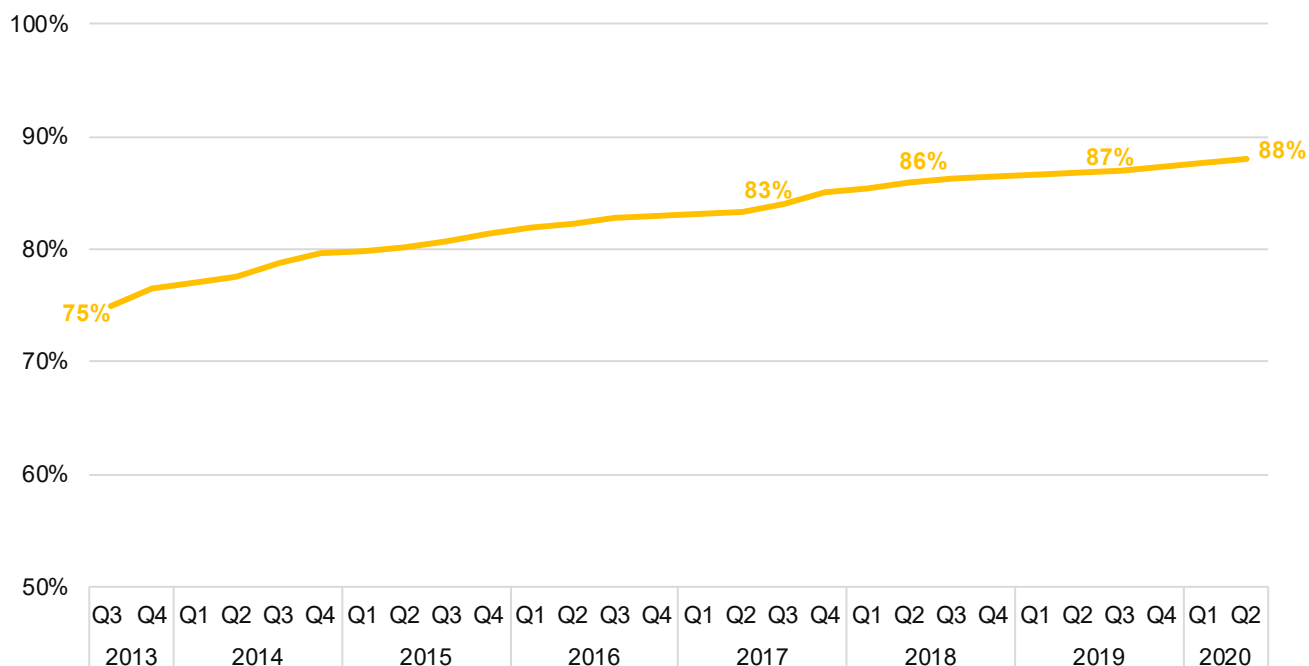


Figure 2.2: Proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above for Quality Area 2, by service type

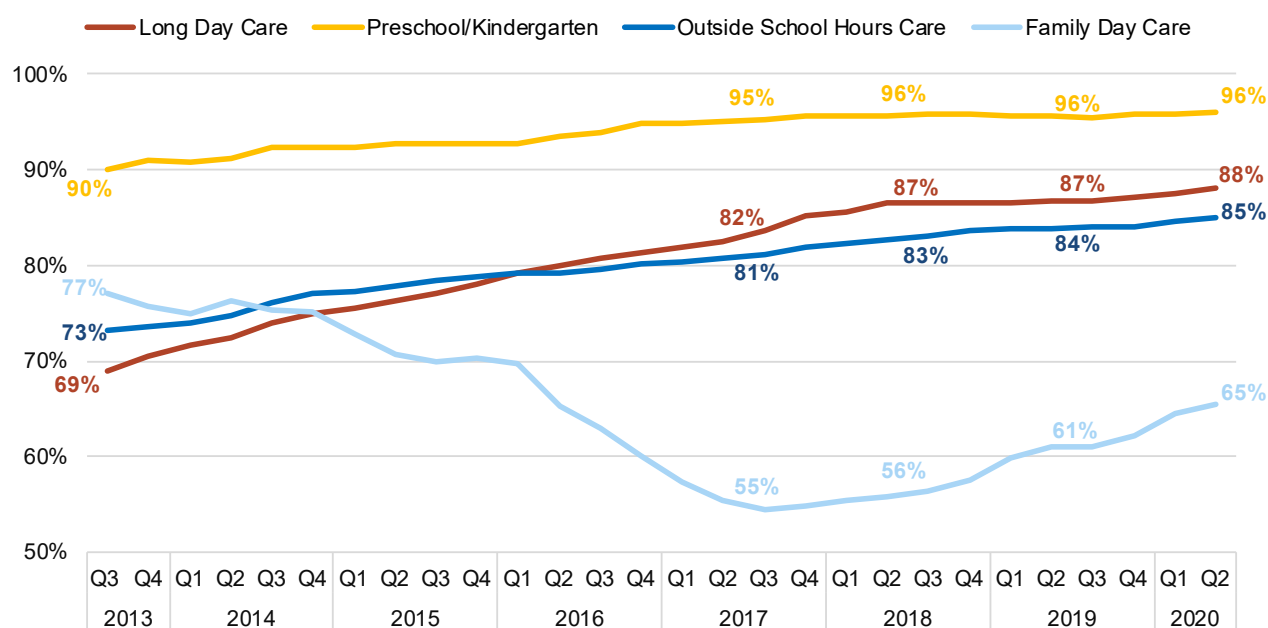


Figure 2.3 shows Standard 2.1 (Health) and 2.2 (Safety) continue to be more challenging than most other standards of the NQS.

As at 30 June 2020, 89% of services are rated Meeting NQS or above for Standard 2.2 and 90% for Standard 2.1, making them the third and fifth most challenging of the 15 standards.

In addition to being comparatively challenging to meet, the two standards have the lowest numbers of services rated Exceeding NQS.

Of all 40 elements of the NQS, Element 2.1.2 (Health practices and procedures) has the fourth highest number of services assessed as Not Met, with Element 2.2.1 (Supervision) having the fifth highest, and Element 2.2.2 (Incident and emergency management) having the ninth highest.

Figure 2.4 shows the proportion of services assessed as Met for Element 2.1.2, 2.2.1 and 2.2.2. The overall proportion of services assessed as Met for each of the three elements has increased compared to a year ago.

Figure 2.3: Proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above for each standard of the NQS, as at 30 June 2020

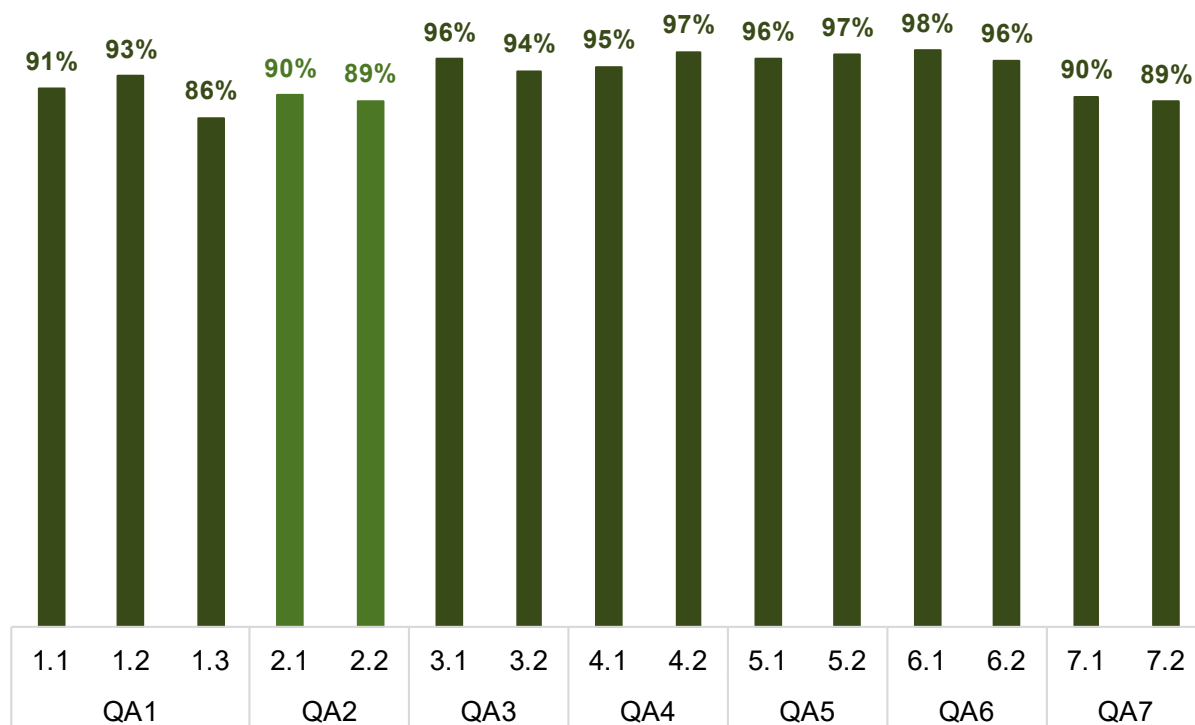
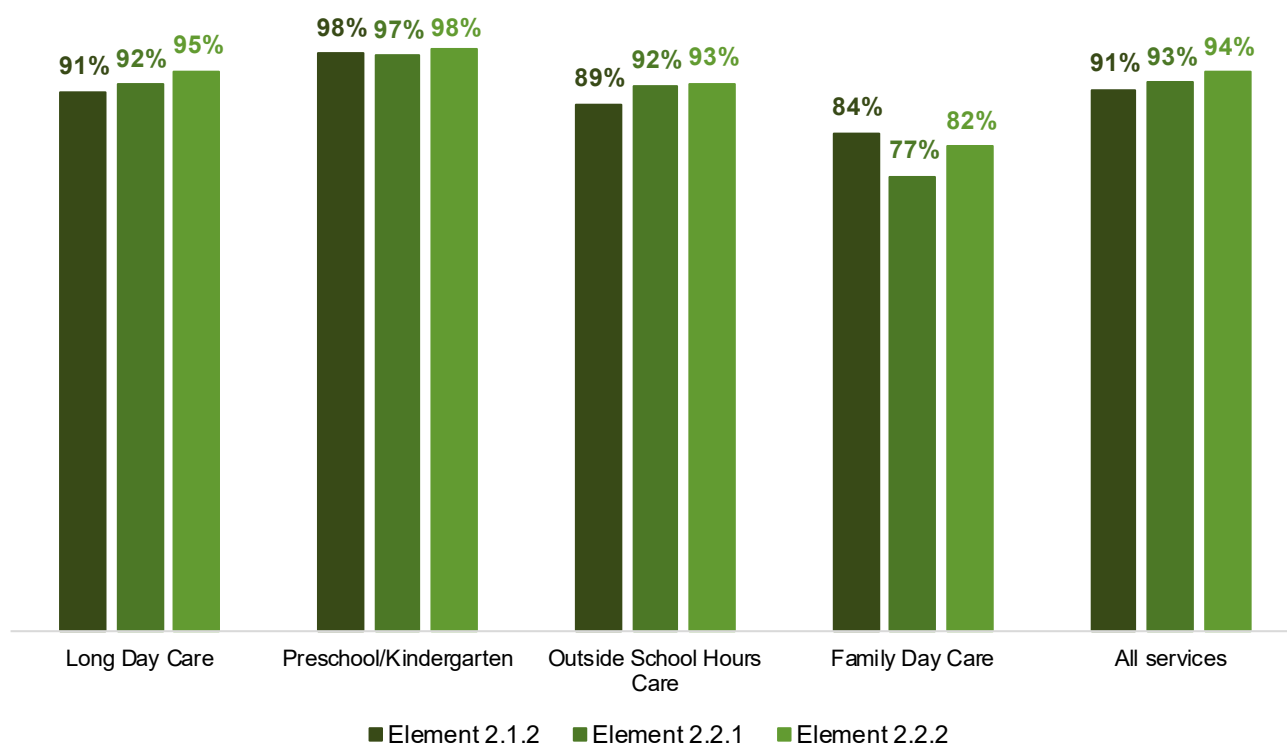


Figure 2.4: Proportion of services assessed as Met for Element 2.1.2 (Health practices and procedures), 2.2.1 (Supervision) and 2.2.2 (Incident and emergency management), as at 30 June 2020



Serious incidents

Education and care service 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 serious incidents, for example across service types or financial years, is challenging. In common with other sectors, the ‘over’ and ‘under’ reporting of serious incidents by service providers can impact accurate reporting.

For example, a 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
- poor adherence to health and safety standards.

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

- exceptional adherence to health and safety standards
- lax reporting procedures
- restrictive learning and development opportunities.

Table 2.1 shows that, in 2019/20, there is a rate of 103 serious incidents per 100 approved services, compared to a rate of 102 in 2018/19, 98 in 2017/18, and 99 in 2016/17.

Long day care services continue to have a higher rate of serious incident reporting compared to other service types. This is unsurprising given the fact that long day care services have more children attending for much longer periods of time, with these children also often being younger.

Table 2.1: Rate of serious incidents (based on number of approved services)¹⁷

Service type	Rate per 100 approved services			
	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Long day care	140	133	133	138
Family day care	67	78	87	96
Outside school hours care	64	67	83	77
Preschool/Kindergarten	41	39	53	52
Total	99	98	102	103

17. 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.

Table 2.2 shows that long day care services also have a higher rate of reporting of serious incidents per 100 approved places compared to other centre-based service types. The year on year figures suggest that calculating rates based on approved places rather than approved services may be more robust and meaningful, as the former goes at least some way to accounting for relative service size.

It is important to note that neither approach for estimating a rate of 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 an education and care service.

Table 2.3 shows that 46% of approved services reported one or more serious incidents in 2019/20, slightly down from 47% in 2018/19.

Long day care services continue to have the highest proportion of services reporting one or more serious incidents, while the proportion of family day care services reporting at least one serious incident again had the highest year on year increase.

Table 2.4 shows that incidents involving injury, trauma or illness continue to account for around 80% of all reported serious incidents.

Table 2.2: Rate of serious incidents (based on number of approved places)^{18,19}

Service type	Rate per 100 approved places			
	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Long day care	2.13	1.98	1.94	1.97
Preschool/Kindergarten	1.35	1.29	1.36	1.34
Outside school hours care	1.07	1.11	1.18	1.07
Total	1.67	1.61	1.68	1.66

Table 2.3: Proportion of services reporting one or more serious incidents

Service type	% of all approved services as at 30 June each year			
	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Long day care	56%	56%	57%	56%
Outside school hours care	36%	37%	40%	39%
Family day care	22%	28%	33%	38%
Preschool/Kindergarten	31%	32%	34%	32%
Total	43%	45%	47%	46%

Table 2.4: Proportion of serious incidents by incident type

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

18. 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.

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

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.

Table 2.5 shows that, in 2019/20, there is a rate of 156 confirmed breaches per 100 approved services, compared to a rate of 132 in 2018/19, 126 in 2017/18, and 98 in 2016/17.

The rate of confirmed breaches increased for all service types in 2019/20, except preschools/ kindergartens. The increase for family day care services is particularly marked. The increase is driven by a change in process for family day care services. In some jurisdictions, confirmed breaches are now recorded at each individual family day care educator residence rather than just at the overall service level.

An increased focus by state and territory regulatory authorities on compliance with the requirements of the National Law and Regulations is also likely to have contributed to the increases in the rates of confirmed breaches in recent years.

Table 2.6 shows that a third (33%) of approved services have one or more confirmed breaches in 2019/20, with family day care and long day care services continuing to have the highest proportions of services with one or more confirmed breaches.

Table 2.5: Rate of confirmed breaches²⁰

Service type	Rate per 100 approved services			
	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Family day care	307	296	292	691
Long day care	115	155	159	182
Outside school hours care	61	82	109	115
Preschool/Kindergarten	28	43	70	59
Total	98	126	132	156

Table 2.6: Proportion of services with one or more confirmed breaches

Service type	% of all approved services as at 30 June each year			
	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Family day care	37%	34%	38%	46%
Long day care	27%	37%	36%	41%
Outside school hours care	16%	30%	28%	28%
Preschool/Kindergarten	11%	28%	19%	18%
Total	21%	33%	30%	33%

20. 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.

Table 2.7 shows that the following two sections of the National Law continue to be the most frequently breached:

- Section 167 – 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 165 – 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.

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

- Regulation 97 – emergency and evacuation procedures
- Regulation 103 – premises, furniture and equipment to be safe, clean and in good repair.

Issues relating to emergency and evacuation procedures that have led to confirmed breaches of Regulation 97 include:

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

Table 2.7: Most frequently breached sections of the National Law

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

Table 2.8: Most frequently breached regulations of the National Regulations

Reg	Requirement	% of all confirmed breaches			
		2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
97	Emergency and evacuation procedures	7%	10%	11%	13%
103	Premises, furniture and equipment to be safe, clean and in good repair	11%	10%	9%	9%
147	Staff members	4%	5%	6%	5%
170	Policies and procedures to be followed	5%	5%	5%	5%
173	Prescribed information to be displayed	5%	5%	5%	4%



Key messages

- The National Quality Framework (NQF) aims to improve the educational and developmental outcomes of all children attending education and care services. This is the second objective of the *Education and Care Services National Law*.
- The global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic had a significant impact on the way educational programs were delivered in 2020. Many education and care service providers demonstrated significant innovation in their use of technology to support children's ongoing learning during this exceptional period of time.
- Quality Area 1 of the National Quality Standard (NQS) provides a detailed assessment of a service's educational program and practice, with the NQS setting a high national benchmark for early childhood education and care, and outside school hours care services in Australia.
- Of the seven quality areas of the NQS, Quality Area 1 continues to be the most challenging.
- As at 30 June 2020, 87% of services are rated Meeting NQS or above for Quality Area 1, up from 85% in 2019, 83% in 2018 and 80% in 2017.
- Just under three-fifths (59%) of family day care services are rated Meeting NQS or above – the highest proportion for four years.
- Standard 1.3 (Assessment and planning) is the most challenging of all 15 standards of the NQS, with the two most challenging of all 40 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 Quality Area 1 (Educational program and practice) and Standard 7.2 (Leadership); and Quality Area 7 (Governance and leadership) and Standard 1.3 (Assessment and planning).
- There is also a high degree of correlation between performance against Quality Area 5 (Relationships with children) and Standard 1.2 (Practice) and Standard 1.1 (Program).
- Research commissioned by ACECQA in 2019 found that genuine and sustained quality improvement is a shared responsibility, with approved providers, service and educational leaders, teachers and educators all playing a vital role. The findings emphasise the need for strong and effective leadership at all levels of service delivery to improve educational program and practice.

Overview

There is strong evidence that quality education and care makes a significant difference in improving children’s future cognitive, educational, physical, social and emotional outcomes.

Practices that support and promote children’s development and learning are the focus of Quality Area 1 (Educational program and practice) of the National Quality Standard. Under the *Education and Care Services National Law and Regulations*, service providers are required to base their educational program on an [approved learning framework](#).

The global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and associated lockdowns had a significant impact on the way educational programs were delivered in 2020.

The lockdown restrictions in place at times across Australia meant families and children frequently stayed at home, including working and being educated from home, for extended periods. Many service providers demonstrated significant innovation by using technology to support children’s learning remotely, while also maintaining face-to-face education and care as needed.

Educational program and practice quality ratings

Figure 3.1 compares performance against Quality Area 1 over time, showing the proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above.

As at 30 June 2020, 87% of services are rated Meeting NQS or above, up from 85% as at 30 June 2019, 83% as at 30 June 2018 and 80% as at 30 June 2017.

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 (see **Figure 3.2**).

While family day care services continue to have the lowest proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above, 59% of family day care services are rated Meeting NQS or above – the highest proportion since 30 June 2016.

Figure 3.1: Proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above for Quality Area 1

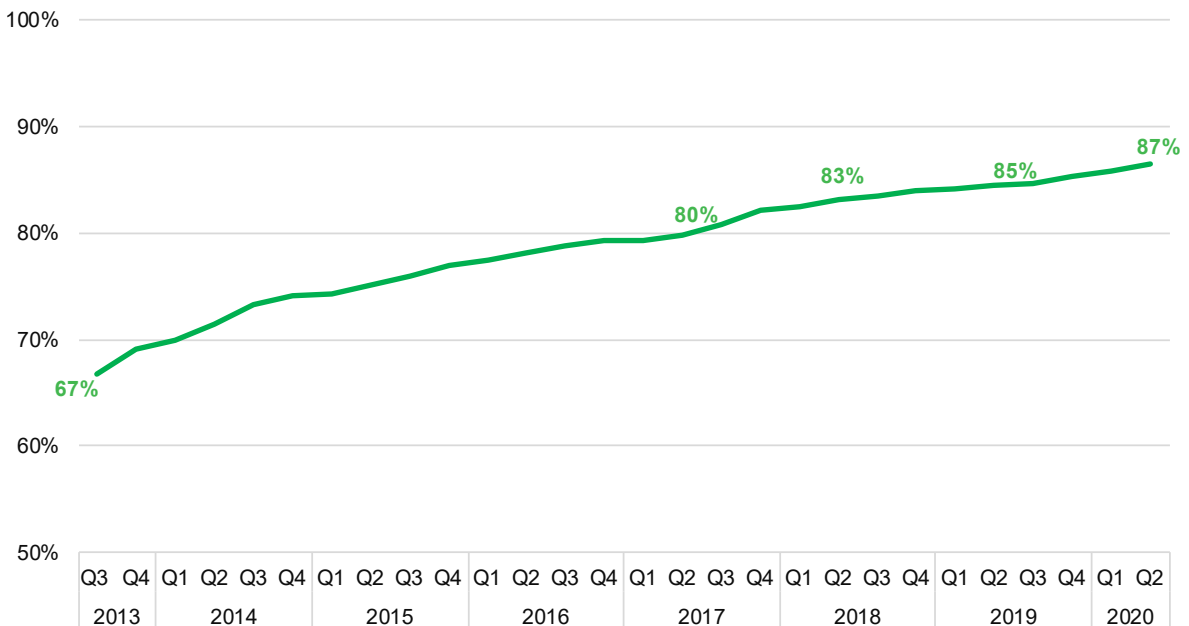


Figure 3.2: Proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above for Quality Area 1, by service type

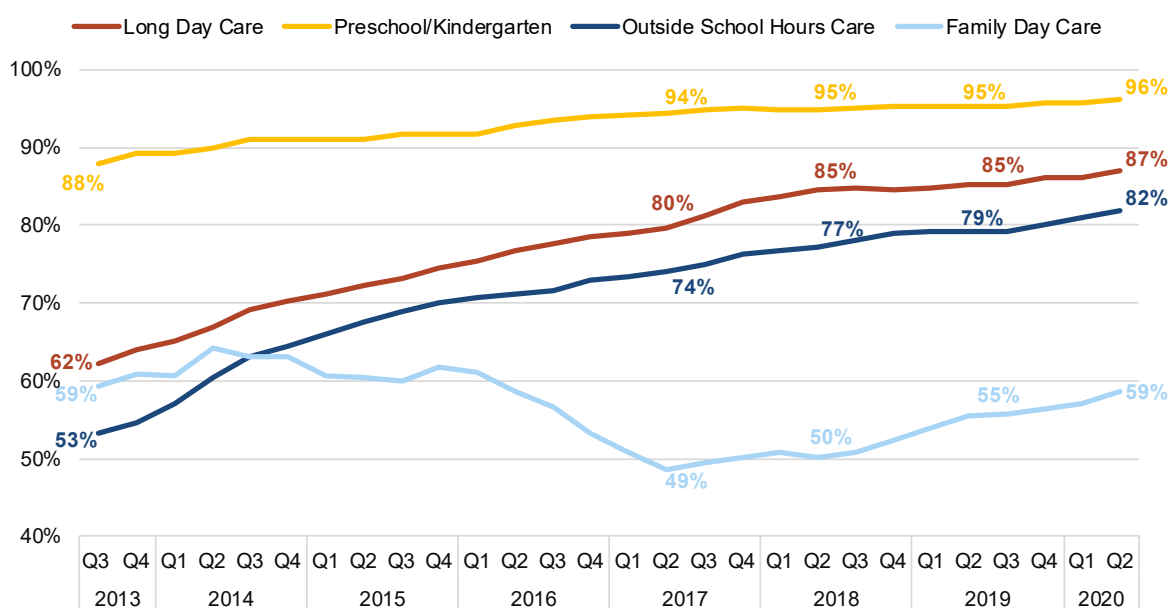


Figure 3.3 shows Standard 1.1 (Program), 1.2 (Practice), and 1.3 (Assessment and planning) in particular, continue to be more challenging than many of the other standards of the NQS.

As at 30 June 2020, 86% of services are rated Meeting NQS or above for Standard 1.3, 91% for Standard 1.1 and 93% for Standard 1.2, making them the first, sixth and seventh most challenging of the 15 standards.

While the three standards are comparatively challenging to meet, Standard 1.1 has the third highest number of services rated Exceeding NQS, with Standard 1.3 having the sixth highest, and Standard 1.2 having the seventh highest.

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

Figure 3.3: Proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above for each standard of the NQS, as at 30 June 2020

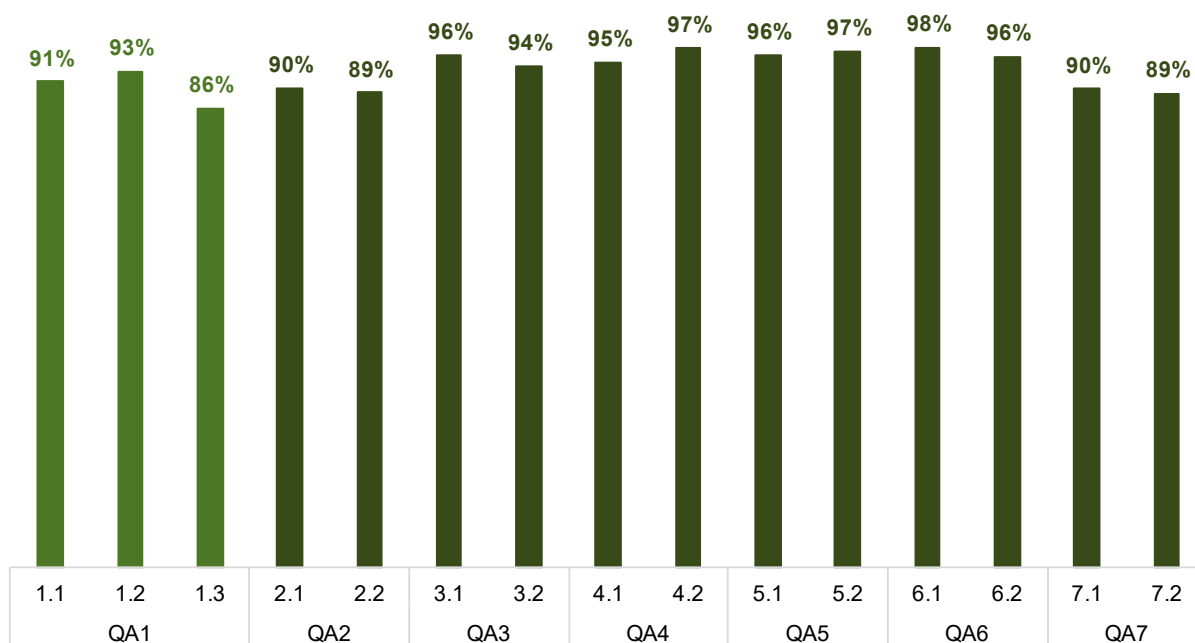
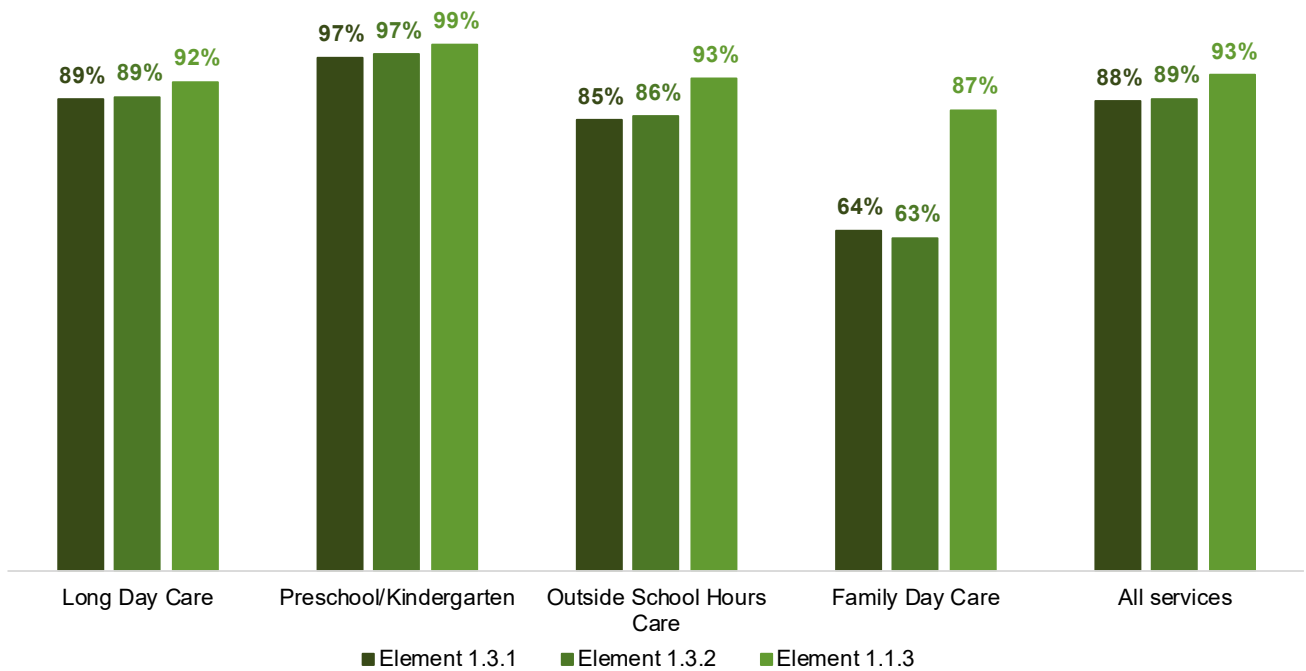


Figure 3.4 shows the proportion of services assessed as Met for Element 1.3.1, 1.3.2 and 1.1.3. The overall proportion of services assessed as Met for each of the three elements has increased compared to a year ago.

Figure 3.4: Proportion of services assessed as Met for Element 1.3.1 (Assessment and planning cycle), 1.3.2 (Critical reflection) and 1.1.3 (Program learning opportunities), as at 30 June 2020



Educational leadership

While Quality Area 1 provides a detailed assessment of educational program and practice, Quality Area 7 addresses governance and leadership, including the role of the service’s educational leader.

As at 30 June 2020, 89% of services are rated Meeting NQS or above for Standard 7.2 (Leadership) and 90% for Standard 7.1 (Governance), making them the second and fourth most challenging of the 15 standards.

In addition to being challenging to meet, the two standards have the fourth and fifth lowest number of services rated Exceeding NQS.

Of all 40 elements of the NQS, Element 7.1.2 (Management systems) has the third highest number of services assessed as Not Met, with Element 7.2.2 (Educational leadership) having the sixth highest, and Element 7.2.3 (Development of professionals) having the seventh highest.

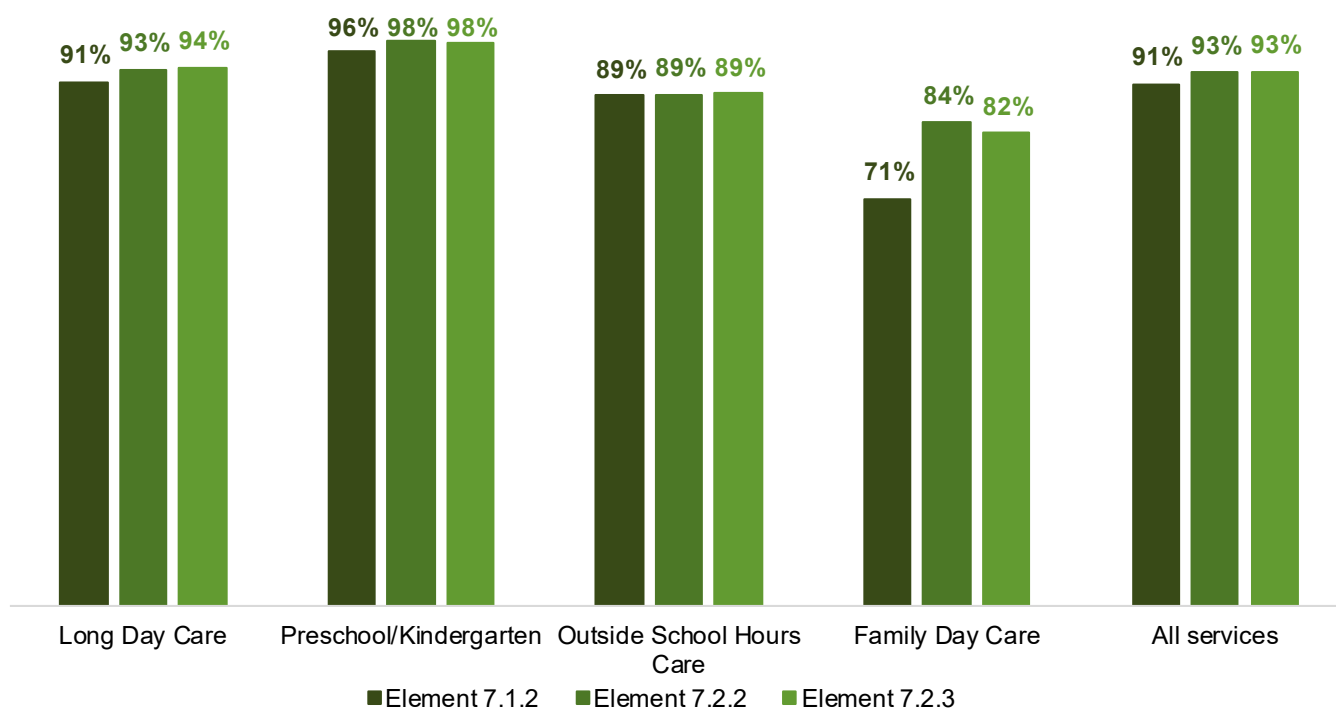
Figure 3.5 shows the proportion of services assessed as Met for Element 7.1.2, 7.2.2 and 7.2.3. The overall proportion of services assessed as Met for each of the three elements has increased compared to a year ago.

A service’s educational leader leads the development and implementation of the educational program, and assessment and planning cycle. The role therefore has a clear relationship with the standards and elements of Quality Area 1.

This relationship is confirmed by correlation analysis of the NQS (see **Figure 3.6**).

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 Quality Area 1 (Educational program and practice) and Standard 7.2 (Leadership); and Quality Area 7 (Governance and leadership) and Standard 1.3 (Assessment and planning).

Figure 3.5: Proportion of services assessed as Met for Element 7.1.2 (Management systems), 7.2.2 (Educational leadership) and 7.2.3 (Development of professionals), as at 30 June 2020



There is also a high degree of correlation between Quality Area 5 (Relationships with children) and Standard 1.2 (Practice) and Standard 1.1 (Program).

Figure 3.6: 2018 NQS correlation analysis matrix²¹ (quality areas to standards), as at 30 June 2020

	QA1	QA2	QA3	QA4	QA5	QA6	QA7
Standard 1.1	0.85	0.60	0.64	0.66	0.71	0.67	0.64
Standard 1.2	0.85	0.58	0.64	0.65	0.72	0.67	0.61
Standard 1.3	0.93	0.62	0.62	0.64	0.66	0.67	0.69
Standard 2.1	0.64	0.84	0.60	0.59	0.58	0.57	0.63
Standard 2.2	0.61	0.90	0.60	0.58	0.54	0.55	0.64
Standard 3.1	0.58	0.55	0.88	0.60	0.60	0.59	0.55
Standard 3.2	0.64	0.56	0.86	0.60	0.64	0.66	0.59
Standard 4.1	0.63	0.55	0.60	0.92	0.64	0.64	0.61
Standard 4.2	0.63	0.52	0.59	0.86	0.68	0.68	0.61
Standard 5.1	0.67	0.53	0.60	0.65	0.93	0.67	0.56
Standard 5.2	0.65	0.52	0.60	0.63	0.92	0.67	0.55
Standard 6.1	0.63	0.51	0.58	0.62	0.65	0.91	0.61
Standard 6.2	0.64	0.53	0.59	0.62	0.65	0.92	0.62
Standard 7.1	0.64	0.65	0.59	0.65	0.58	0.65	0.89
Standard 7.2	0.70	0.60	0.59	0.63	0.57	0.67	0.91

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

Continuous quality improvement

Promoting continuous improvement in the quality of children's education and care services is one of the key **objectives** of the NQF. **Research** commissioned by ACECQA in 2019 focused on factors that support quality improvement in both educational program and practice, and governance and leadership.

The research found that genuine and sustained quality improvement is a shared responsibility, with approved providers, service and educational leaders, teachers and educators all playing a vital role. The findings emphasise the need for strong and effective leadership at all levels of service delivery.

Case study: Kindergarten Quality Improvement Program (Victoria)

The Kindergarten Quality Improvement Program is funded by the Victorian Department of Education and Training and aims to improve outcomes for services rated Working Towards NQS.

A kindergarten in metropolitan Melbourne is an example of a service achieving successful outcomes through this program:

- The service had a history of being unable to meet the minimum requirements of the National Law and Regulations. The service received an overall rating of Working Towards NQS in 2013 and 2016.
- In July 2018, the service joined Phase 1 of the Kindergarten Quality Improvement Program. This six month program focussed on governance and leadership. The service actively participated in this program, reviewing their service philosophy, updating their Quality Improvement Plan and communicating regularly with the Kindergarten Quality Improvement Program mentor.
- In June 2019, the service participated in Phase 2 of the Kindergarten Quality Improvement Program. This 18 month program focussed on educational program and practice. The service's educational leader was supported to implement positive changes to educators' practice, and program development and documentation.
- In November 2019, the service achieved an overall rating of Meeting NQS, attributing their success to the support they received from the Kindergarten Quality Improvement Program.

The following factors were identified as particularly influential to quality improvement in educational program and practice:

- maximising learning opportunities for children, guided by knowledge of the Early Years Learning Framework and Framework for School Age Care, with a focus on supporting children's agency and rights
- sustained commitment to improvement, notably through educator collaboration and critical reflection
- service philosophy as the foundation of practice
- involving families and the local community in broad and meaningful ways.

ACECQA's website includes a **collection of resources** to assist service providers in meeting the requirements of the NQS.

Case study: Quality Support Program (NSW in partnership with ACECQA)

The **Quality Support Program** (QSP) is an initiative of the NSW Department of Education that has been in place since June 2018. It involves ACECQA delivering free tailored professional development and support to approved providers and service leaders of eligible services. Almost 300 services have taken part in the initiative to date.

The main objective of the QSP is to improve the quality of participating services to the level of Meeting NQS or higher, and to improve participants' knowledge and confidence of the National Quality Standard.


The program includes an introductory workshop, face-to-face service visits, support phone calls and emails, eLearning training, and bespoke resources.

Early findings from the QSP show that:

- the program has been largely successful in supporting participating services to improve their rating
- QSP services were almost three times more likely to achieve a rating of Meeting NQS compared to matched non-participating services
- service leaders became more confident following their participation and felt better prepared for the assessment and rating process
- service leaders were more knowledgeable about the NQS after completing the program
- service leaders were overall very satisfied with the program, would recommend it to others, and found that the supporting resources were helpful.

One service shares their experiences in **this video** available on the **Quality Support Program page** of the ACECQA website.

Children from vulnerable and disadvantaged backgrounds



Chapter 4

Key messages

- The National Quality Framework (NQF) is underpinned by the principles of equity, inclusion and diversity.
- Children from more disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to be developmentally vulnerable, and receive the greatest benefits from attending high quality education and care.
- There is likely to be a significant increase of potentially vulnerable children in Australia as a result of the immediate and continued impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) global pandemic.
- Access to high quality education and care for vulnerable and disadvantaged children in particular will be more important than ever as Australia begins to recover from the impact of COVID-19.
- The proportion of children's education and care services in the most disadvantaged areas of Australia rated Meeting National Quality Standard (NQS) or above increased to 78% in 2020 from 76% in 2019.
- However, the difference in the proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above in the most disadvantaged and most advantaged areas has continued to increase – from two percentage points in 2017 to six percentage points in 2020.
- There also remains a marked difference (nine percentage points) in services rated Exceeding NQS, with services in the most advantaged areas more likely to achieve the rating than those in the most disadvantaged areas.
- At the quality area level, the greatest difference (10 percentage points) in the proportion of services rated Exceeding NQS relates to educational program and practice (Quality Area 1) and staffing arrangements (Quality Area 4).
- The likelihood of a service to be rated Exceeding NQS decreases as its geographic remoteness increases. While 30% of services located in major cities are rated Exceeding NQS, this decreases to 26-28% for regional areas, and 14-24% for remote areas.

Overview

There is a large body of research highlighting the importance of high quality education and care to improve social inclusion and equity by reducing the gap in children’s developmental and educational outcomes.

Children from disadvantaged backgrounds receive the greatest benefits from attending high quality education and care. However, they are less likely to access high quality education and care compared to their peers for a range of reasons, including cost, lack of availability and a limited understanding of the benefits.

There is likely to be a significant increase of potentially vulnerable children in Australia as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) global pandemic, notably as a result of parental/carer unemployment and underemployment.

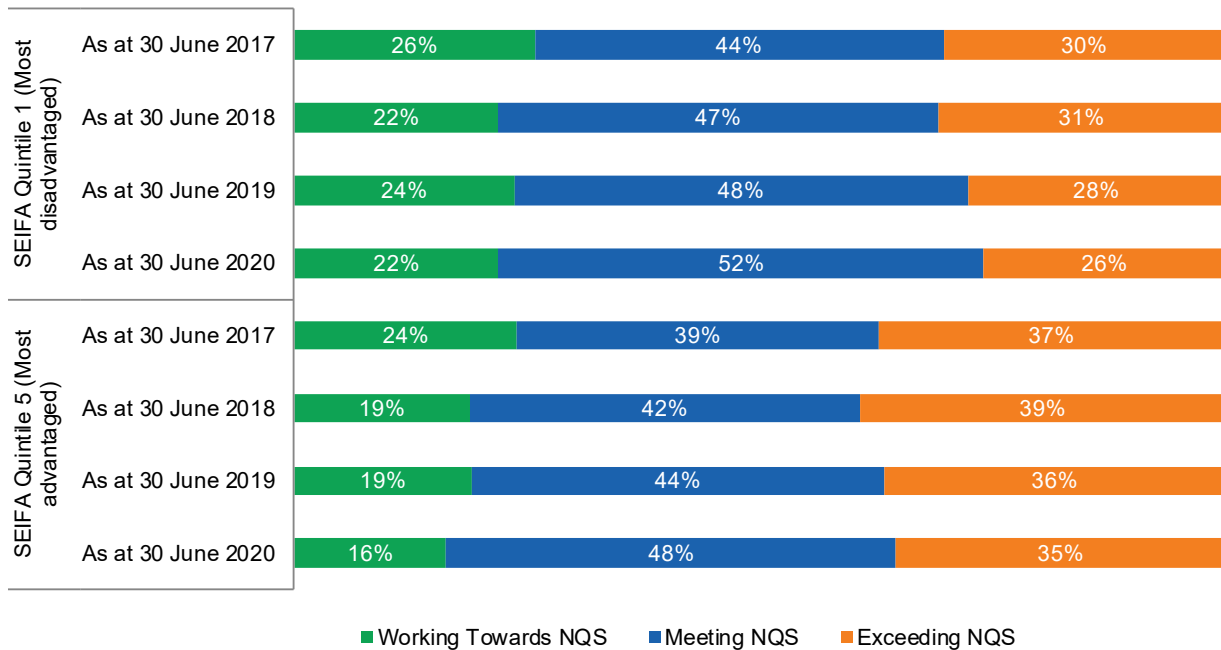
Maintaining a focus on supporting access to high quality education and care services for children from disadvantaged backgrounds will be an important priority for all governments.

Quality ratings by socio-economic status of areas

The [Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas \(SEIFA\)](#)²² Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage (IRSAD) is used to classify services by the level of relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage of their local area. The analysis below uses SEIFA as a proxy measure to identify and compare 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).

Figure 4.1 shows that 78% of services in the most disadvantaged areas of Australia and 84% of services in the most advantaged areas are rated Meeting NQS or above in 2020. These figures represent an improvement from a year ago, when 76% of services in the most disadvantaged areas and 81% of services in the most advantaged areas were rated Meeting NQS or above.

Figure 4.1: Overall quality ratings of services by SEIFA quintiles 1 and 5



22. The [Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas \(SEIFA\)](#) is a product of the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) that ranks areas in Australia according to relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage. The indexes are based on information from the five-yearly Census. Variables used cover a number of areas including household income, education, employment, occupation, housing and other indicators of advantage and disadvantage. ACECQA uses the address details of a service at the Statistical Area 1 (SA1) level to identify its SEIFA Index of Relative Socio Economic Advantage and Disadvantage (IRSAD) classification. Some services are excluded from SEIFA classifications because of poor quality address matching.

While the ratings have improved in both the most disadvantaged and most advantaged areas, the difference between the proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above in these areas has continued to increase – from two percentage points in 2017, to three percentage points in 2018, to five percentage points in 2019, to six percentage points in 2020.

There is also a marked difference in services rated Exceeding NQS. As at 30 June 2020, 35% of services in the most advantaged areas are rated Exceeding NQS, compared to 26% of services in the most disadvantaged areas.

At the quality area level, the greatest difference (10 percentage points) in the proportion of services rated Exceeding NQS relates to educational program and practice (Quality Area 1), and staffing arrangements (Quality Area 4).

The smallest difference (four percentage points) relates to collaborative partnerships with families and communities (Quality Area 6).

The proportion of services rated Working Towards NQS increases, while the proportion of services rated Exceeding NQS decreases, with the level of relative socio-economic disadvantage for all service types (see **Figure 4.2**).

Family day care services display the greatest difference (17 percentage points) between the most disadvantaged areas and the most advantaged areas in the proportion of services rated Working Towards NQS, while preschools/ kindergartens display the greatest difference (21 percentage points) in the proportion of services rated Exceeding NQS.

Figure 4.2: Overall quality ratings of services by SEIFA quintiles 1 and 5 and service type, as at 30 June 2020



While services in the most disadvantaged areas are less likely to be rated Exceeding NQS, there are services in these areas achieving the [Excellent rating](#) (the highest quality rating, denoting exceptional education and care). Two such examples are below:

Yirrkala Preschool (Northern Territory)

[Yirrkala Preschool](#), located in North East Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory, was [awarded the Excellent rating](#) in September 2019.

Examples of exceptional practice at the service include:

- Engagement and collaborative partnerships with families and community to improve children's learning outcomes, including through a Women's Learning and Action Circle. This creates a culturally safe space for female family members, new mothers, school and service staff, and Elders of the Yirrkala community to discuss and share knowledge of children's learning and development.
- Commitment to culture and diversity by embedding Yolngu culture in the service philosophy, employing Yolngu staff from the community, and delivering the education and care program in Yolngu Matha. The service invites school staff, community Elders and specialists to run activities, such as traditional storytelling and dance. Dhimurra Rangers (male rangers) teach children to make traditional fish traps, and collect bush honey and medicine.
- Focus on developing a comprehensive understanding of each child's cultural background and place of origin. For example, the age appropriate program of learning on country is developed with children's families and community Elders who lead traditional skill development.
- Use of 'Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) observation tool' to create targeted, meaningful and culturally appropriate learning opportunities. For example, an educator engaged a child who had difficulty using scissors in a variety of activities using playdough and natural materials to develop the child's fine motor skills

Rosie's Early Learning (Queensland)

[Rosie's Early Learning](#), located in Queensland, was [awarded the Excellent rating](#) in 2016 and [again in September 2019](#).

Examples of exceptional practice at the service include:

- 'Young Mums Studying Children's Services Priority Placement Program' that provides priority training alongside education and care arrangements for young mothers. This project has assisted young mothers to achieve Certificate III level education and care qualifications and led one to become a full time educator at the service.
- Use of 'Statements of Intent' to understand the children's abilities, regardless of their challenges, in order to inform and improve current practice. For example, an educator was given an opportunity to learn sign language from specialised professionals to communicate with, and meet the needs of, a child with hearing impairment.
- 'Bush Kindy' program that helps children explore, discover and connect with the local bushland and learn about sustainability and the importance of land and country for all Australians.
- Publication of children's work in four books that explore their ideas of citizenship and connections.

Quality ratings by geographical remoteness

Figure 4.3 presents the distribution of services' quality ratings by the [Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia \(ARIA+\)](#)²³.

The likelihood of a service to be rated Working Towards NQS increases as its geographic remoteness increases. While 18% of services located in major cities and inner regional areas are rated Working Towards NQS, this increases to 21% for outer regional areas, and 20-31% for remote areas.

The inverse pattern is apparent for services rated Exceeding NQS. While 30% of services located in major cities and inner regional areas are rated Exceeding NQS, this decreases to 26-28% for regional areas, and 14-24% for remote areas. It is important to note that there are relatively small numbers of services in remote areas compared to other geographical locations.

It is also important to note that remote areas are often areas of high socioeconomic disadvantage, highlighting the interplay and relationship between community level factors that can contribute to children experiencing developmental vulnerability and disadvantage.

Social inclusion

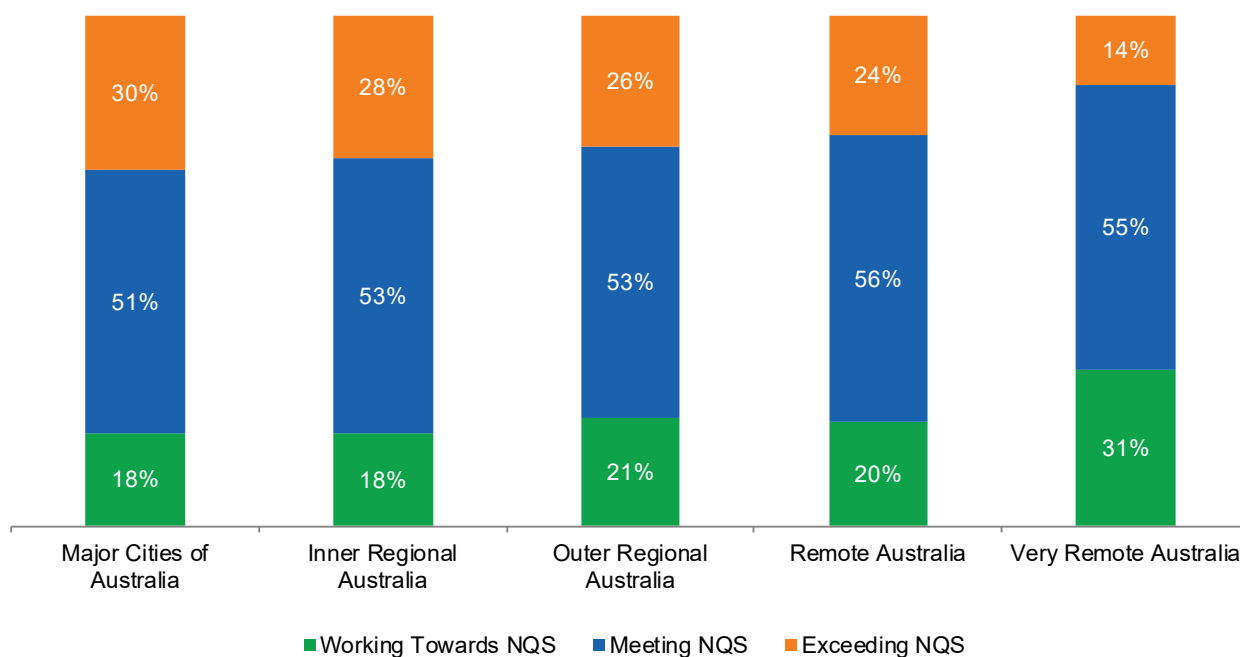
The NQS contains both explicit and implicit references to social inclusion, including:

- Standard 3.2 (Use) – the service environment is inclusive, promotes competence and supports exploration and play-based learning
- Standard 6.2 (Collaborative partnerships) – collaborative partnerships enhance children's inclusion, learning and wellbeing
- Element 1.1.2 (Child-centred) – each child's current knowledge, strengths, ideas, culture, abilities and interests are the foundation of the program
- Element 6.2.2 (Access and participation) – effective partnerships support children's access, inclusion and participation in the program.

Figure 4.4 shows that Standard 3.2 and 6.2 are less challenging than some other standards of the NQS.

As at 30 June 2020, 96% of services are rated Meeting NQS or above for Standard 6.2 and 94% for Standard 3.2.

Figure 4.3: Overall quality ratings of services by ARIA+ classification, as at 30 June 2020



23. The [Accessibility and Remoteness Index of Australia \(ARIA+\)](#) is a product of the Hugo Centre for Population and Housing and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). It measures relative access to services based on road distances to service centres. ACECQA uses the address details of a service at the Statistical Area 1 (SA1) level to identify its ARIA+ classification. Some services are excluded from ARIA+ classifications because of poor quality address matching.

In addition to being comparatively less challenging to meet, Standard 6.2 has the highest number of services rated Exceeding NQS, with Standard 3.2 having the eighth highest.

Figure 4.4: Proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above for each standard of the NQS, as at 30 June 2020

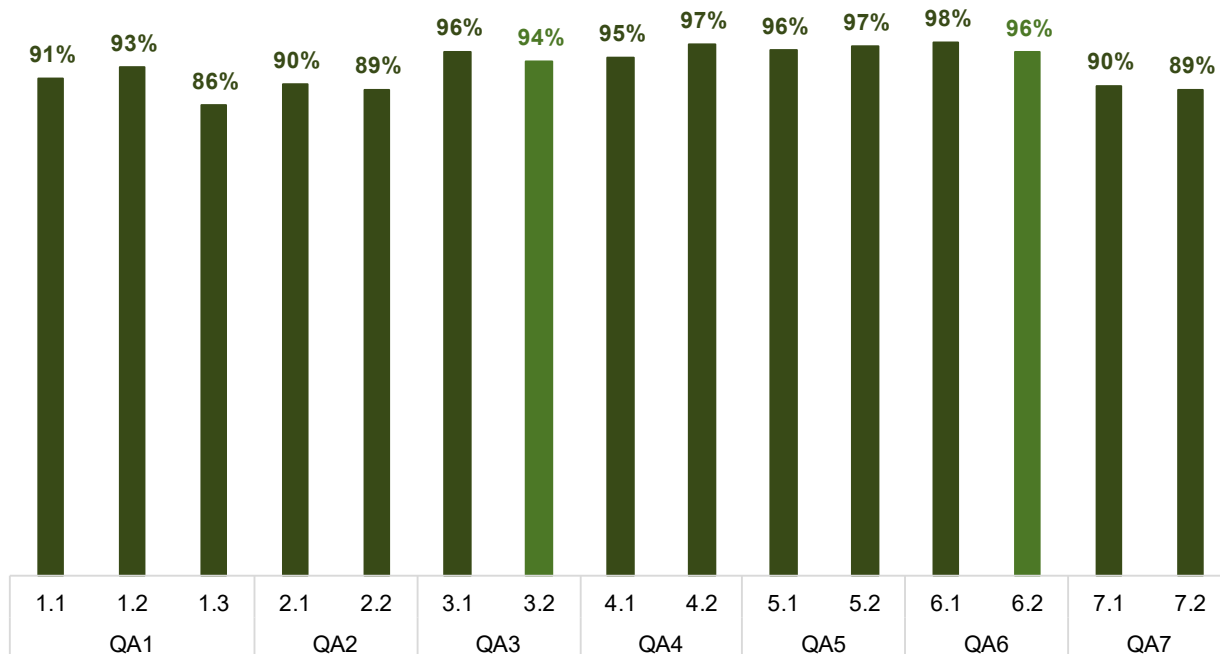
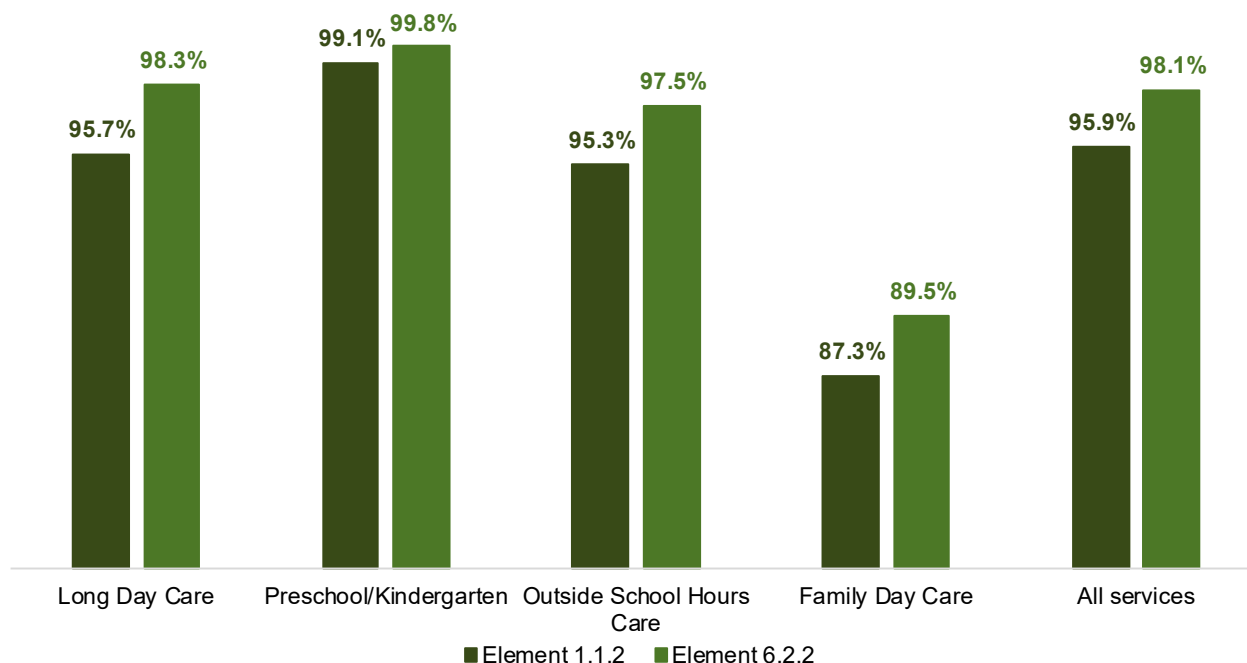


Figure 4.5 shows that 98.1% of services are assessed as Met for Element 6.2.2 (Access and participation) and 95.9% for Element 1.1.2 (Child-centred). The overall proportion of services assessed as Met for both elements has increased compared to a year ago.

Figure 4.5: Proportion of services assessed as Met for Element 1.1.2 (Child-centred) and 6.2.2 (Access and participation), as at 30 June 2020





Key messages

- One of the guiding principles of the National Quality Framework (NQF) is that best practice is expected in the provision of children's education and care services.
- Improved educator to child ratios and educator qualifications, stipulated under the *Education and Care Services National Law* and Regulations, contribute to higher quality education and care.
- Quality Area 4 of the National Quality Standard (NQS) assesses a service's staffing arrangements, including organisation of educators and continuity of staff, and professionalism, including professional collaboration and standards.
- As at 30 June 2020, 95% of services are rated Meeting NQS or above for Quality Area 4, up from 94% in 2019 and 2018, and 92% in 2017.
- More than four-fifths (86%) of family day care services are rated Meeting NQS or above – the highest proportion for more than four years.
- Updated versions of the vocational education and care qualifications, including the Certificate III and Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care, are expected to be available for registered training organisations to implement from 2021.
- While the proportion of early childhood initial teacher education graduates obtaining employment in early childhood settings has increased since 2015, the majority of graduates gain employment in schools.
- As at 30 June 2020, 6.4% of services hold a staffing waiver, up from 4.5% in 2019, and 3.9% in 2018 and 2017.
- One in ten long day care services hold a staffing waiver, with most of these waivers relating to the early childhood teacher requirements of the National Regulations.
- Services in remote areas continue to have the highest proportion of staffing waivers, reflecting the relative difficulty of recruiting and retaining teachers and educators in those locations.
- In December 2019, Education Ministers endorsed the development of a new national workforce strategy to support the recruitment, retention, sustainability and quality of the children's education and care workforce. The new strategy is anticipated to be finalised and published in the second half of 2021.
- Well-supported teachers, educators and staff are critical to quality education and care. Recovery from the coronavirus (COVID-19) global pandemic, including initiatives to support educator wellbeing, will inform some of the immediate and short-term priorities of the new national workforce strategy.

Overview

The *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* sets out a vision for a ‘world class education system that encourages and supports every student’, recognising that the early years provide the foundation for learning throughout school and beyond.

Improved educator to child ratios and educator qualifications both contribute to higher quality education and care.

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

Staffing arrangements quality ratings

Figure 5.1 compares performance against Quality Area 4 over time, showing the proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above.

As at 30 June 2020, 95% of services are rated Meeting NQS or above, up from 94% as at 30 June 2019 and 2018, and 92% as at 30 June 2017.

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 (see **Figure 5.2**).

While family day care services continue to have the lowest proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above, 86% of family day care services are rated Meeting NQS or above – the highest proportion since 31 March 2016.

Figure 5.3 shows that Standard 4.1 (Staffing arrangements) and 4.2 (Professionalism) are less challenging than many other standards of the NQS.

As at 30 June 2020, 97% of services are rated Meeting NQS or above for Standard 4.2 and 95% for Standard 4.1.

Figure 5.1: Proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above for Quality Area 4

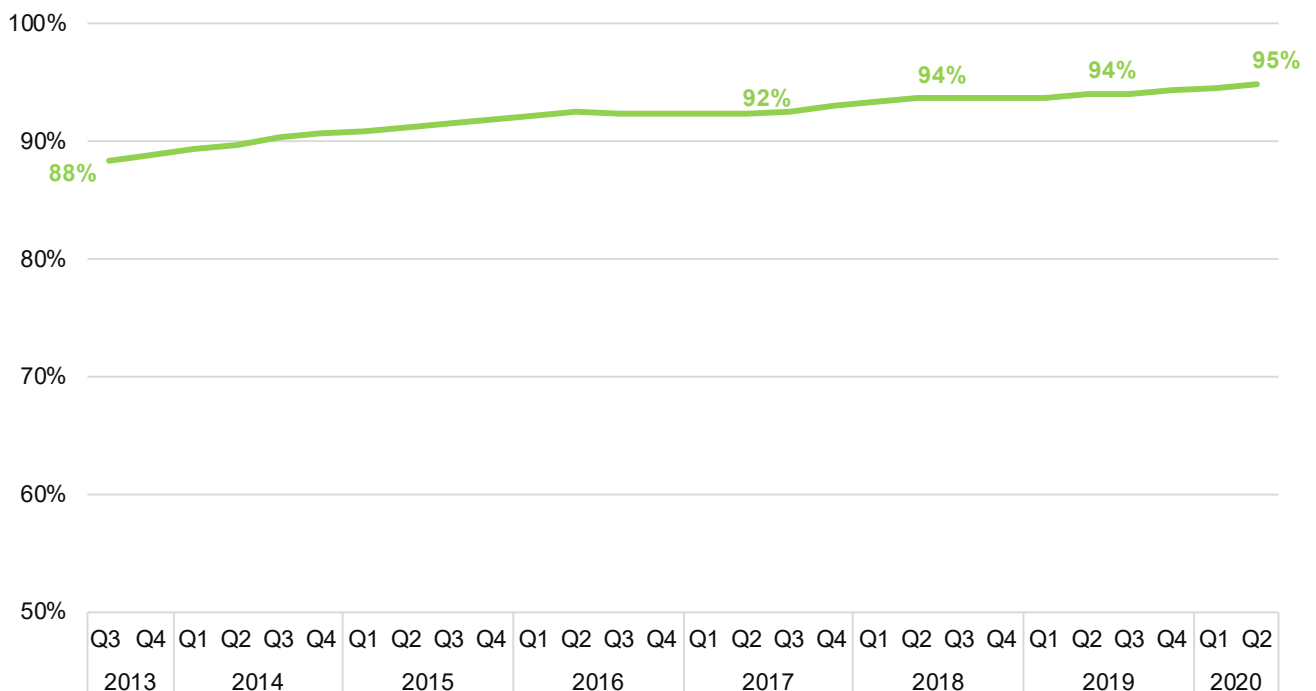


Figure 5.2: Proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above for Quality Area 4, by service type

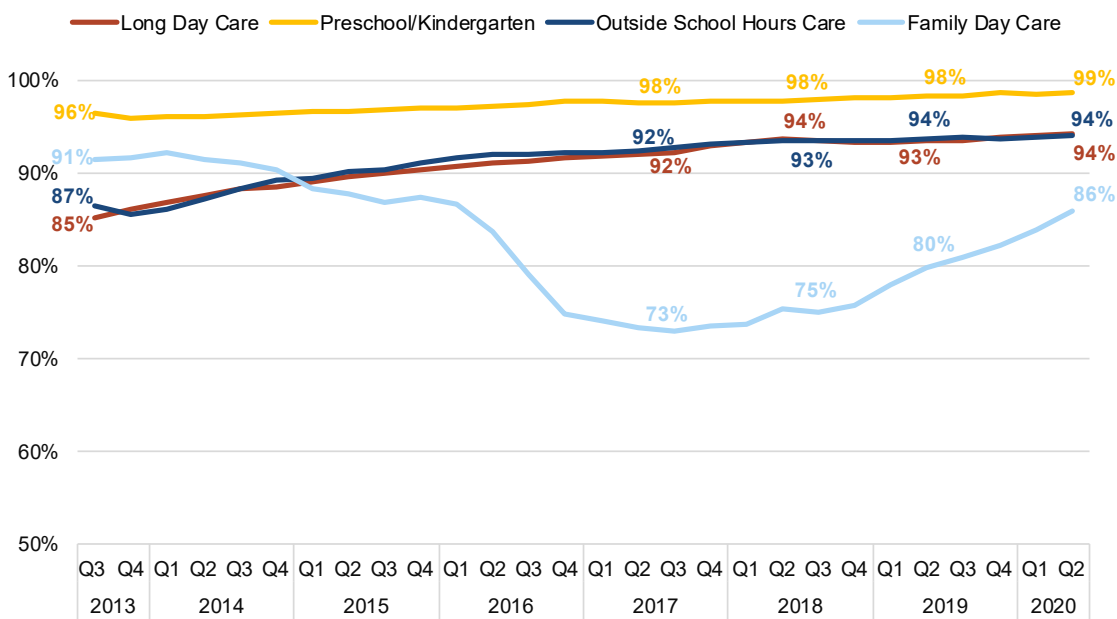
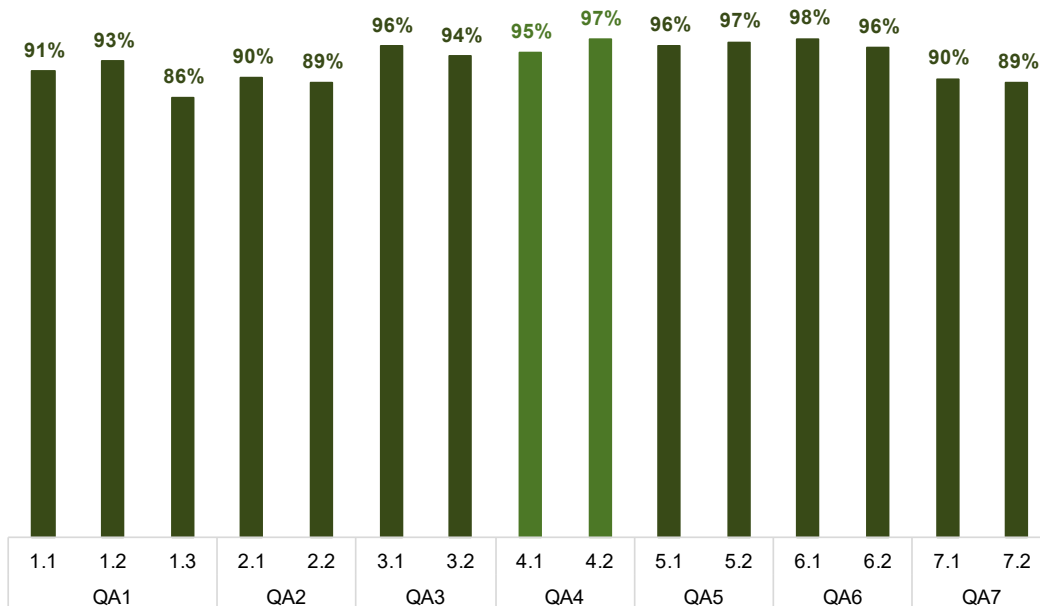


Figure 5.3: Proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above for each standard of the 2018 NQS, as at 30 June 2020



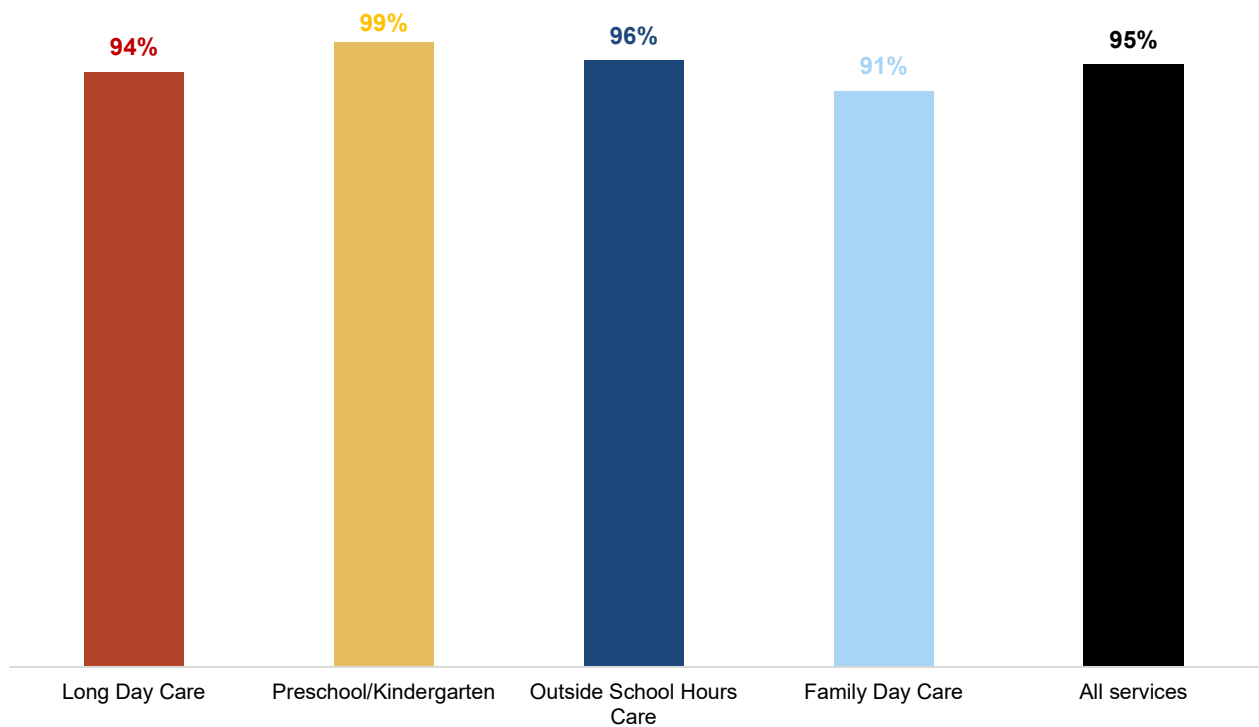
While the two standards are comparatively less challenging to meet, they have the sixth and seventh lowest numbers of services rated Exceeding NQS.

Of all 40 elements of the NQS, Element 4.1.1 (Organisation of educators) has the tenth highest number of services assessed as Not Met.

Figure 5.4 shows the proportion of services assessed as Met for Element 4.1.1. The overall proportion of services assessed as Met for the element has increased compared to a year ago.

The Education and Care Service National Regulations mandate specific educator to child ratio and educator qualification requirements. The majority of educators hold vocational education and training (VET) level qualifications. The National Regulations also require specific early childhood teacher requirements for long day care services and preschools/kindergartens, which are aligned to the number of children being educated and cared for.

Figure 5.4: Proportion of services assessed as Met for Element 4.1.1 (Organisation of educators), as at 30 June 2020



Vocational education data

Table 5.1 shows that total enrolments in the two major early childhood VET courses decreased by 20% between 2016 and 2019.

While the number of enrolments in the Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) has remained steady at above 50,000, the number of enrolments in the Diploma of ECEC has decreased from more than 70,000 to less than 50,000.

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.

Completion rates for the 2016, 2017 and 2018 cohorts are expected to steadily increase for both the Certificate in ECEC and Diploma of ECEC, with the average completion rate across all vocational education and training courses also expected to increase year on year (see **Table 5.2**).

Employment outcomes for both the Certificate III in ECEC and Diploma of ECEC have remained steady in recent years. Around 41-45% of graduates of the Certificate III in ECEC achieve employment, compared to around 58-61% of graduates of the Diploma of ECEC (**Table 5.3**).

In 2017, the Australian Industry and Skills Committee (AISC) commissioned SkillsIQ to review six children's education and care qualifications, including the Certificate III in ECEC and Diploma of ECEC. As part of the review, a number of key changes have been proposed, including:

- strengthened assessment requirements
- increased work placement hours
- new entry requirements for the Diploma of ECEC.

SkillsIQ expects the final versions of the revised qualifications to be endorsed by the AISC in 2021, with the qualifications available for registered training organisations to implement.

Table 5.1: Vocational education enrolment numbers²⁴

Qualification	2016	2017	2018	2019
Certificate III in ECEC	53,940	53,795	52,835	54,880
Diploma of ECEC	74,955	67,285	52,240	48,105
Total	128,890	121,080	105,075	102,985

Table 5.2: Vocational education completion rates²⁵

Qualification	2015	2016	2017	2018
Certificate III in ECEC	46%	49%	51%	56%
Diploma of ECEC	40%	43%	52%	57%
All vocational education and training	41%	42%	46%	52%

Table 5.3: Vocational education employment outcomes²⁶

Qualification and graduate status		2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Certificate III in ECEC	Employed	44%	41%	44%	45%	44%
	Unemployed	30%	30%	30%	28%	27%
	Not in the labour force	10%	13%	12%	11%	10%
	Not known	16%	16%	14%	16%	19%
Diploma of ECEC	Employed	58%	59%	61%	61%	61%
	Unemployed	23%	24%	23%	22%	20%
	Not in the labour force	7%	7%	7%	6%	5%
	Not known	11%	10%	8%	10%	13%

24. NCVER (2020), *Total VET students and courses* - historical data is refreshed each year.

25. NCVER, customised unpublished completion rates as of December 2020.

26. NCVER (2020), *Total VET students and courses* - historical data is refreshed each year.

Higher education data

Figure 5.5 shows the number of students commencing early childhood and primary initial teacher training degrees at Australian higher education institutions from 2009 to 2018.

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

While commencement numbers for early childhood initial teacher training degrees in 2018 are higher than they were in 2009, the 2018 figure of 3556 is the lowest figure since before the introduction of the NQF.

Commencement numbers for primary initial teacher training degrees have decreased slightly across the same period.

Figure 5.6 shows the number of students completing early childhood and primary initial teacher training degrees at Australian higher education institutes from 2009 to 2018.

Completion numbers for early childhood initial teacher training degrees have increased from 1784 in 2009 to 2280 in 2018, with completion numbers for primary teaching degrees also increasing slightly across the same period.

While the proportion of early childhood graduates obtaining employment in early childhood settings has increased since 2015, the majority of graduates gain employment in schools (see **Table 5.4**).

This is likely due to a large number of students undertaking early childhood courses that cover the birth to eight age range. These students graduate as dual qualified teachers (early childhood and primary) and may be attracted by the favourable pay and conditions in the schooling system compared to the early childhood sector. The structure of many initial teacher education courses may also influence students to seek a career in the schooling system. Early childhood related supervised professional experience placements often occur early in the degree, with the final placement typically being a primary school placement. A successful final placement leads many graduates to then seek employment in that setting.

Conversely, only a very small proportion of primary graduates obtain employment in early childhood settings.

Figure 5.5: Early childhood and primary initial teacher training degree commencement numbers

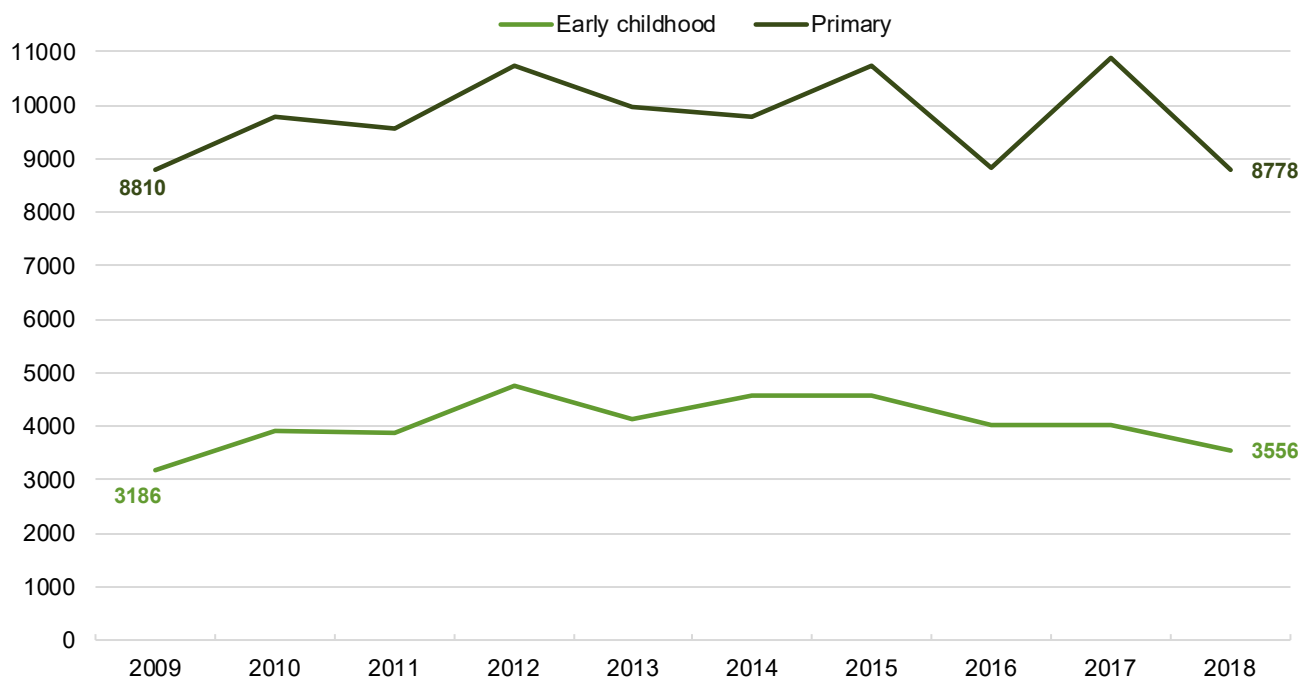


Figure 5.6: Early childhood and primary initial teacher training degree completion numbers

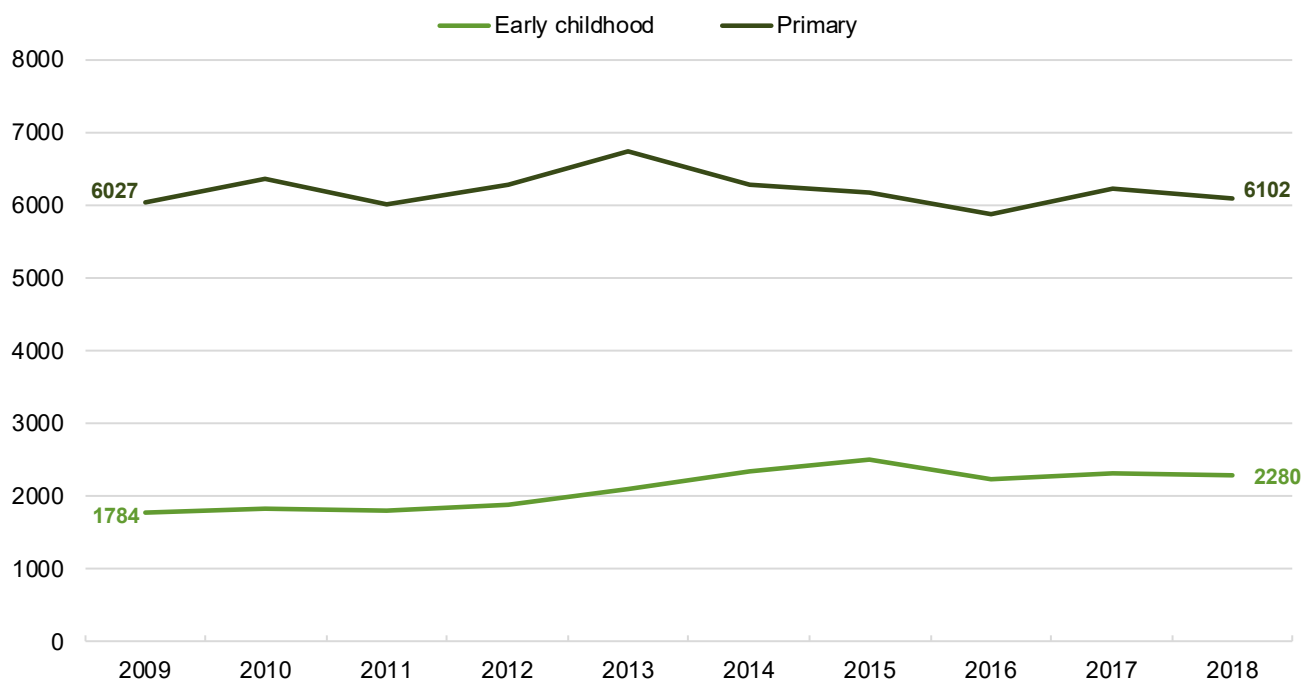


Table 5.4 Higher education graduate outcomes²⁷

Graduate outcomes	2015		2016		2017		2018	
	Early childhood	Primary	Early childhood	Primary	Early childhood	Primary	Early childhood	Primary
Employed in schools	56%	70%	67%	76%	59%	77%	59%	73%
Employed in early childhood settings	35%	1%	41%	3%	43%	2%	38%	2%
Full-time further study	4%	4%	3%	3%	2%	2%	6%	7%
Not employed	5%	7%	5%	7%	6%	8%	2%	2%

27. Australian Department of Education (2020), *Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching, Graduate Outcomes Survey*.

Modifications to ACECQA's supervised professional experience requirements for 2020

The coronavirus (COVID-19) global pandemic and the associated restrictions had a significant impact on initial teacher education in 2020, in particular the provision of supervised professional experience placements.

After consultation with higher education institutes, state and territory teacher regulatory authorities, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, (AITSL) and sector stakeholders, the ACECQA Board modified its supervised professional experience requirements for students graduating in 2020. These modifications reduced the number of required days in line with approaches taken by teacher regulatory authorities.

In its deliberations, the ACECQA Board focused on achieving a balance between a practical and pragmatic response to a public health emergency without unduly compromising quality standards.

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.

Figure 5.7 shows that 6.4% of services hold a staffing waiver as at 30 June 2020, up from 4.5% as at 30 June 2019, and 3.9% as at 30 June 2018 and 2017.

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 2016, however the proportions in the first half of 2020 exceed any historical increases.

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

Figure 5.7: Proportion of services with a staffing waiver²⁸



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

Figure 5.8 shows the proportion of staffing waivers for each of the three types of centre-based service. While staffing waivers for outside school hours care services, which do not require early childhood teachers, and preschools/kindergartens, which typically have more established and experienced staff, have remained low, long day care services have driven the overall trend and caused the recent notable increases.

As at 30 June 2020, one in ten long day care services hold a staffing waiver, with most of these waivers relating to the early childhood teacher requirements of the National

Regulations.

Figure 5.9 shows that children’s education and care services located in remote and very remote areas continue to have the highest proportion of staffing waivers, reflecting the greater difficulty of recruiting and retaining staff in those locations. It is also important to note that there are relatively small numbers of services in remote areas compared to other geographical locations.

There is a recent marked increase in staffing waivers for services located in major cities, which again likely reflects the ongoing impact of COVID-19.

Figure 5.8: Proportion of services with a staffing waiver, by centre-based service type

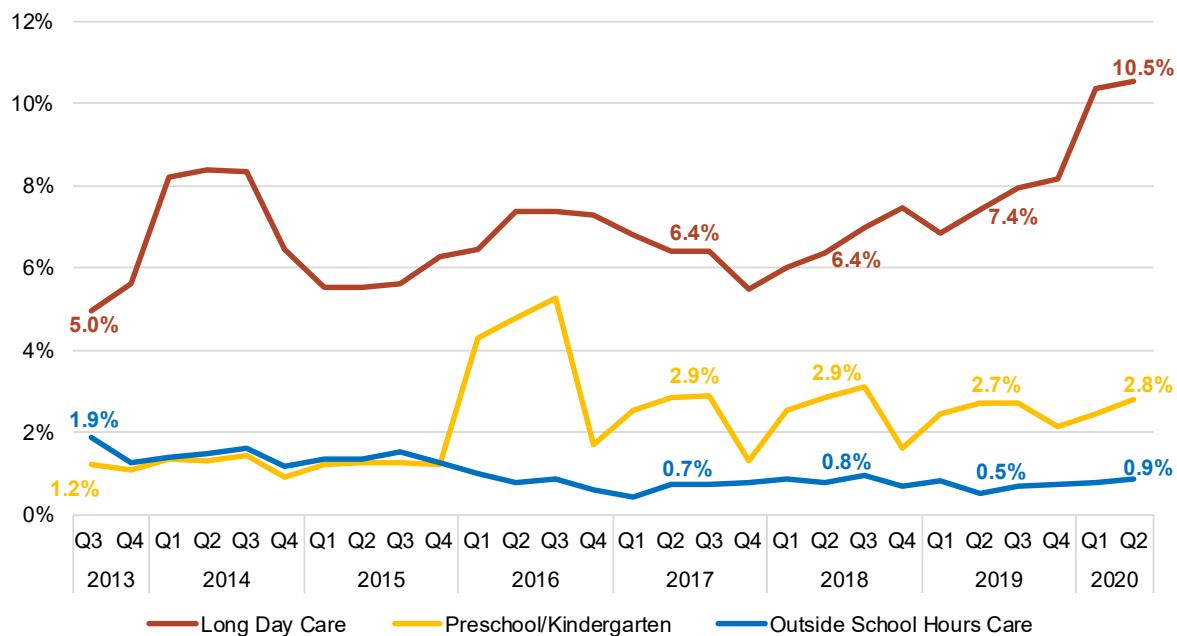
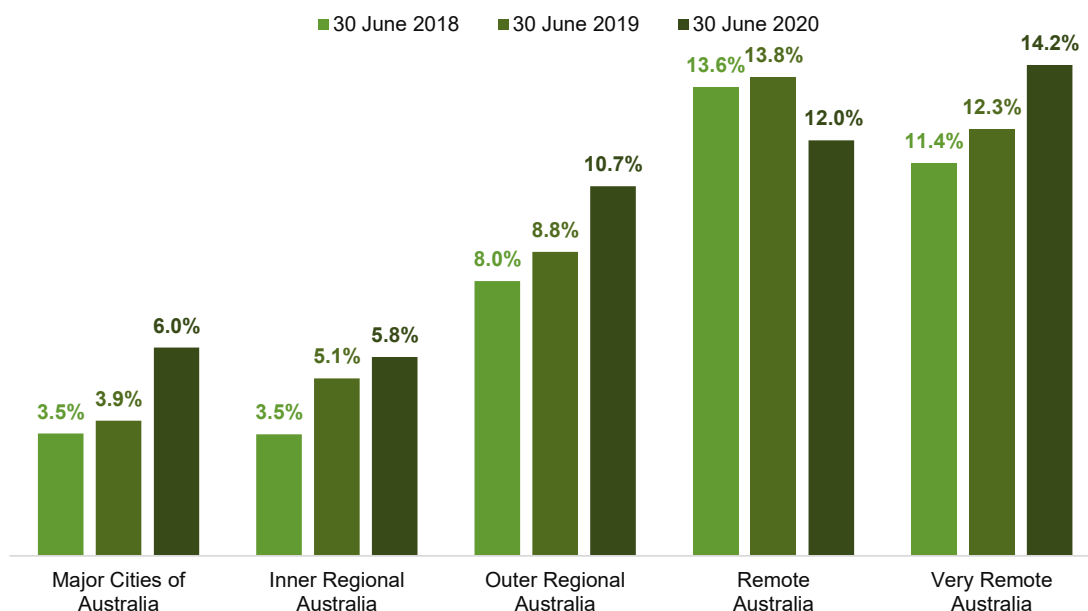


Figure 5.9: Proportion of services with a staffing waiver by remoteness classification



Educator wellbeing

Well-supported teachers, educators and staff are critical to quality education and care.

Teachers and educators play a vital role in supporting children's resilience before, during and after major incidents and emergencies. In 2019/20, they provided significant emotional support to children and families during the bushfires and COVID-19. Such support can come at the detriment of their own physical and emotional wellbeing.

[Be You](#) provides specific resources to support teachers' and educators' mental health and wellbeing (in addition to resources for children and families).

Governments and ACECQA have also developed resources to support and promote educator wellbeing, including ACECQA's [poster series](#) and [information sheet](#), NSW [resources and webinars](#), and Queensland's [COVID-19 wellbeing resources](#).

Children's education and care national workforce strategy

In 2019, ACECQA, informed by extensive stakeholder consultation, undertook research and analysis to identify the underlying issues and opportunities to support the children's education and care sector to attract, develop and retain a high quality workforce.

The report, [Progressing a national approach to the children's education and care workforce](#) confirmed that workforce issues continue to be a significant challenge across the sector. While there has been substantial growth in the overall number of qualified educators and early childhood teachers since the start of the NQF

in 2012, workforce shortfalls continue to exist across most jurisdictions, and are particularly acute in regional and remote areas.

While many employers have their own workforce strategies, and several jurisdictions have initiated strategies to address local issues, there is currently no nationally agreed strategy to support the growing demand for a highly qualified workforce.

In December 2019, following consideration of ACECQA's report, the COAG Education Council [endorsed](#) the development of a new national workforce strategy.

The development of the strategy has been made significantly more challenging by the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on society more broadly and on the children's education and care sector specifically. Recovery from COVID-19, including initiatives to support educator wellbeing, will inform some of the immediate and short-term priorities of the new national workforce strategy.

The strategy will represent a joint long-term commitment between governments and sector stakeholders, with its issues, opportunities and priorities to be shaped by an ongoing process of co-design, which began with the 2019 consultation process.

The new strategy is anticipated to be finalised and published in the second half of 2021.

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