



NQF Snapshot

Q3 2021



Australian Children's
Education & Care
Quality Authority

A quarterly report from
the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority

November 2021

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Overview

NQF Snapshot Q3 2021 is ACECQA's 35th national report on children's education and care services operating under the National Quality Framework (NQF).

It provides analysis and information on the profile of the sector and the quality ratings of services against the National Quality Standard (NQS).

A revised version of the NQS commenced on 1 February 2018. The number of quality standards has reduced from 18 to 15, and the number of quality elements has reduced from 58 to 40.

The changes streamlined the NQS and reduced overlap between elements and standards. Analysis at the standard and element level uses quality ratings against the 2018 NQS only, while analysis at the overall and quality area level uses all current quality ratings against both the 2012 and 2018 NQS.

An [interactive online version of the Snapshot](#), which includes additional analysis, is available on the ACECQA website.

The data presented in this Snapshot was taken from the National Quality Agenda IT System (NQA ITS) at 00:30 on 1 October 2021.

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

On 2 April 2020, in recognition of the COVID-19 global pandemic, Education Ministers announced four critical areas for time-limited regulatory action, including the suspension of assessment and ratings. This resulted in a stark decline in assessment and rating visits in Q2 2020 (see Figure 10). Regulatory authorities have now recommenced the assessment and rating process as appropriate.

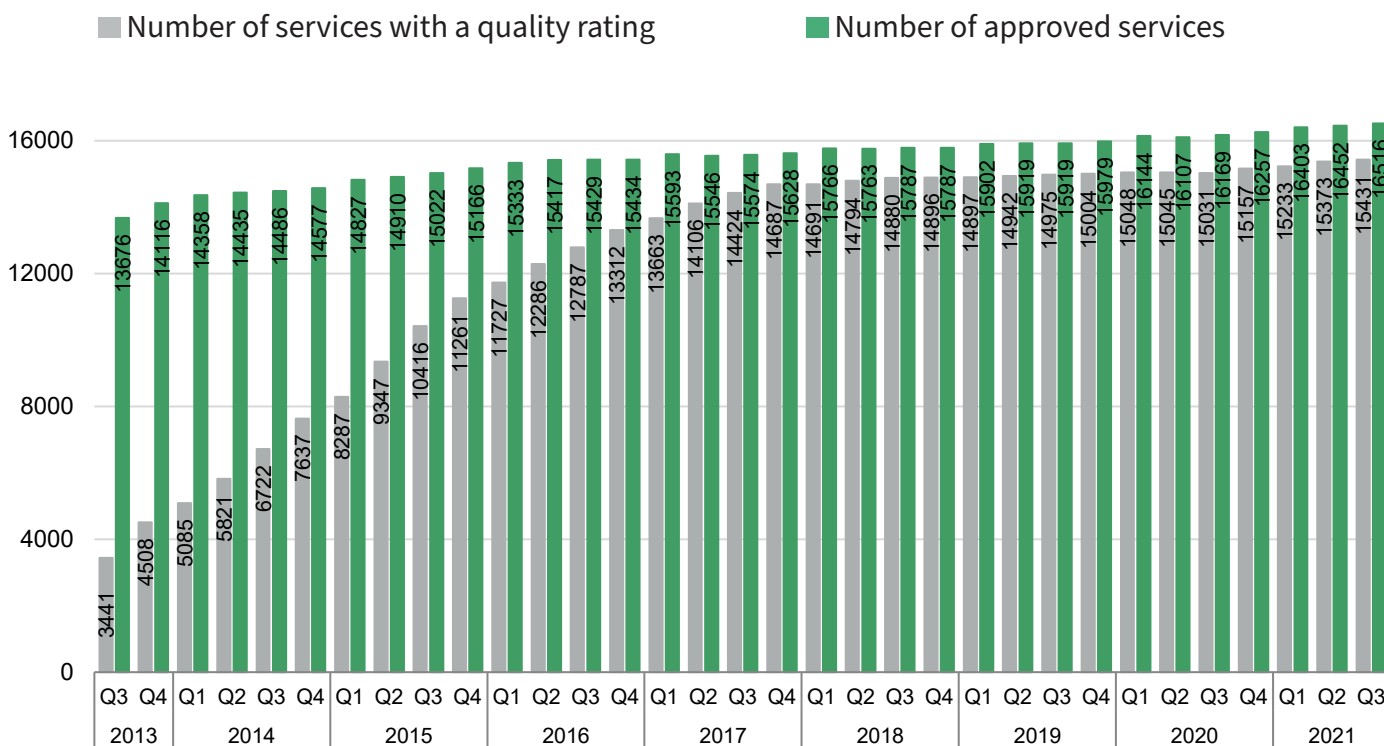
More than 1,100 centre-based service closures related to the impact of COVID-19 were recorded in the NQA ITS at the start of three consecutive weeks in March/April 2020. There were 291 such centre-based service closures at the start of October 2021 (see Figure 9). Up-to-date information is available via the [service and temporary closure mapping tool](#) on the ACECQA website.



Snapshot highlights

16,516	children's education and care services approved to operate under the NQF
15,431 (93%)	services with a quality rating
13,315 (86%)	services with a quality rating of Meeting NQS or above
7268	providers approved to operate
5857 (81%)	providers approved to operate only one service
36	services rated Excellent by ACECQA ¹
13,748	quality rating reassessments completed
67%	of services rated Working Towards NQS improved their overall quality rating at reassessment
10,492 (64%)	services with a quality rating against the 2018 NQS

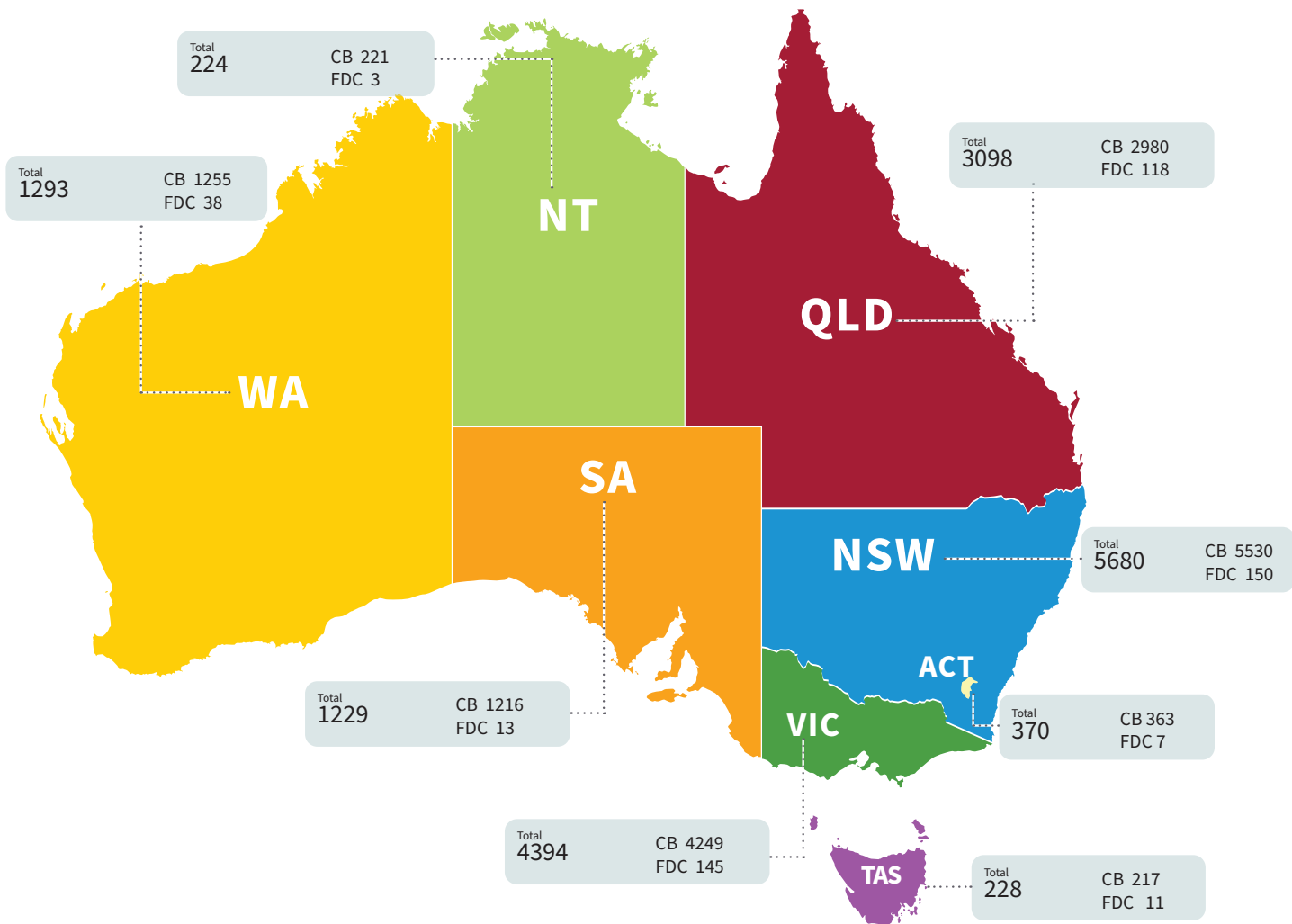
Figure 1: Number of approved services and number of services with a quality rating by quarter



¹ The Excellent rating is awarded for a period of three years. Unless a reapplication for the Excellent rating is received, a service's rating will revert back to Exceeding NQS after this three year period. The Snapshot includes the current number of Excellent rated services.

Profile of the sector

Figure 2: Number of approved services by jurisdiction and service type



<p>Total Centre-based (CB) ¹</p> <p>16,031 (97%)</p> <p>2% Increase on Q3 2020</p>	<p>Total Family day care (FDC) ²</p> <p>485(3%)</p> <p>-4% Decrease on Q3 2020</p>	<p>Total</p> <p>16,516</p> <p>2% Increase on Q3 2020</p>
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¹ A centre-based service is an education and care service other than a family day care service. This includes most long day care, preschool and outside school hours care services that are delivered at a centre. It does not include Tasmanian preschools/kindergartens and most preschools/kindergartens in Western Australia that are outside the scope of the NQF, as well as other services that aren't regulated under the National Law.

² A family day care service is an education and care service delivered through a network of educators operating from residences and other approved venues. They are sometimes known as family day care schemes and they are administered and supported by central coordination units.

Figure 3: Proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above by overall rating and quality area

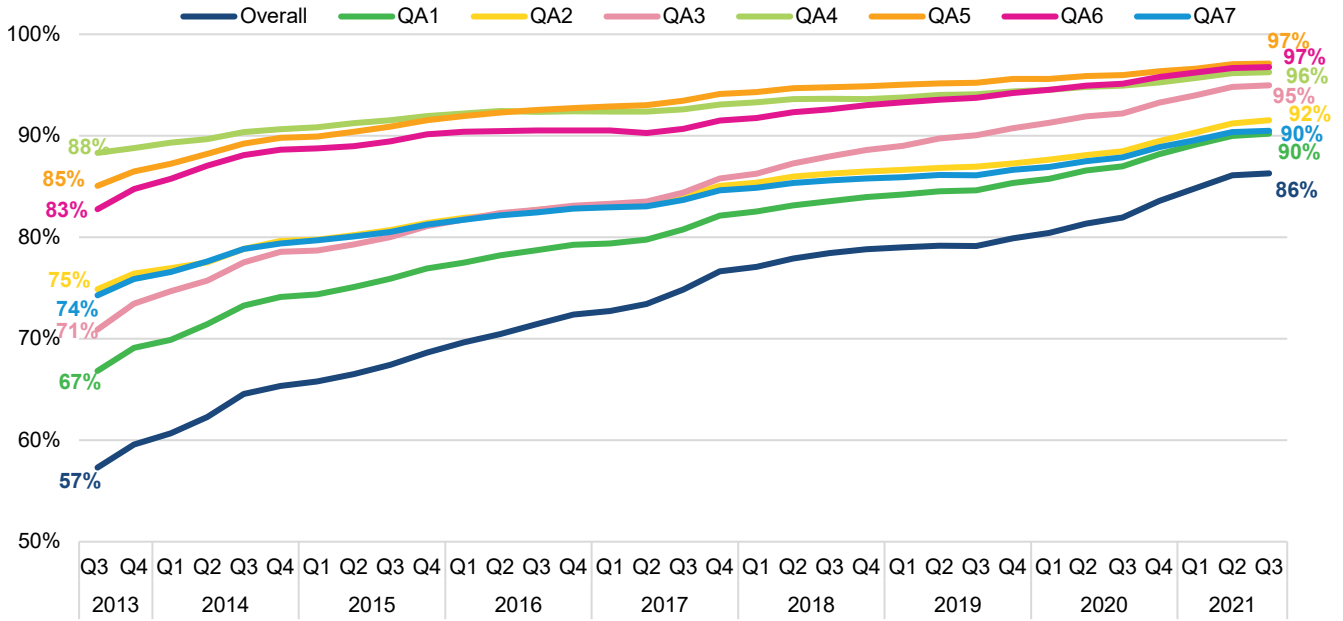


Figure 4: Proportion of services rated Exceeding NQS or above by overall rating and quality area

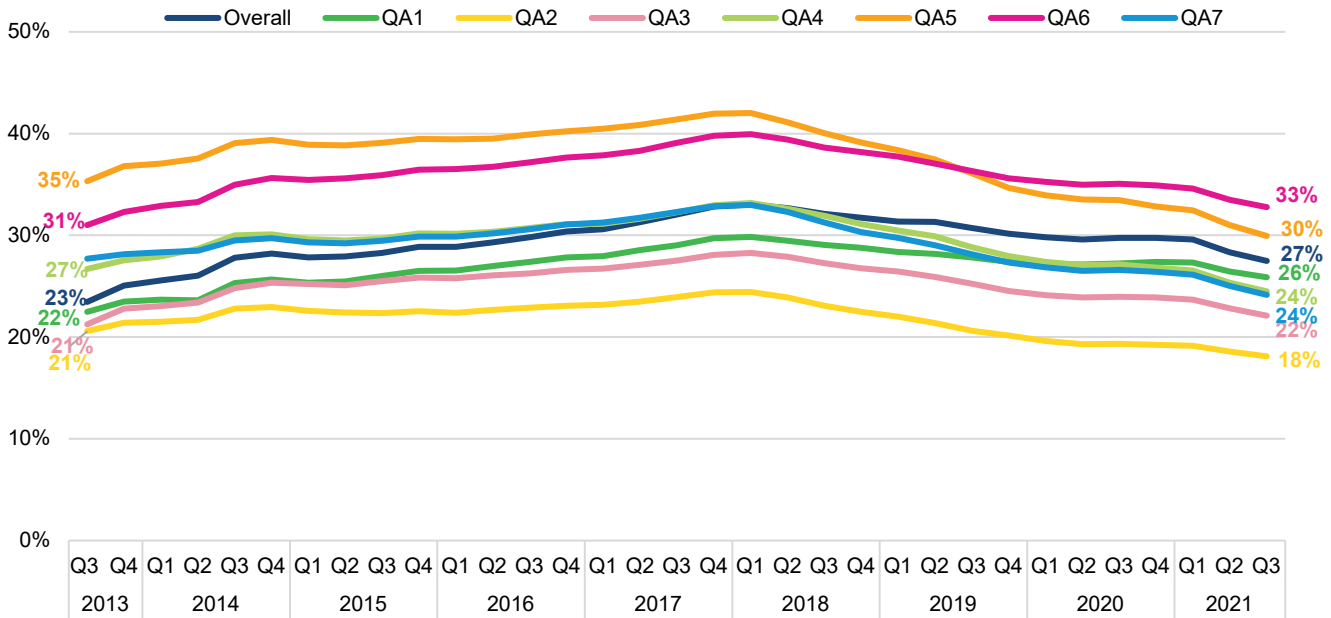


Figure 5: Proportion of services by service sub-type and jurisdiction ^{1,2,3,4,5}

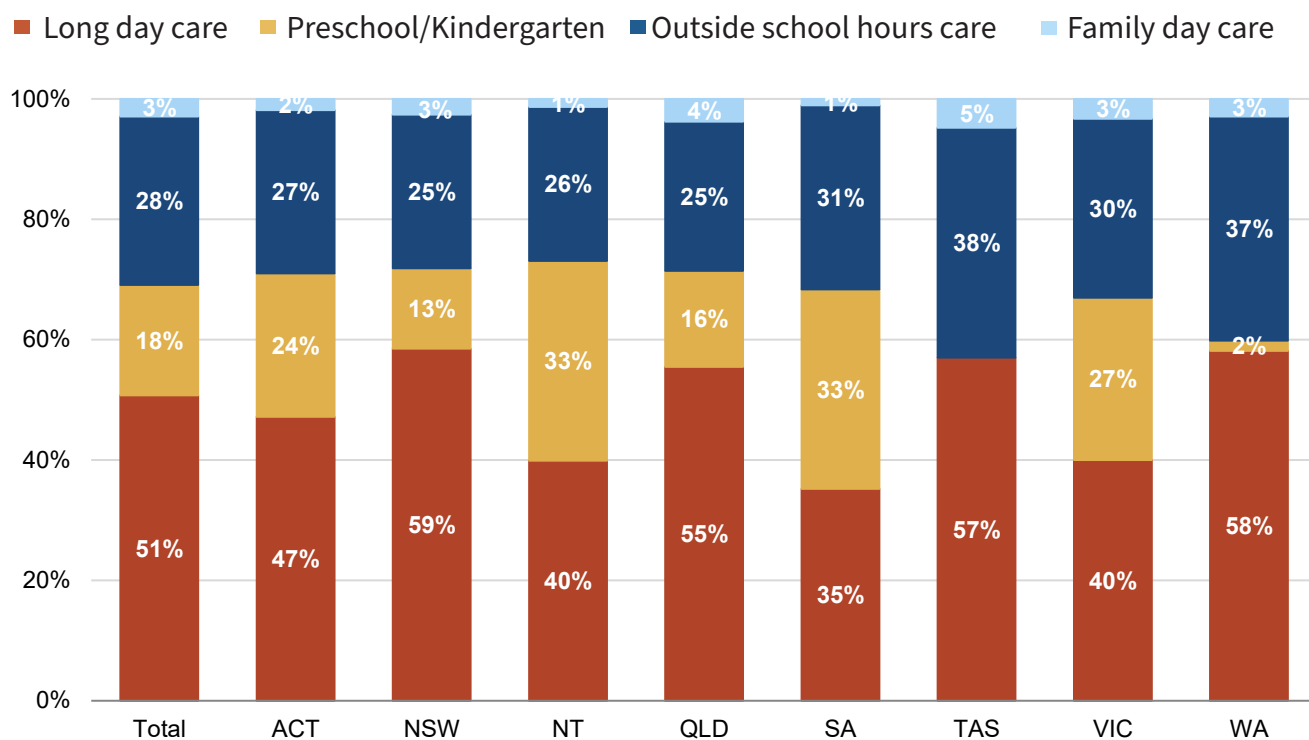


Table 1: Number of services by service sub-type and jurisdiction

	Family day care	Long day care	Preschool/Kindergarten	Outside school hours care	Other	Total
ACT	7	174	88	100	1	370
NSW	150	3323	759	1448	0	5680
NT	3	89	74	57	1	224
QLD	118	1719	494	767	0	3098
SA	13	433	407	376	0	1229
TAS	11	130	0	87	0	228
VIC	145	1757	1186	1306	0	4394
WA	38	751	22	481	1	1293
TOTAL	485	8376	3030	4622	3	16,516

1 NQA ITS data collected on service sub-type is self-reported by providers when applying for service approval, and providers may choose multiple service sub-types. For example, a service providing both long day care and outside school hours care, or one providing both long day care and preschool/kindergarten.

2 Providers are not required to notify changes to this information, and therefore this NQA ITS information may not be current.

3 Centre-based services offering more than one type of service are classified as follows: services which provide long day care in addition to any other service type are classified as long day care services; services which provide preschool/kindergarten as well as outside school hours care are classified as preschool/kindergarten services; services which provide outside school hours care only are classified as outside school hours care services.

4 Excludes Tasmanian preschools/kindergartens and most preschools/kindergartens in Western Australia that are outside the scope of the NQF, as well as other services that aren't regulated under the National Law.

5 Three services categorised as 'Other' excluded for graphical purposes.

Figure 6: Proportion of services by provider management type ^{1,2,3}

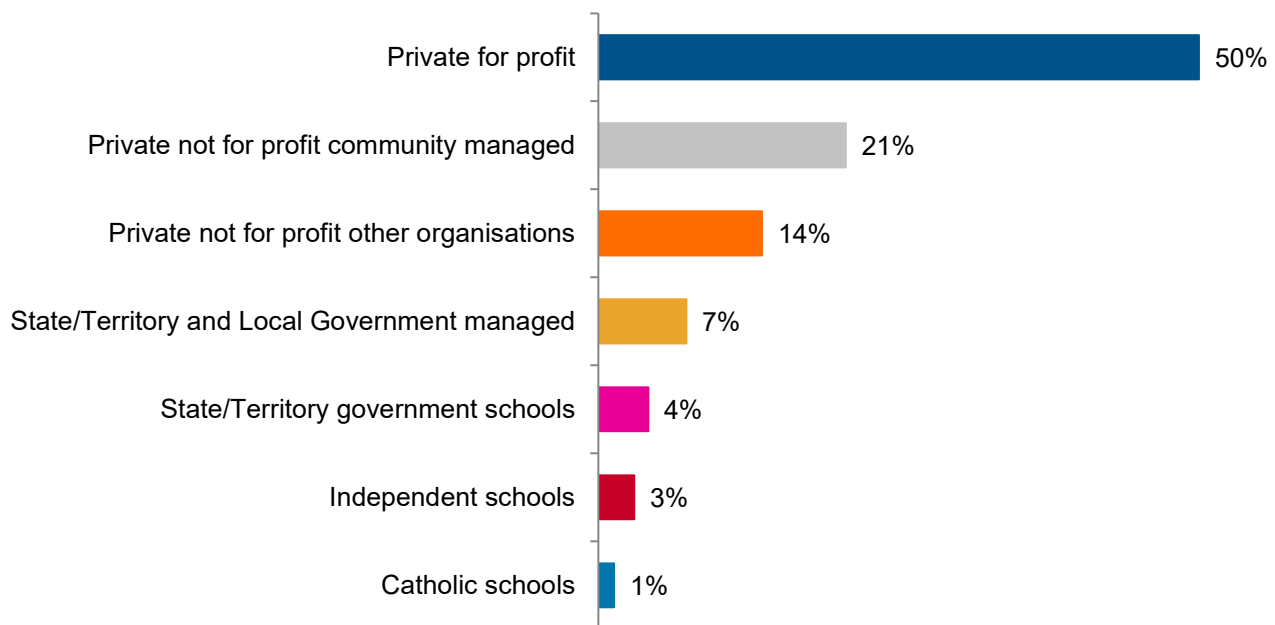


Table 2: Number and proportion of services by provider management type

Provider management type	Number of services	Proportion of services
Private for profit	8254	50%
Private not for profit community managed	3401	21%
Private not for profit other organisations	2248	14%
State/Territory and Local Government managed	1207	7%
State/Territory government schools	683	4%
Independent schools	492	3%
Catholic schools	215	1%
Not stated/Other	16	0%
Total	16,516	100%

¹ NQA ITS data collected on provider management type is self-reported by providers when applying for provider approval. Providers are not required to notify changes to this information, and therefore this NQA ITS information may not be current.

² Provider management type classifications are available at Australian Bureau of Statistics (2013) [National Early Childhood Education and Care Collection: Data Collection Guide, 2013](#) (Cat. No. 4240.0.55.002).

³ 16 services categorised as 'Not stated/Other' excluded for graphical purposes.

Figure 7 shows that 81% of approved providers operate a single service while 1% of approved providers operate 25 or more services.

Figure 7: Proportion of approved providers by size

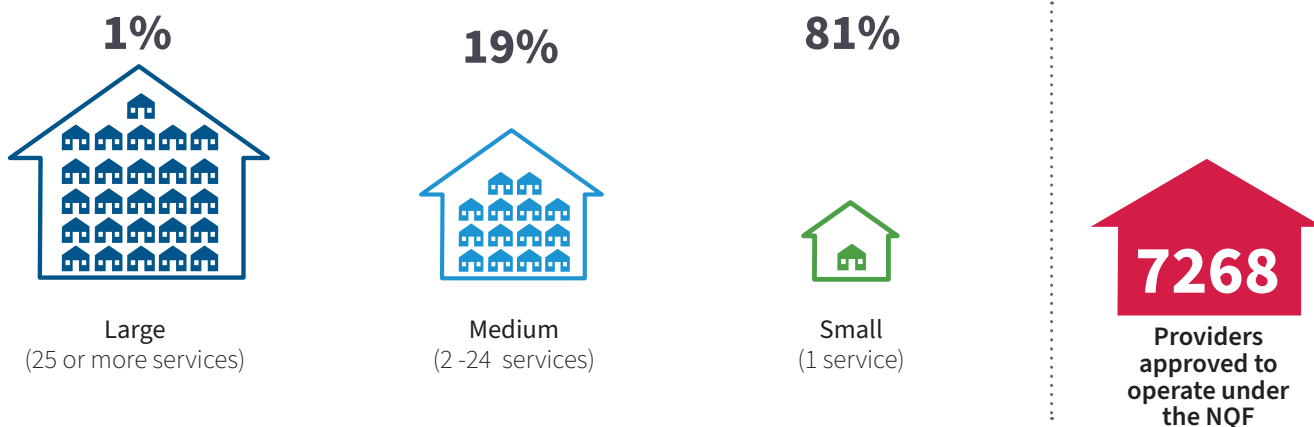


Figure 8 shows that 35% of approved services are operated by small approved providers while 34% of approved services are operated by large approved providers.

Figure 8: Proportion of approved services by provider size

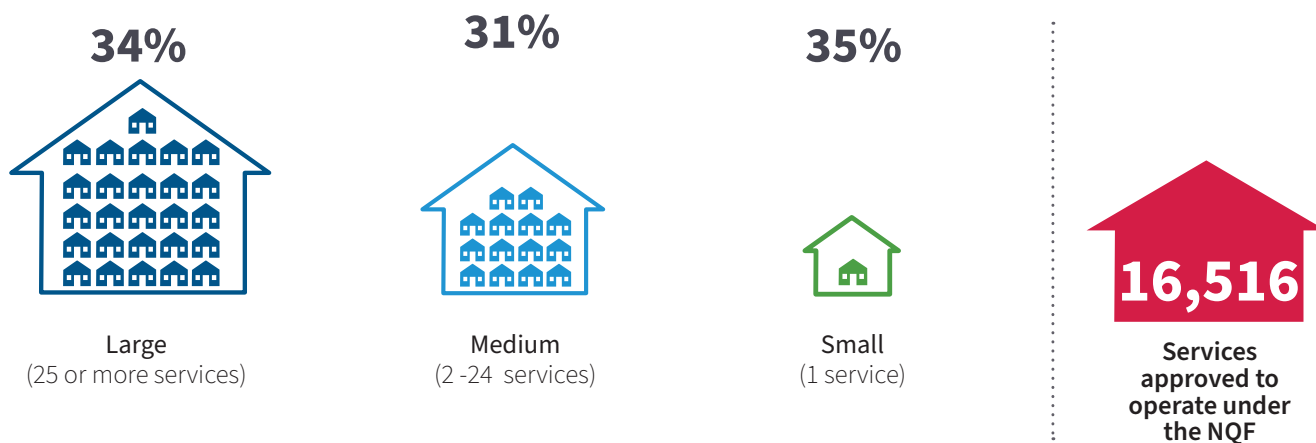


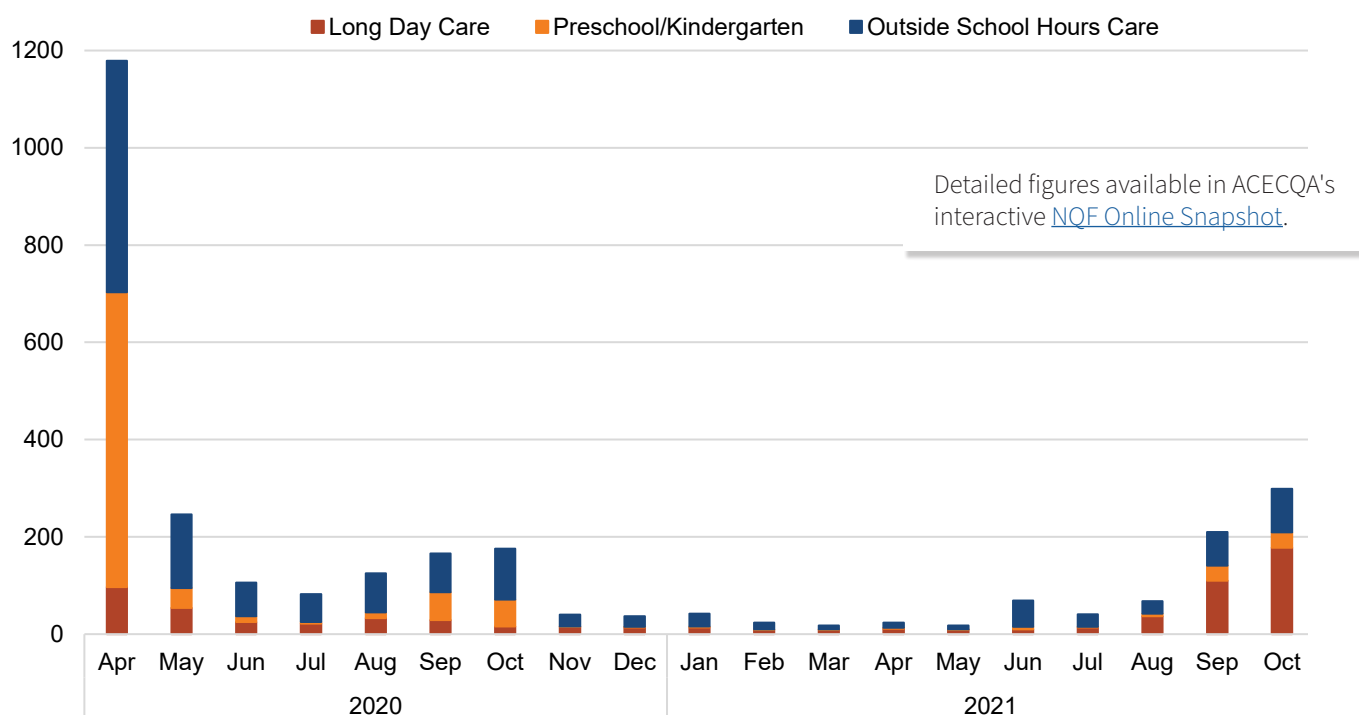
Figure 9 shows the total number of centre-based services closed at the start of each month from April 2020, where the closure is related to the impact of COVID-19.

The number and proportion of service closures varied over time and across jurisdictions. This may be due to differing approaches to precautionary measures, such as school closures, at the state and territory level. The timing, duration and extent of these measures impacts the demand for children’s education and care services, as well as the decisions of service providers to keep services operating.

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 April 2020, with the majority of these being preschools/kindergartens, followed by outside school hours care services. There were 291 such centre-based service closures at the start of October 2021.

Up-to-date information is available via the [service and temporary closure mapping tool](#) on the ACECQA website.

Figure 9: Number of centre-based service closures recorded in the NQA ITS at the start of each month, related to the impact of COVID-19



Progress of assessment and rating

Table 3 includes all approved services. The proportion of services with a quality rating will not reach 100% at any one time because a small proportion of services will only recently have been approved and may not have started operating or may have only been operating for a short period of time. In general, state and territory regulatory authorities will not assess and rate newly approved services which have been operating for less than 9-12 months.

Table 3: Quality ratings by jurisdiction

	Number of services	Proportion of all services	Number of services with a quality rating	Proportion of services with a quality rating
ACT	370	2%	336	91%
NSW	5680	34%	5405	95%
NT	224	1%	214	96%
QLD	3098	19%	2938	95%
SA	1229	7%	1193	97%
TAS	228	1%	213	93%
VIC	4394	27%	4019	91%
WA	1293	8%	1113	86%
TOTAL	16,516	100%	15,431	93%

Table 4: Number of services with a quality rating by service sub-type and jurisdiction

	Family day care	Long day care	Preschool/ Kindergarten	Outside school hours care	Other	Total
ACT	7	156	86	87	0	336
NSW	142	3195	746	1322	0	5405
NT	3	86	73	51	1	214
QLD	100	1625	482	731	0	2938
SA	12	410	402	369	0	1193
TAS	10	122	0	81	0	213
VIC	126	1578	1151	1164	0	4019
WA	31	651	19	411	1	1113
TOTAL	431	7823	2959	4216	2	15,431

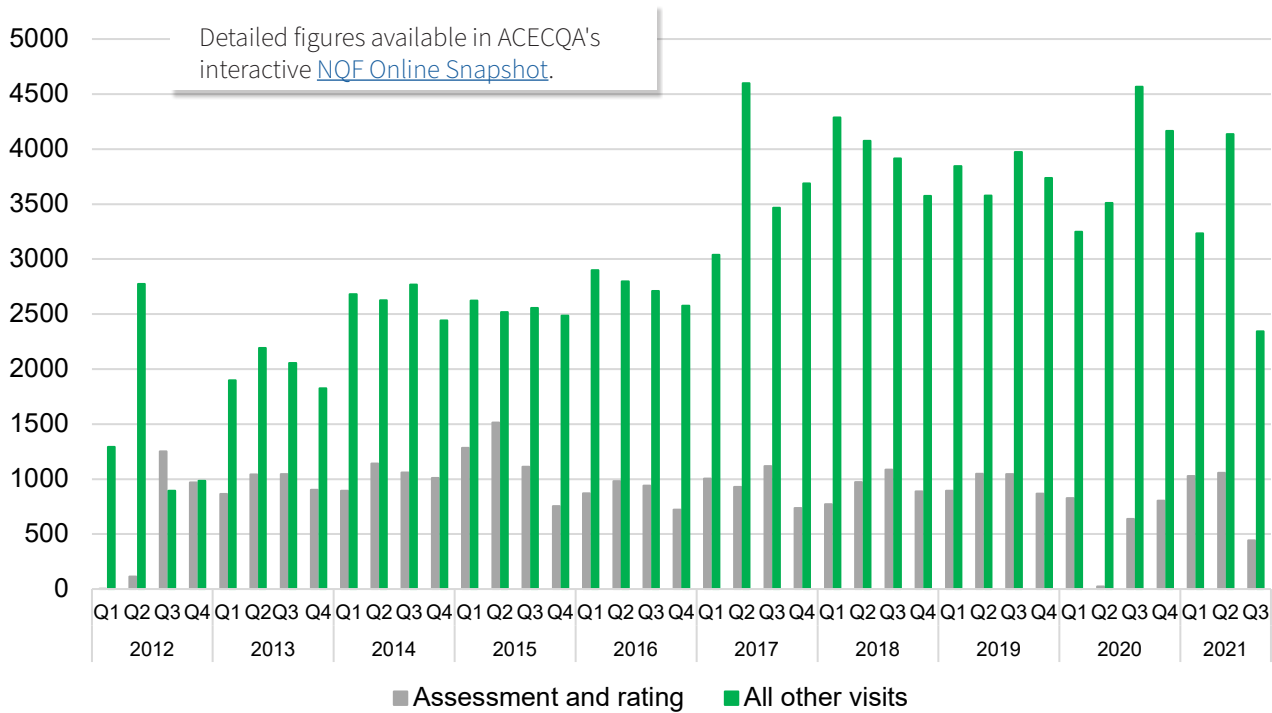
Service visits

Figure 10 shows the total number of quality assessment and rating visits compared to all other visits undertaken by state and territory regulatory authorities each quarter. Other types of visits include checking and monitoring compliance with the requirements of the NQF, investigating complaints and responding to events such as serious incidents or changes of service ownership, as well as visits for educative purposes.

While the ratio of assessment and rating visits to all other visits has fluctuated over time, state and territory regulatory authorities have undertaken more than three times as many other types of visit than assessment and rating visits since 2017, emphasising the significant amount of regulatory work that occurs outside of quality assessment and rating.

On 2 April 2020, in recognition of the COVID-19 global pandemic, Education Ministers announced four critical areas for time-limited regulatory action, including the suspension of assessment and ratings. This resulted in the stark decline in assessment and rating visits in Q2 2020.

Figure 10: Number of service visits (quality assessment and rating visits compared to all other visits)



Draft and final reports, and reviews

Table 5 shows the proportion of overall quality ratings that change between the draft and final assessment and rating report.

As part of the comprehensive assessment and rating process, service providers are issued a draft report by state and territory regulatory authorities, which includes the proposed quality ratings. Service providers are given the opportunity to provide any required feedback or clarification prior to the final report and quality ratings being issued.

More than 93% of all overall quality ratings remain unchanged between the draft and final assessment and rating reports.

Table 5: Proportion of overall quality ratings that change between the draft and final assessment and rating report

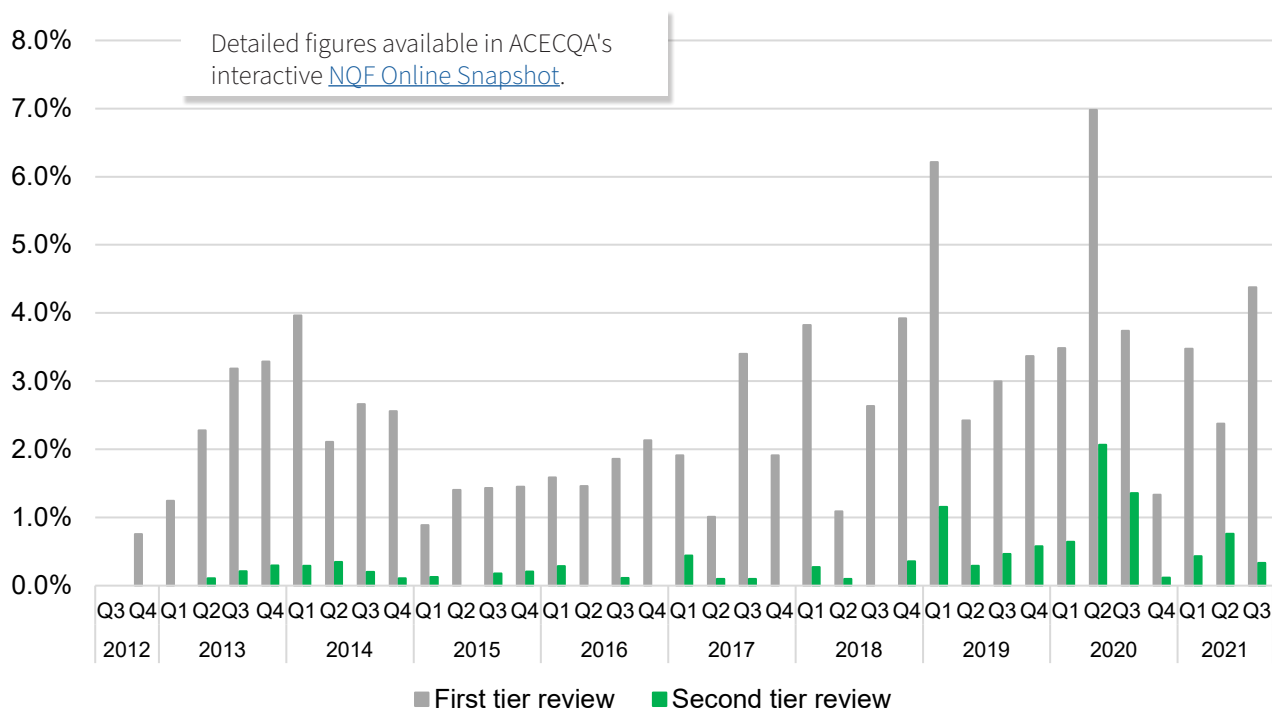
Rating level	Change in rating	%
Higher	1057	6.9%
Unchanged	14,334	93.1%
Lower	1	0.0%

Figure 11 shows the proportion of quality assessment and ratings that result in a first or second tier review.

As part of the comprehensive assessment and rating process, service providers may request a (first tier) review by the relevant state and territory regulatory authority following the final report and quality ratings being issued. They may also subsequently request a (second tier) review by an expert panel convened by ACECQA.

While the proportion of assessment and ratings that result in a first or second tier review is very low, it has increased in recent years. This may reflect a number of factors, including changes introduced with the 2018 NQS which made it more challenging for a service to achieve an overall rating of Exceeding NQS. As well, most services have now been quality assessed and rated more than once, with a lower subsequent rating more likely to be challenged by a service provider.

Figure 11: Proportion of quality assessment and ratings that result in a first or second tier review



Quality improvement

Table 6 presents a service's previous overall rating alongside its reassessed overall rating. For example, 3327 services previously rated Working Towards NQS improved their rating to Meeting NQS after reassessment. While 1957 services previously rated Working Towards NQS received the same rating again after reassessment.

Table 6: Reassessments by overall quality rating¹

		Rating after reassessment				Total
		Significant Improvement Required	Working Towards NQS	Meeting NQS	Exceeding NQS	
Rating before reassessment	Significant Improvement Required	19	68	15	0	102
	Working Towards NQS	43	1957	3327	745	6072
	Meeting NQS	4	811	2991	741	4547
	Exceeding NQS	2	293	1205	1527	3027
	Total	68	3129	7538	3013	13,748

		Rating after reassessment				Improvement rate
		Significant Improvement Required	Working Towards NQS	Meeting NQS	Exceeding NQS	
Rating before reassessment	Significant Improvement Required	19%	67%	15%	0%	81%
	Working Towards NQS	1%	32%	55%	12%	67%
	Meeting NQS	0%	18%	66%	16%	16%
	Exceeding NQS	0%	10%	40%	50%	-

¹ Reassessments include the following processes described in the National Law: i. Partial reassessment and re-rating requested by provider; ii. Partial reassessment and re-rating instigated by the regulatory authority; iii. Full reassessment and re-rating requested by provider; iv. Full reassessment and re-rating instigated by the regulatory authority.

Overall quality ratings

Authorised officers from state and territory regulatory authorities assess and rate services using the seven quality areas, 15 standards and 40 elements that make up the NQS. Services are given a rating for each of the seven quality areas and an overall rating.

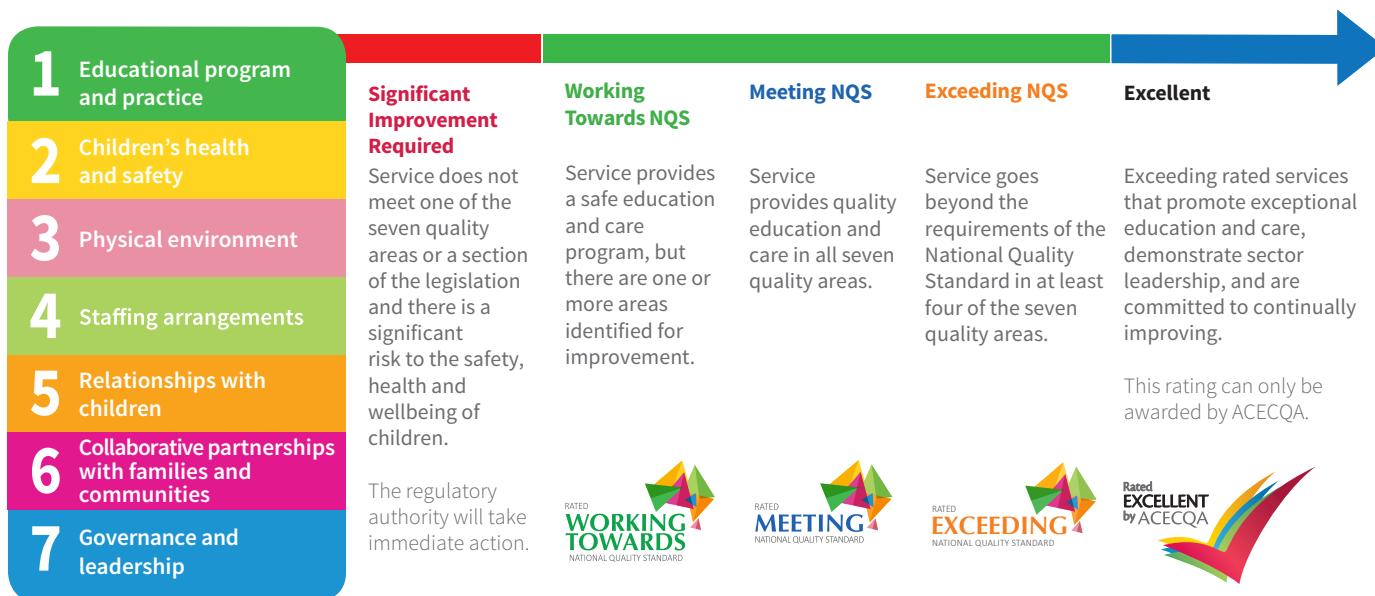


Table 7: Overall quality ratings by jurisdiction

	Significant Improvement Required	Working Towards NQS	Meeting NQS	Exceeding NQS	Excellent	Total
ACT	0	76 23%	107 32%	151 45%	2	336
NSW	5	728 13%	3364 62%	1295 24%	13	5405
NT	1	40 19%	140 65%	32 15%	1	214
QLD	0	322 11%	1791 61%	815 28%	10	2938
SA	0	167 14%	481 40%	540 45%	5	1193
TAS	2	46 22%	110 52%	55 26%	0	213
VIC	0	501 12%	2396 60%	1117 28%	5	4019
WA	0	228 20%	687 62%	198 18%	0	1113
TOTAL	8	2108 14%	9076 59%	4203 27%	36	15,431

Figure 12: Overall quality ratings by service type

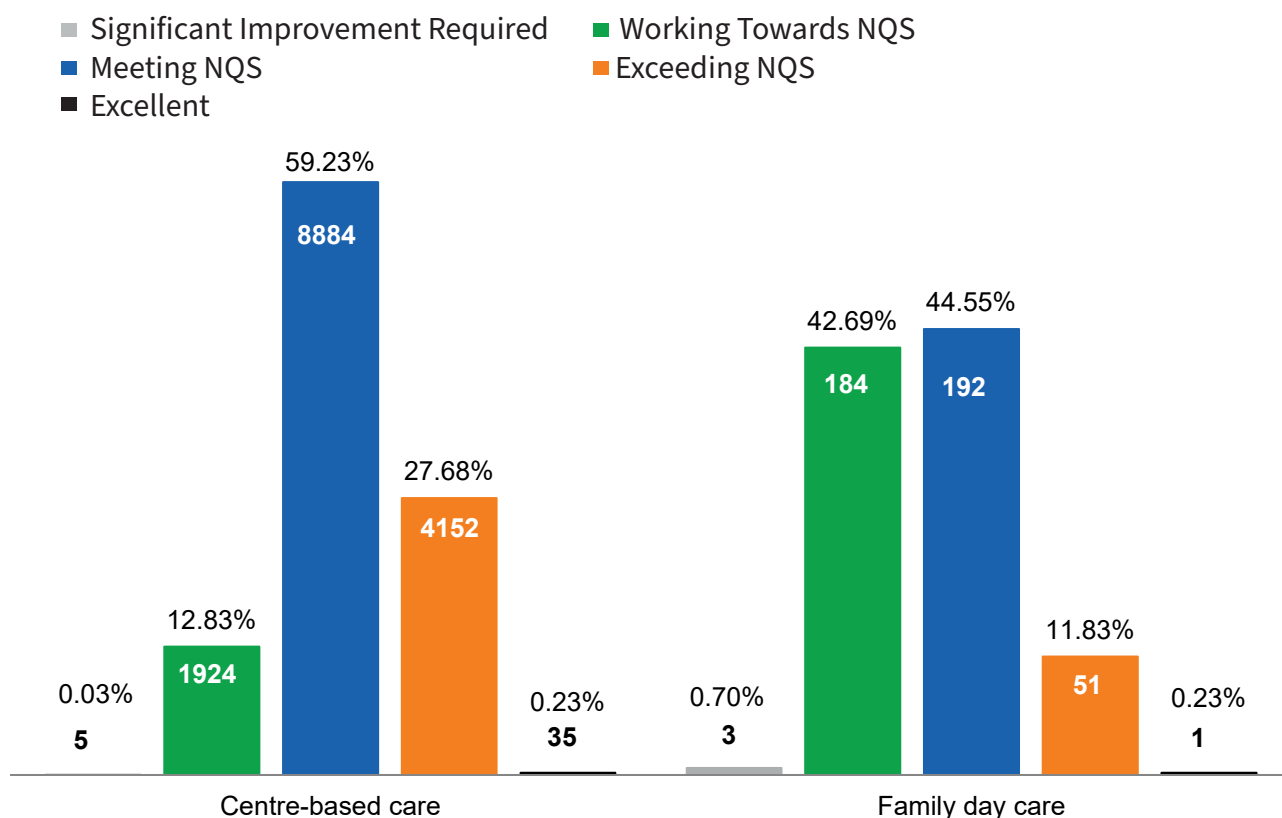


Figure 13: Overall quality ratings by centre-based service sub-type

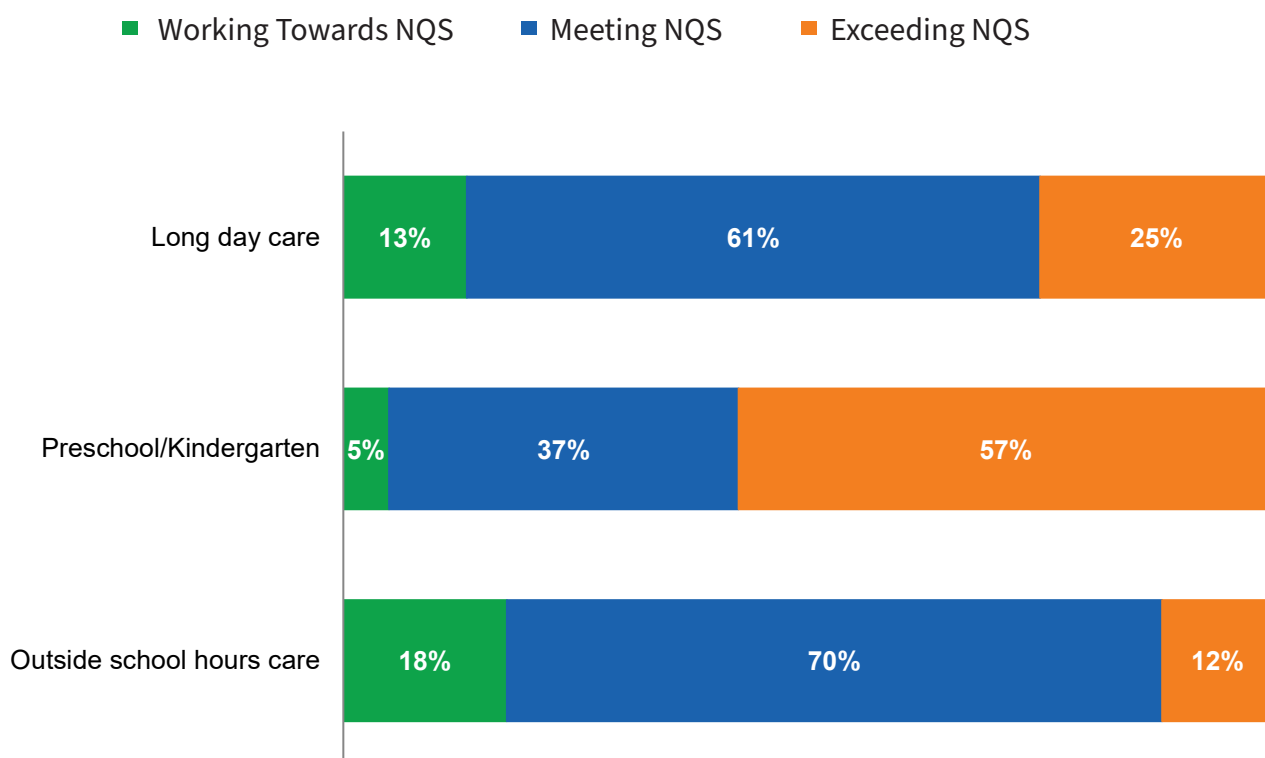
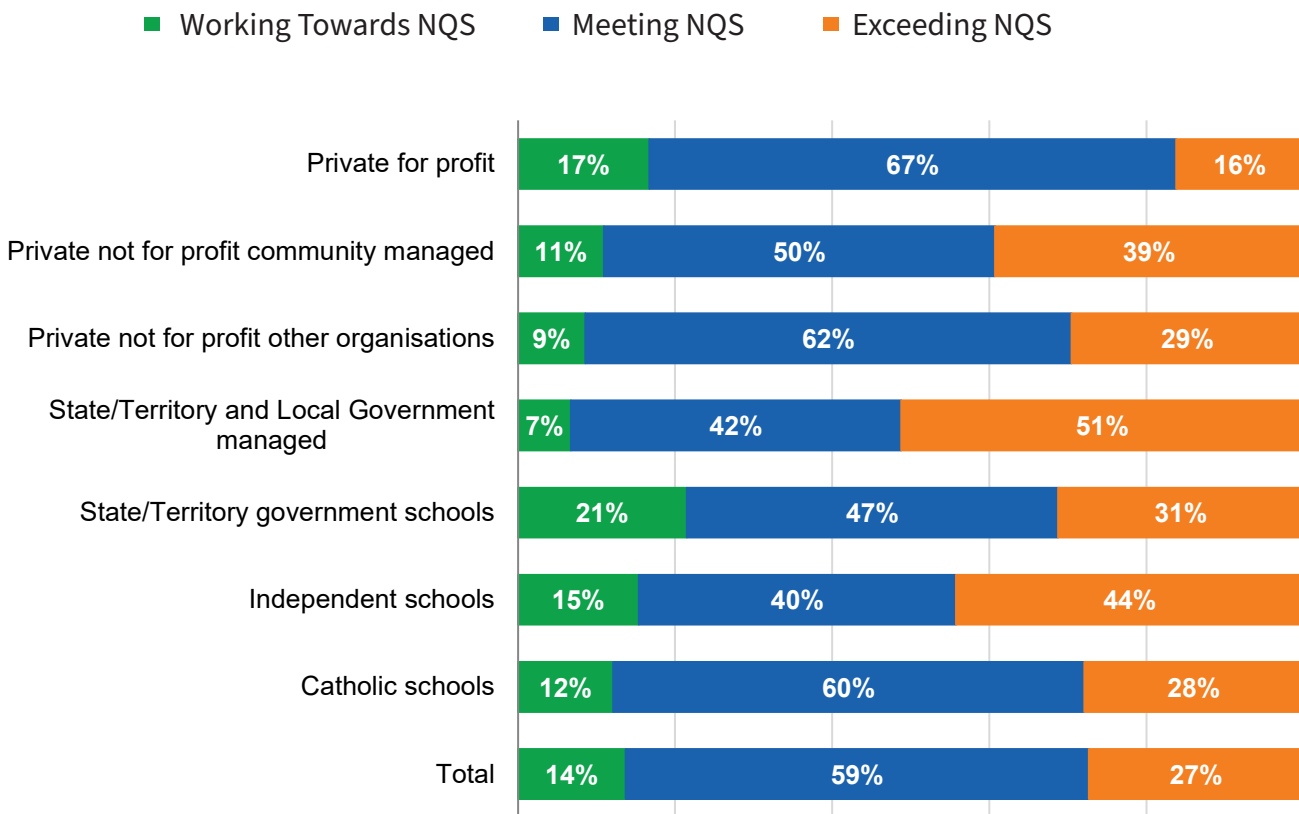


Figure 14 shows the variation in spread of quality ratings between provider management types.

These differences can reflect a range of contextual factors, such as the service profile of these provider types. For example, half of all 'State/Territory and Local Government managed' services are preschools/kindergartens, with preschools/kindergartens performing better against the NQS than other service types (see Figure 13). In contrast, preschools/kindergartens make up only 1% of 'Private for profit' services.

Figure 14: Overall quality ratings by provider management type¹



¹ 14 providers categorised as 'Not stated/Other' excluded for graphical purposes.

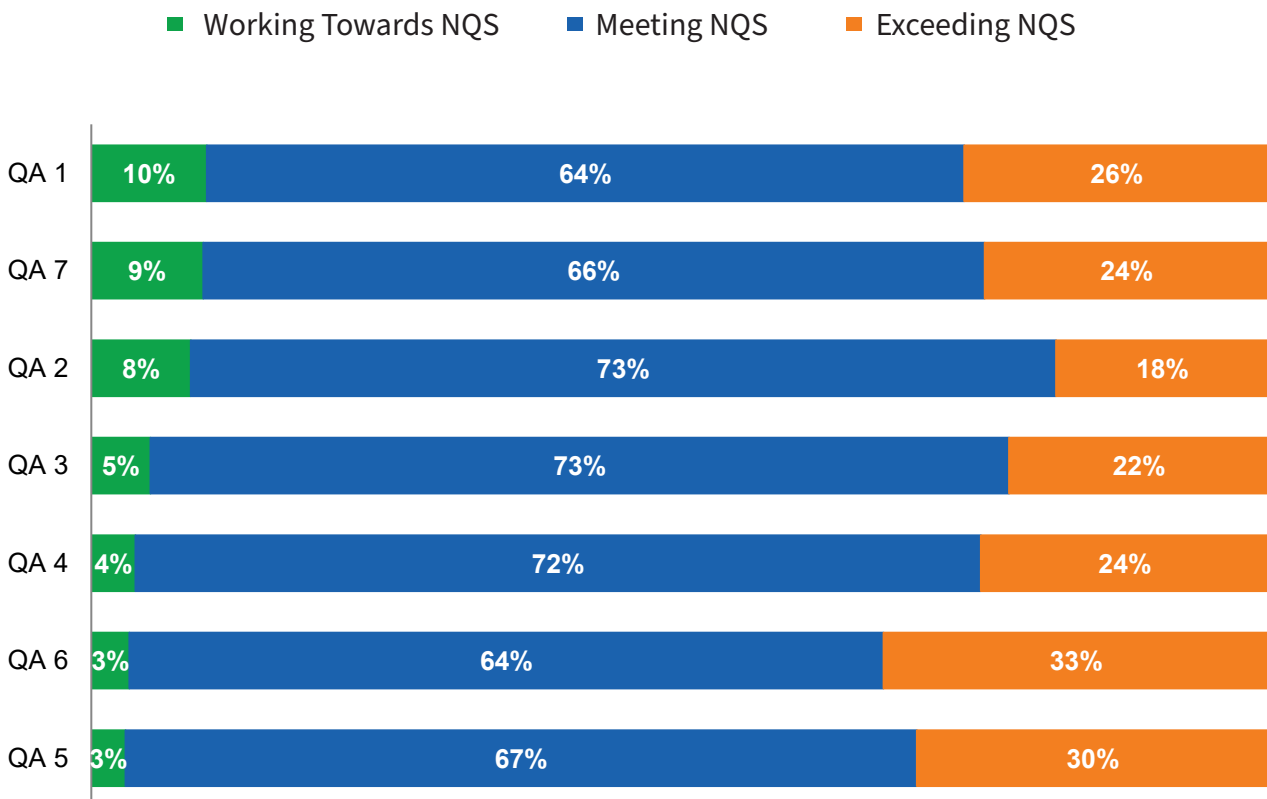
Quality area ratings

Table 8 and Figure 16 rank the seven quality areas of the NQS in descending order based on the number and proportion of services rated Working Towards NQS in each quality area.

Table 8: Quality area ratings

	Significant Improvement Required	Working Towards NQS	Meeting NQS	Exceeding NQS
Quality Area 1 - Educational program and practice	1	1511	9926	3993
Quality Area 7 - Governance and leadership	5	1464	10,235	3727
Quality Area 2 - Children's health and safety	8	1301	11,330	2792
Quality Area 3 - Physical environment	1	775	11,247	3408
Quality Area 4 - Staffing arrangements	1	579	11,074	3777
Quality Area 6 - Collaborative partnerships with families and communities	0	499	9878	5054
Quality Area 5 - Relationships with children	0	448	10,366	4617

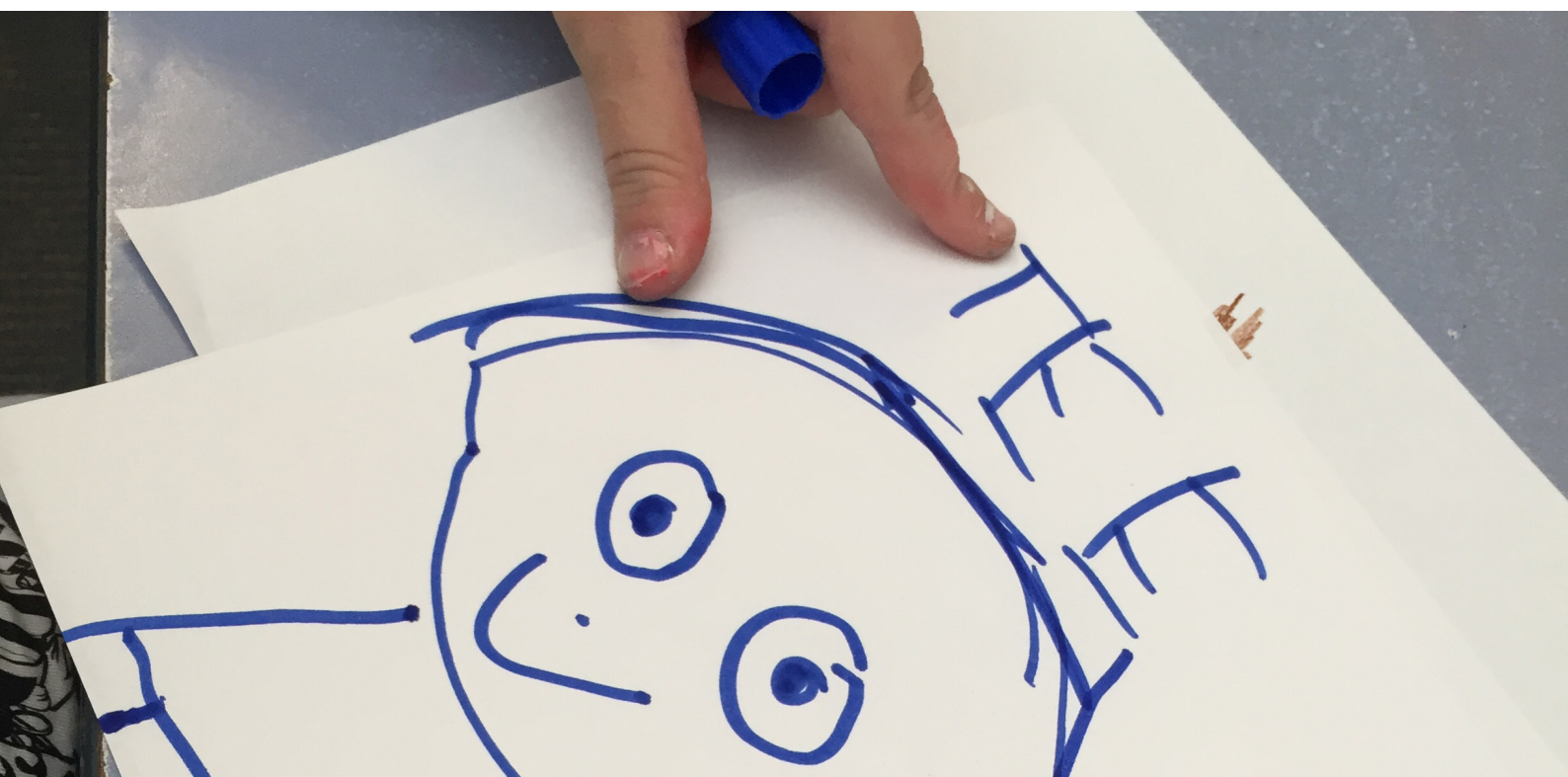
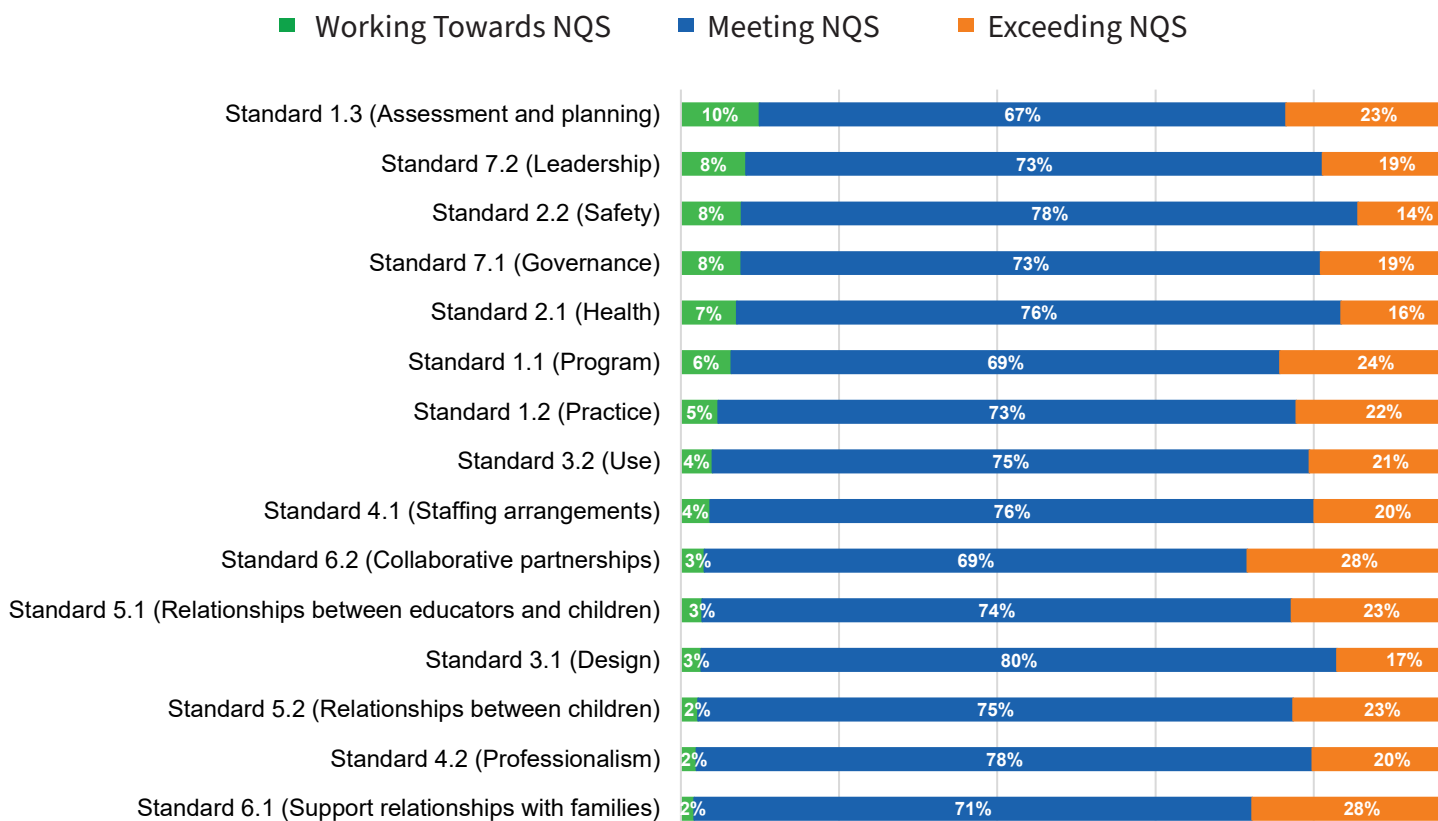
Figure 15: Quality area ratings



Standard level ratings under the 2018 NQS

Figure 16 ranks the 15 standards of the 2018 NQS in descending order based on the proportion of services rated Working Towards NQS in each standard.

Figure 16: Standard level ratings under the 2018 NQS



Element level results under the 2018 NQS

Table 9 ranks the 40 elements of the 2018 NQS in descending order, based on the proportion of services that do not meet each element.

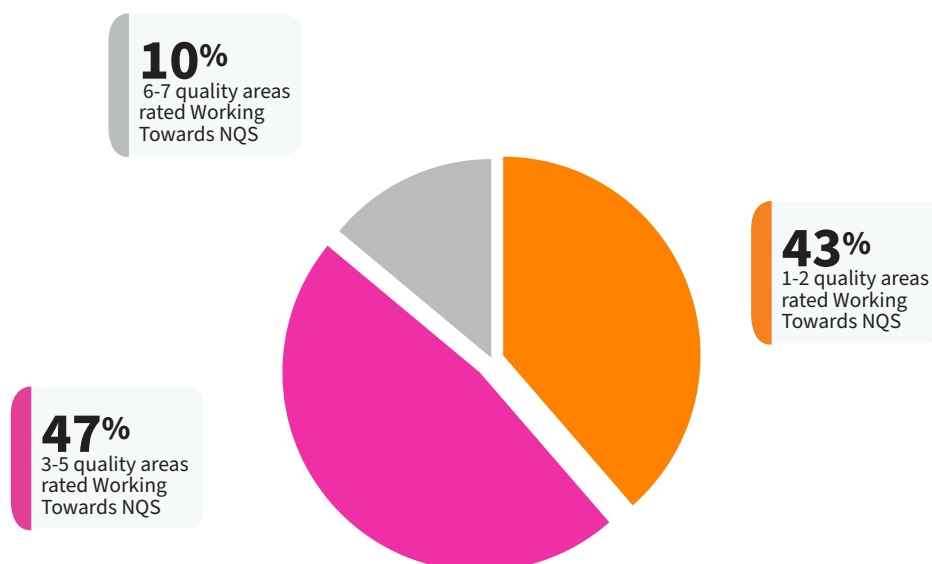
Table 9: Element level results under 2018 NQS

	% Not Met		% Not Met
1.3.1 (Assessment and planning cycle)	8.4%	5.2.2 (Self-regulation)	2.1%
1.3.2 (Critical reflection)	8.1%	7.1.1 (Service philosophy and purpose)	2.1%
7.1.2 (Management systems)	6.9%	3.1.2 (Upkeep)	2.1%
2.1.2 (Health practices and procedures)	6.1%	6.2.3 (Community engagement)	2.0%
7.2.2 (Educational leadership)	5.5%	3.2.1 (Inclusive environment)	2.0%
7.2.3 (Development of professionals)	5.5%	2.1.3 (Healthy lifestyle)	1.8%
2.2.1 (Supervision)	5.4%	2.2.3 (Child protection)	1.8%
1.1.3 (Program learning opportunities)	4.6%	3.2.2 (Resources support play-based learning)	1.7%
2.2.2 (Incident and emergency management)	4.1%	5.1.1 (Positive educator to child interactions)	1.6%
4.1.1 (Organisation of educators)	3.5%	4.2.2 (Professional standards)	1.5%
1.1.1 (Approved learning framework)	3.2%	6.2.2 (Access and participation)	1.5%
7.2.1 (Continuous improvement)	3.0%	2.1.1 (Wellbeing and comfort)	1.2%
1.1.2 (Child-centred)	2.9%	3.1.1 (Fit for purpose)	1.1%
1.2.3 (Child directed learning)	2.9%	4.2.1 (Professional collaboration)	1.0%
1.2.2 (Responsive teaching and scaffolding)	2.7%	6.1.3 (Families are supported)	1.0%
1.3.3 (Information for families)	2.7%	6.2.1 (Transitions)	0.9%
3.2.3 (Environmentally responsible)	2.4%	6.1.1 (Engagement with the service)	0.8%
1.2.1 (Intentional teaching)	2.4%	4.1.2 (Continuity of staff)	0.7%
5.1.2 (Dignity and rights of the child)	2.2%	6.1.2 (Parent views are respected)	0.7%
7.1.3 (Roles and responsibilities)	2.1%	5.2.1 (Collaborative learning)	0.6%

Services rated Working Towards NQS

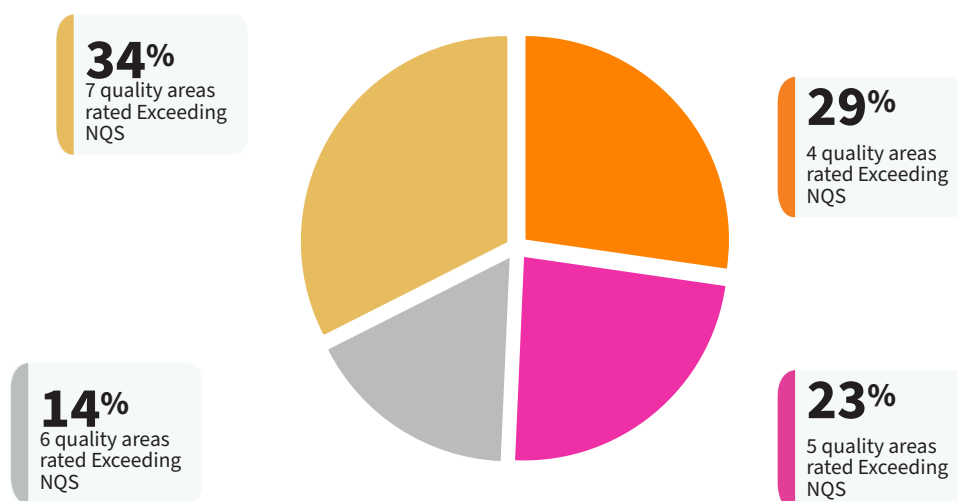
A service receives an overall rating of Working Towards NQS if any of the seven quality areas are rated Working Towards NQS. A quality area is rated Working Towards NQS if any of the standards within that quality area are rated Working Towards NQS.

Figure 17: Proportion of services rated Working Towards NQS by number of quality areas rated Working Towards NQS



Services rated Exceeding NQS

Figure 18: Proportion of services rated Exceeding NQS by number of quality areas rated Exceeding NQS



Australian Capital Territory summary

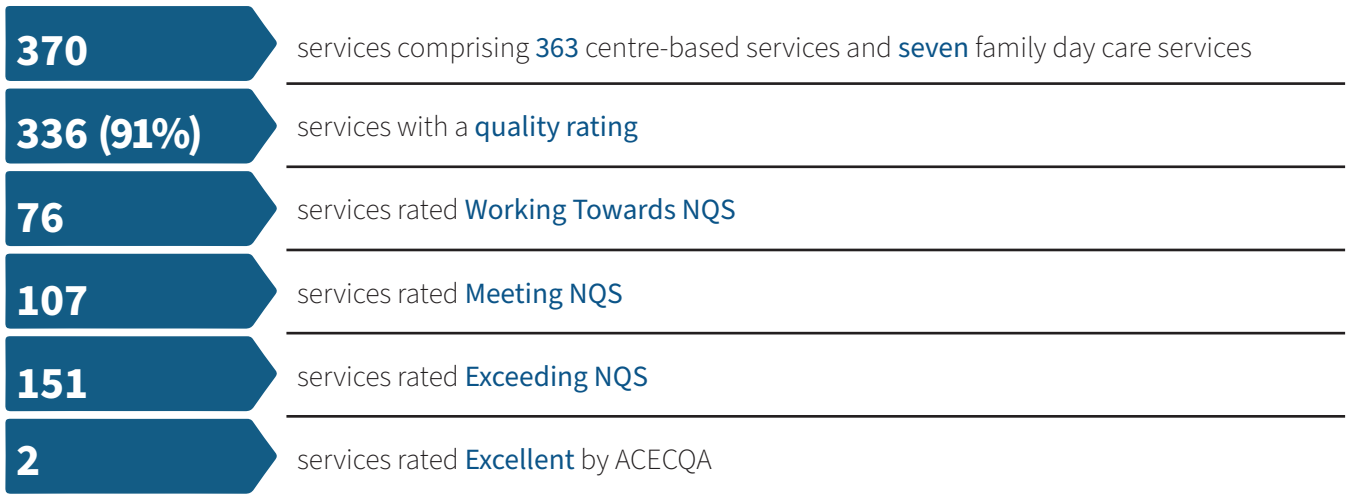
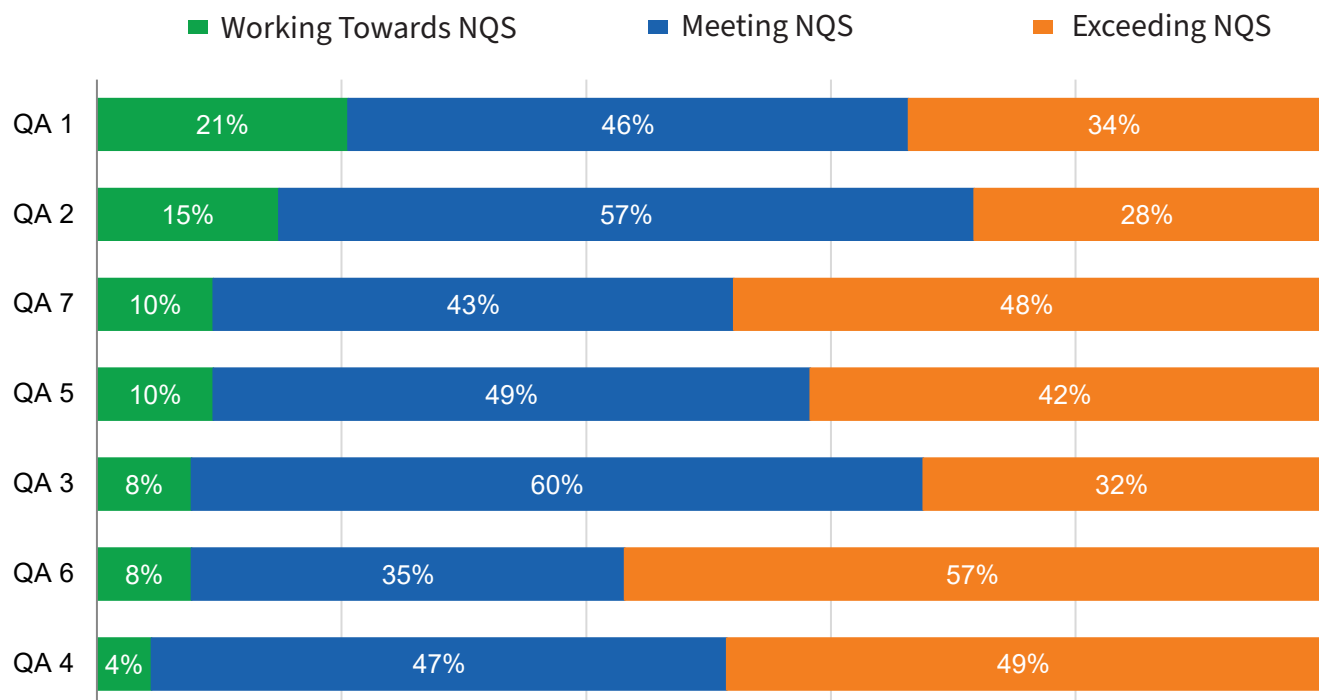


Figure 19 ranks the seven quality areas of the NQS in descending order based on the proportion of services rated Working Towards NQS in each quality area.

Figure 19: Quality area ratings



Contact details

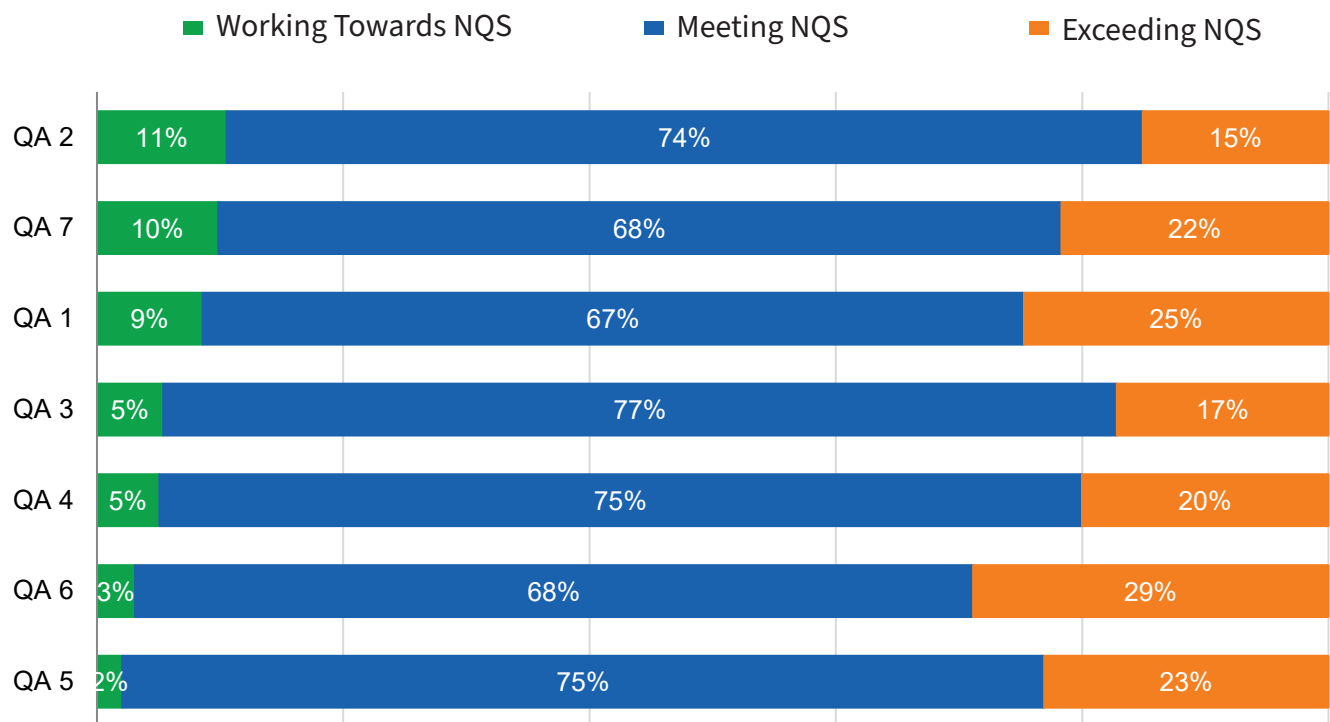
Education Directorate
 Children's Education and Care Assurance
www.education.act.gov.au/early-childhood

New South Wales summary

5680	services comprising 5530 centre-based services and 150 family day care services
5405 (95%)	services with a quality rating
5	services rated Significant Improvement Required
728	services rated Working Towards NQS
3364	services rated Meeting NQS
1295	services rated Exceeding NQS
13	services rated Excellent by ACECQA

Figure 20 ranks the seven quality areas of the NQS in descending order based on the proportion of services rated Working Towards NQS in each quality area.

Figure 20: Quality area ratings



Contact details

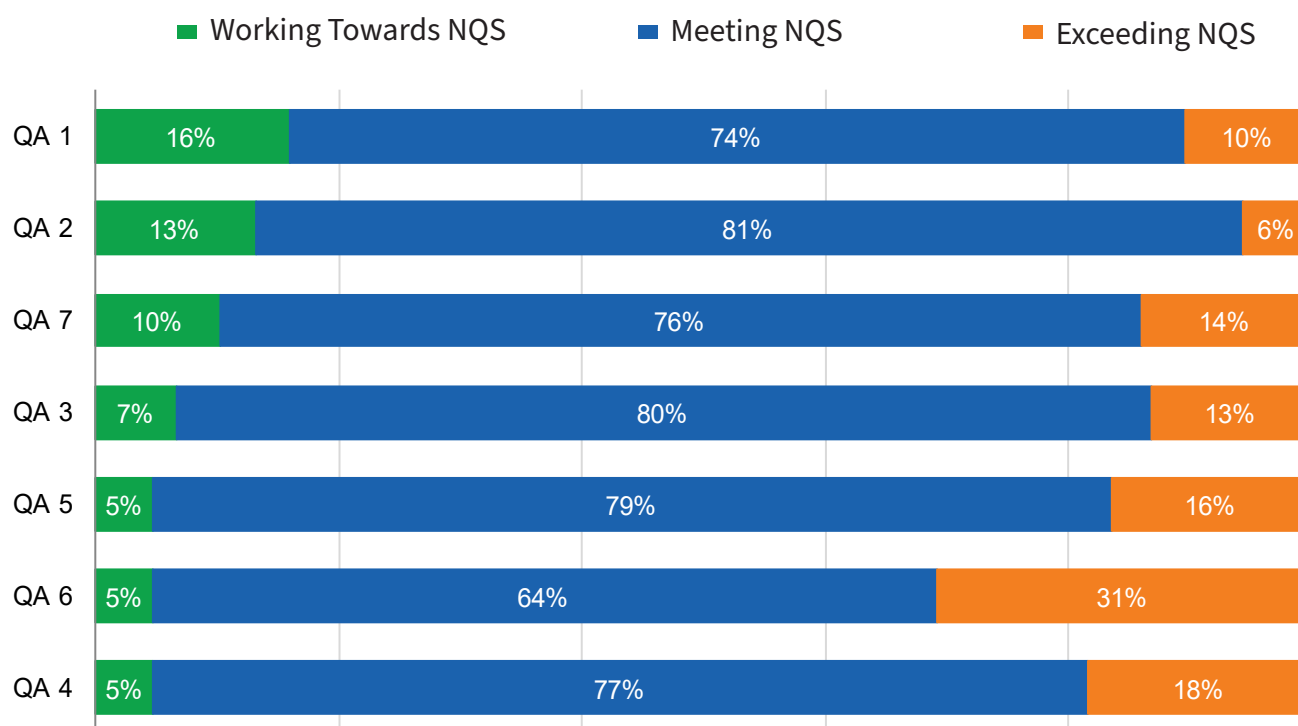
Department of Education
 Early Childhood Education Directorate
www.education.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education

Northern Territory summary

224	services comprising 221 centre-based services and three family day care services
214 (96%)	services with a quality rating
1	service rated Significant Improvement Required
40	services rated Working Towards NQS
140	services rated Meeting NQS
32	services rated Exceeding NQS
1	service rated Excellent by ACECQA

Figure 21 ranks the seven quality areas of the NQS in descending order based on the proportion of services rated Working Towards NQS in each quality area.

Figure 21: Quality area ratings



Contact details

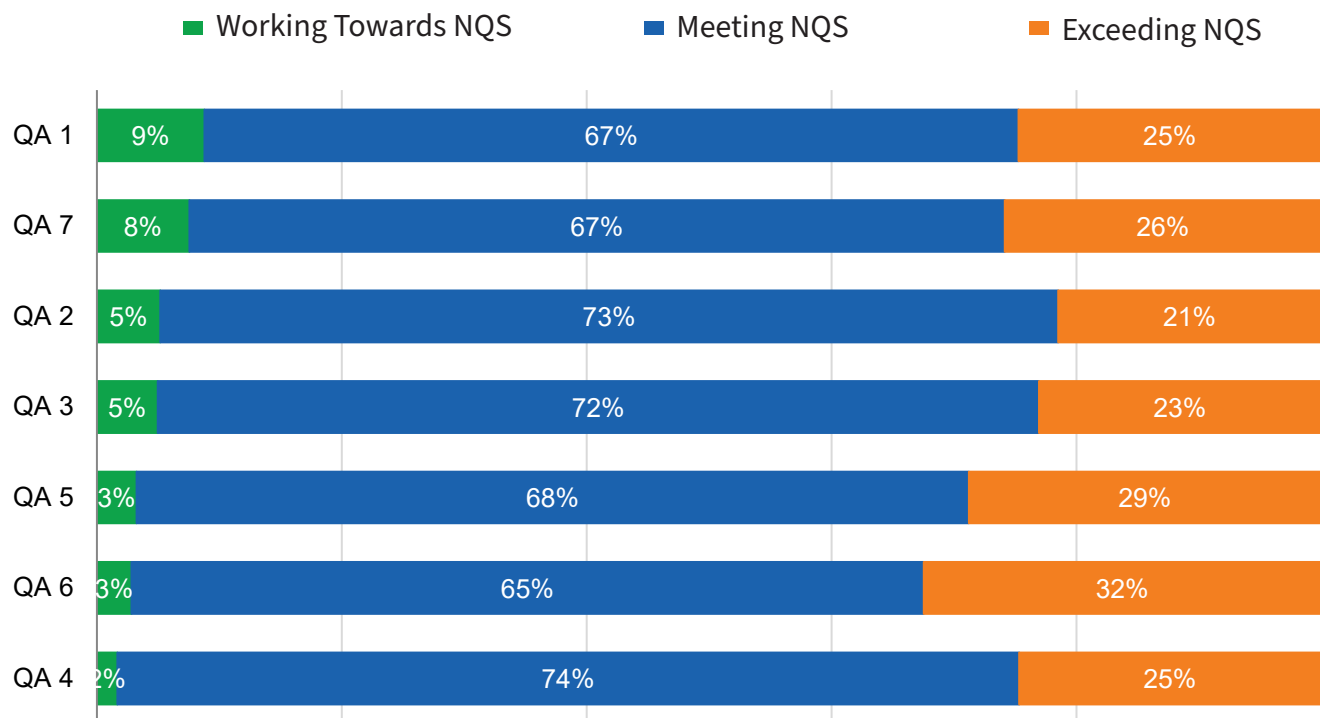
Department of Education
 Quality Education and Care NT
www.nt.gov.au/learning/early-childhood

Queensland summary

3098	services comprising 2980 centre-based services and 118 family day care services
2938 (95%)	services with a quality rating
322	services rated Working Towards NQS
1791	services rated Meeting NQS
815	services rated Exceeding NQS
10	services rated Excellent by ACECQA

Figure 22 ranks the seven quality areas of the NQS in descending order based on the proportion of services rated Working Towards NQS in each quality area.

Figure 22: Quality area ratings



Contact details

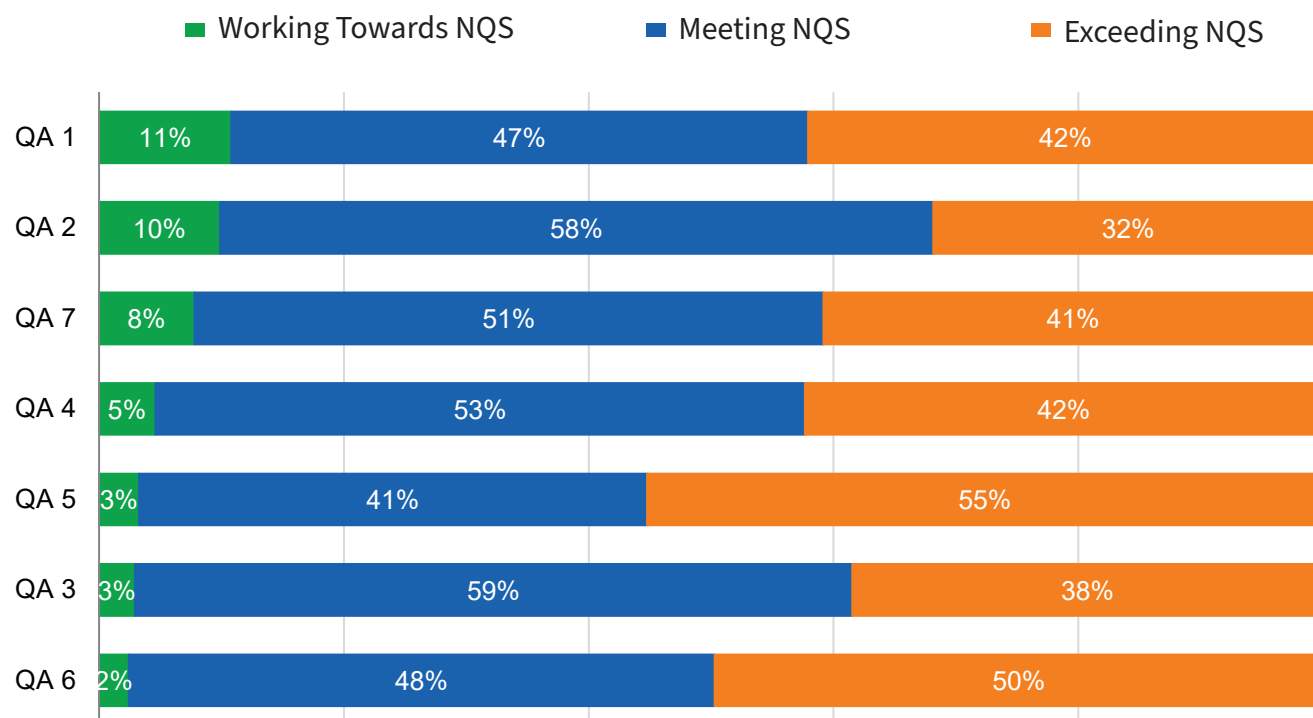
Department of Education
 Early Childhood Education and Care
www.earlychildhood.qld.gov.au

South Australia summary

1229	services comprising 1216 centre-based services and 13 family day care services
1193 (97%)	services with a quality rating
167	services rated Working Towards NQS
481	services rated Meeting NQS
540	services rated Exceeding NQS
5	services rated Excellent by ACECQA

Figure 23 ranks the seven quality areas of the NQS in descending order based on the proportion of services rated Working Towards NQS in each quality area.

Figure 23: Quality area ratings



Contact details

Education and Early Childhood Services Registration and Standards
Board of South Australia
www.esb.sa.gov.au/early-childhood

Tasmania summary

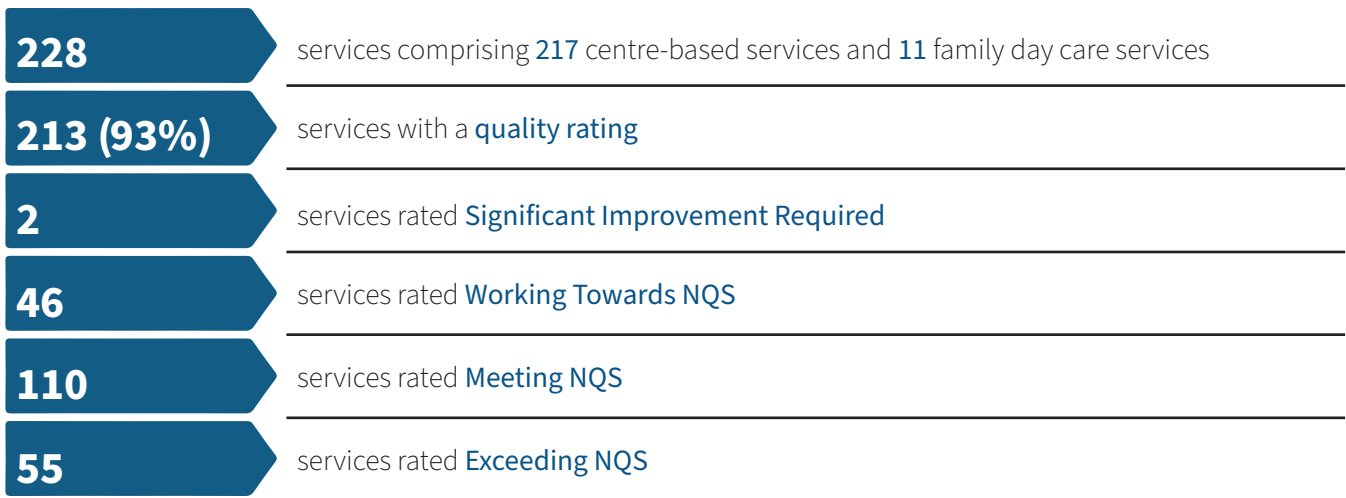
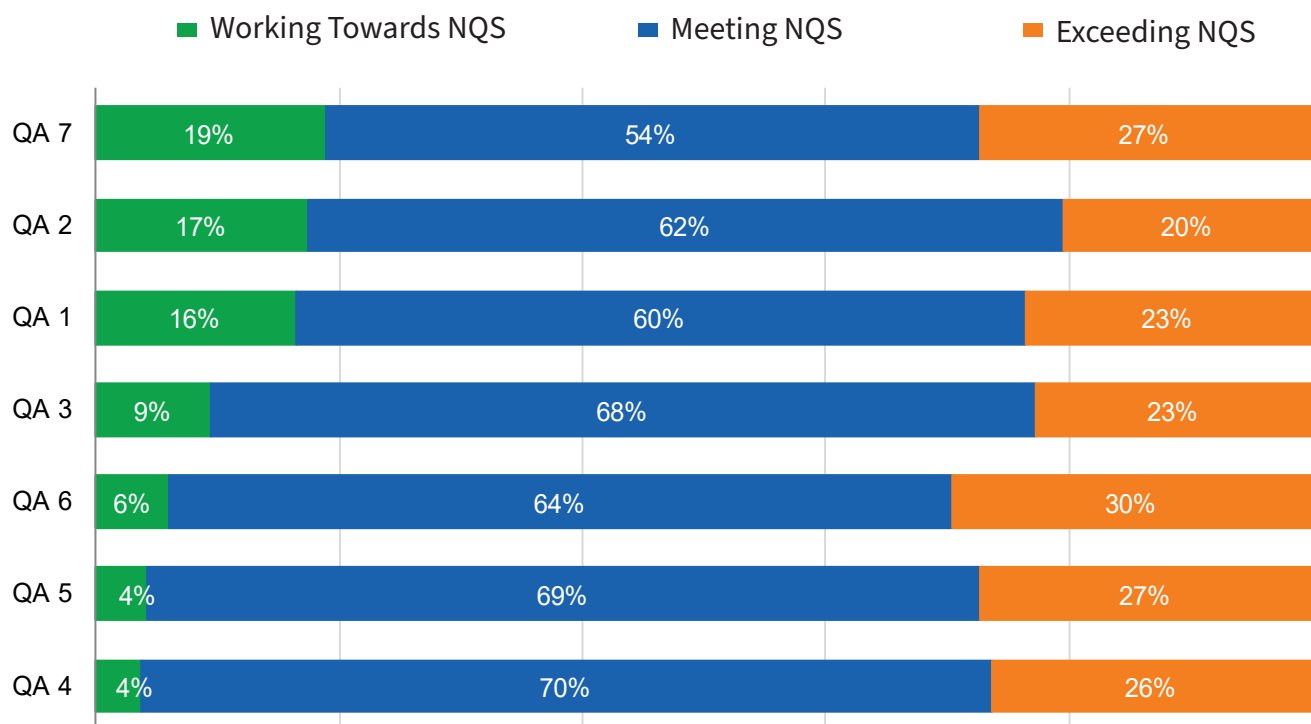


Figure 24 ranks the seven quality areas of the NQS in descending order based on the proportion of services rated Working Towards NQS in each quality area.

Figure 24: Quality area ratings



Contact details

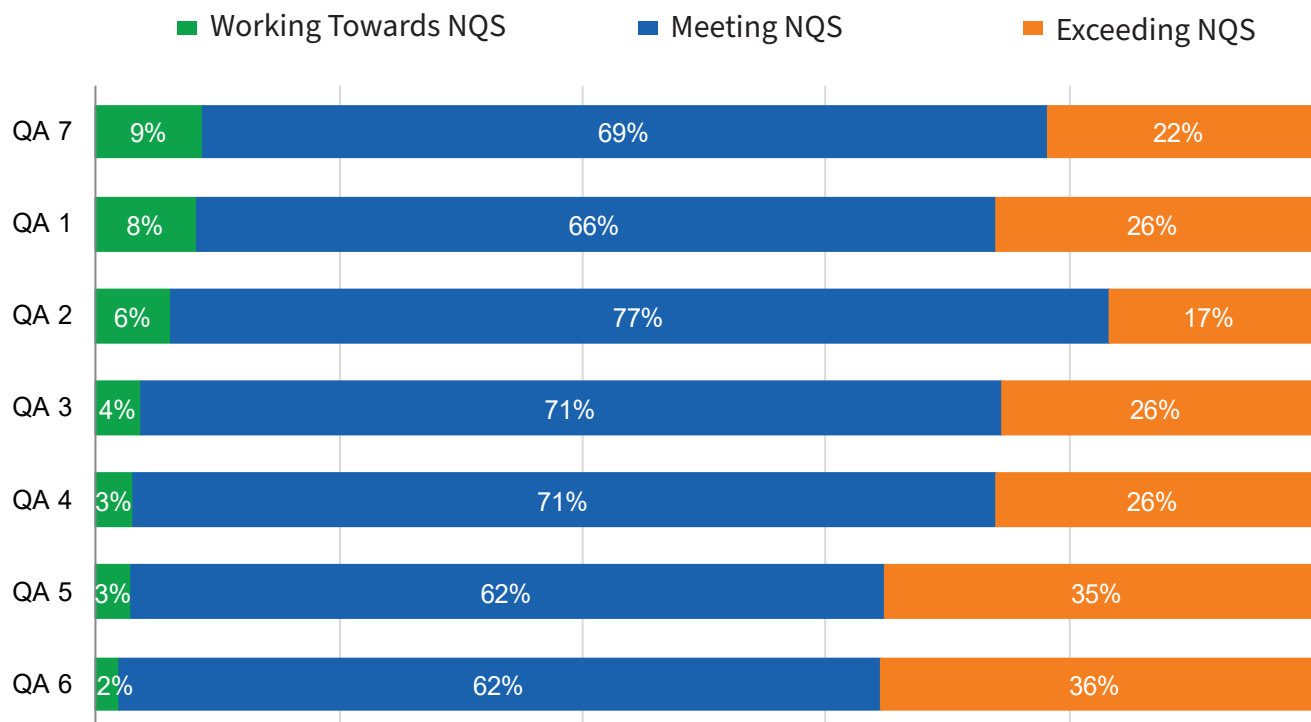
Department of Education
Education and Care Unit
www.educationandcare.tas.gov.au

Victoria summary

4394	services comprising 4249 centre-based services and 145 family day care services
4019 (91%)	services with a quality rating
501	services rated Working Towards NQS
2396	services rated Meeting NQS
1117	services rated Exceeding NQS
5	services rated Excellent by ACECQA

Figure 25 ranks the seven quality areas of the NQS in descending order based on the proportion of services rated Working Towards NQS in each quality area.

Figure 25: Quality area ratings



Contact details

Department of Education and Training
 Quality Assessment and Regulation Division
www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/regulation

Western Australia summary

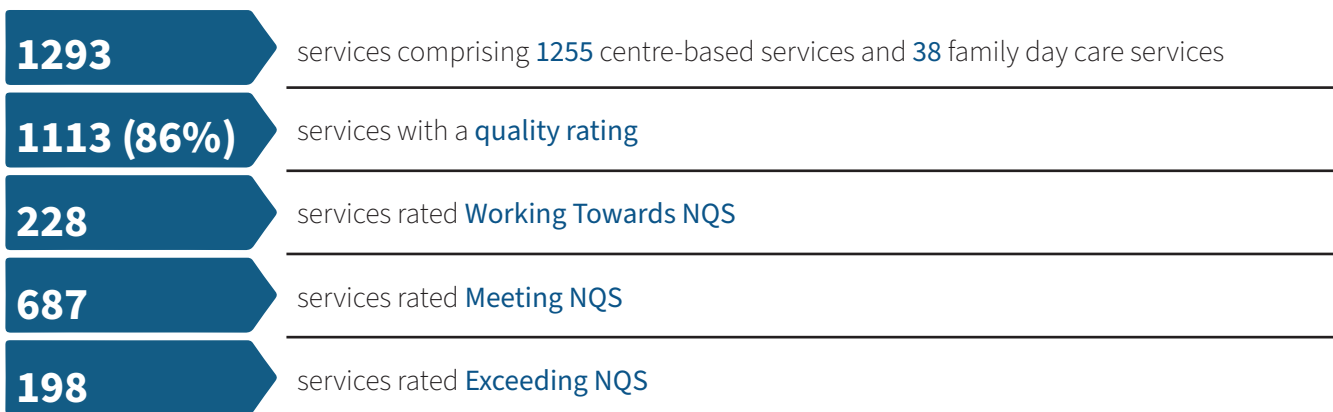
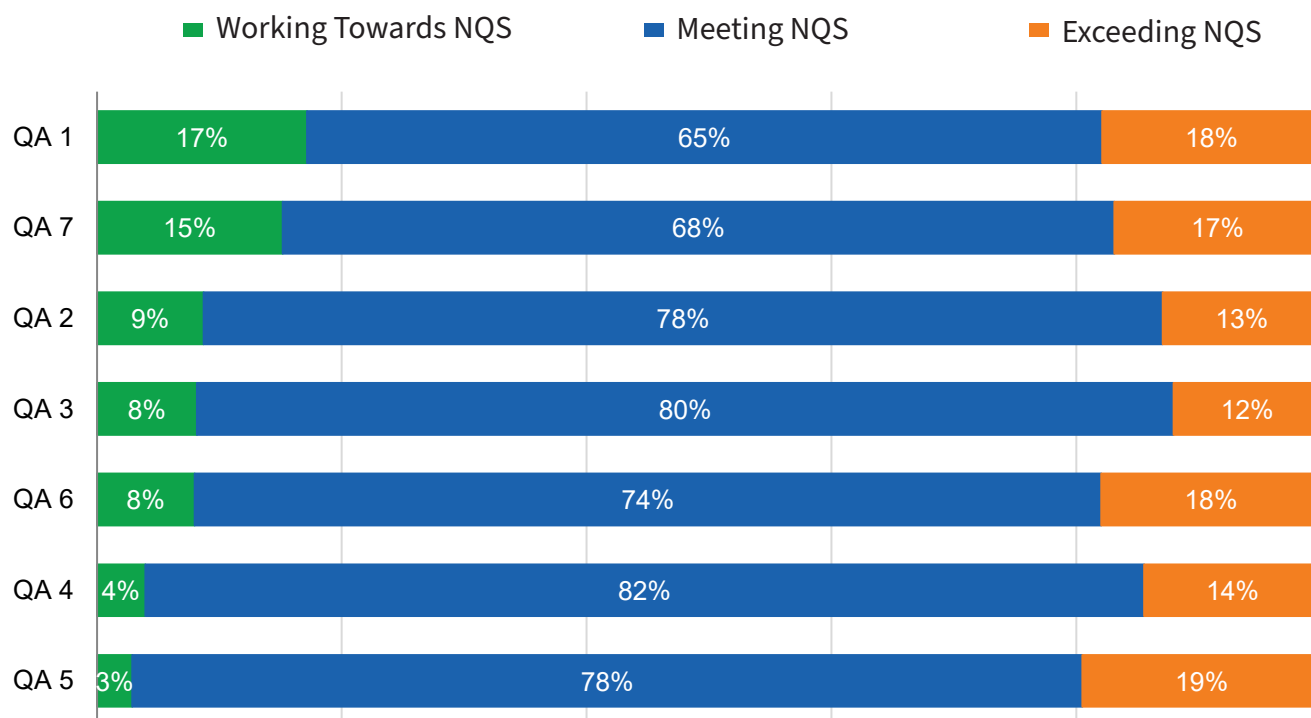


Figure 26 ranks the seven quality areas of the NQS in descending order based on the proportion of services rated Working Towards NQS in each quality area.

Figure 26: Quality area ratings



Contact details

Department of Communities
 Education and Care Regulatory Unit
www.communities.wa.gov.au



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