



Australian Children's  
Education & Care  
Quality Authority



# NQF Snapshot Q4 2023

February 2024

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

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# Overview

NQF Snapshot Q4 2023 is ACECQA's 44<sup>th</sup> 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 January 2024.

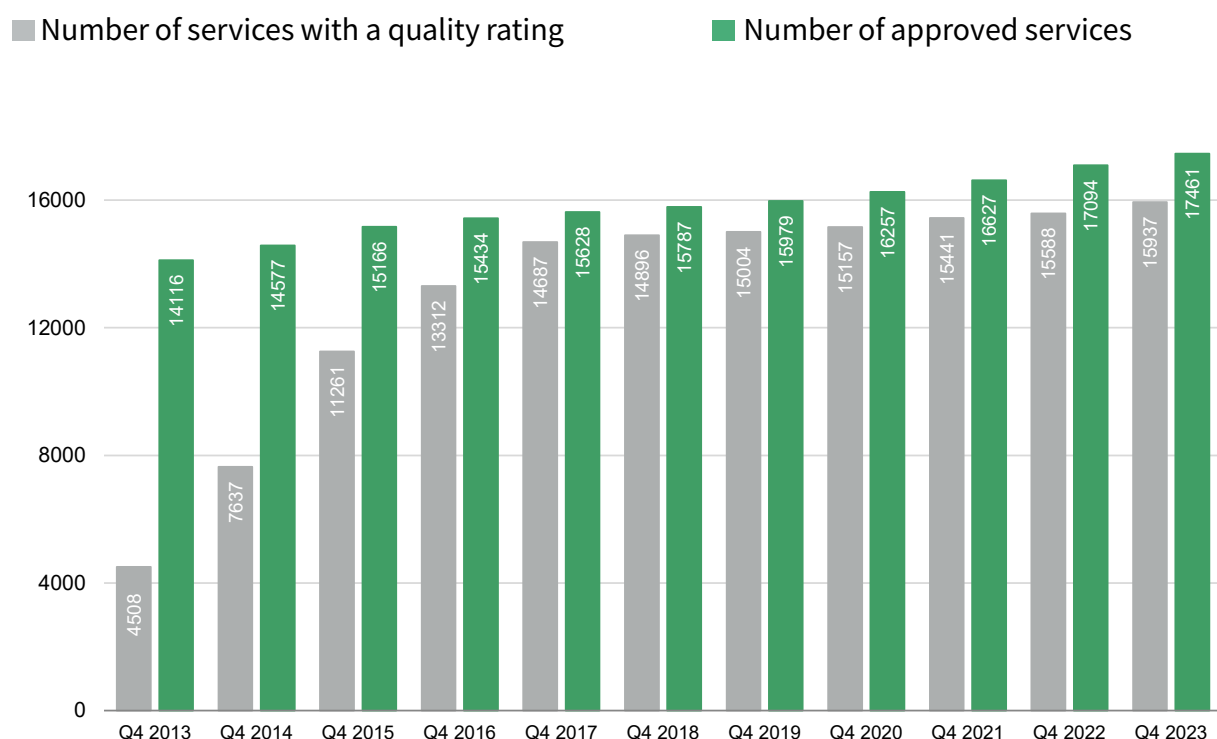
Due to rounding, individual percentages in the tables and figures may not add up to 100%.



# Snapshot highlights

<b>17,461</b>	children's education and care services approved to operate under the NQF
<b>15,937 (91%)</b>	services with a quality rating
<b>14,294 (90%)</b>	services with a quality rating are Meeting NQS or above
<b>7196</b>	providers approved to operate
<b>5696 (79%)</b>	providers approved to operate only one service
<b>30</b>	services rated Excellent by ACECQA <sup>1</sup>
<b>19,706</b>	quality rating reassessments completed
<b>68%</b>	of services rated Working Towards NQS improved their overall quality rating at reassessment
<b>14,737 (84%)</b>	services with a quality rating against the 2018 NQS

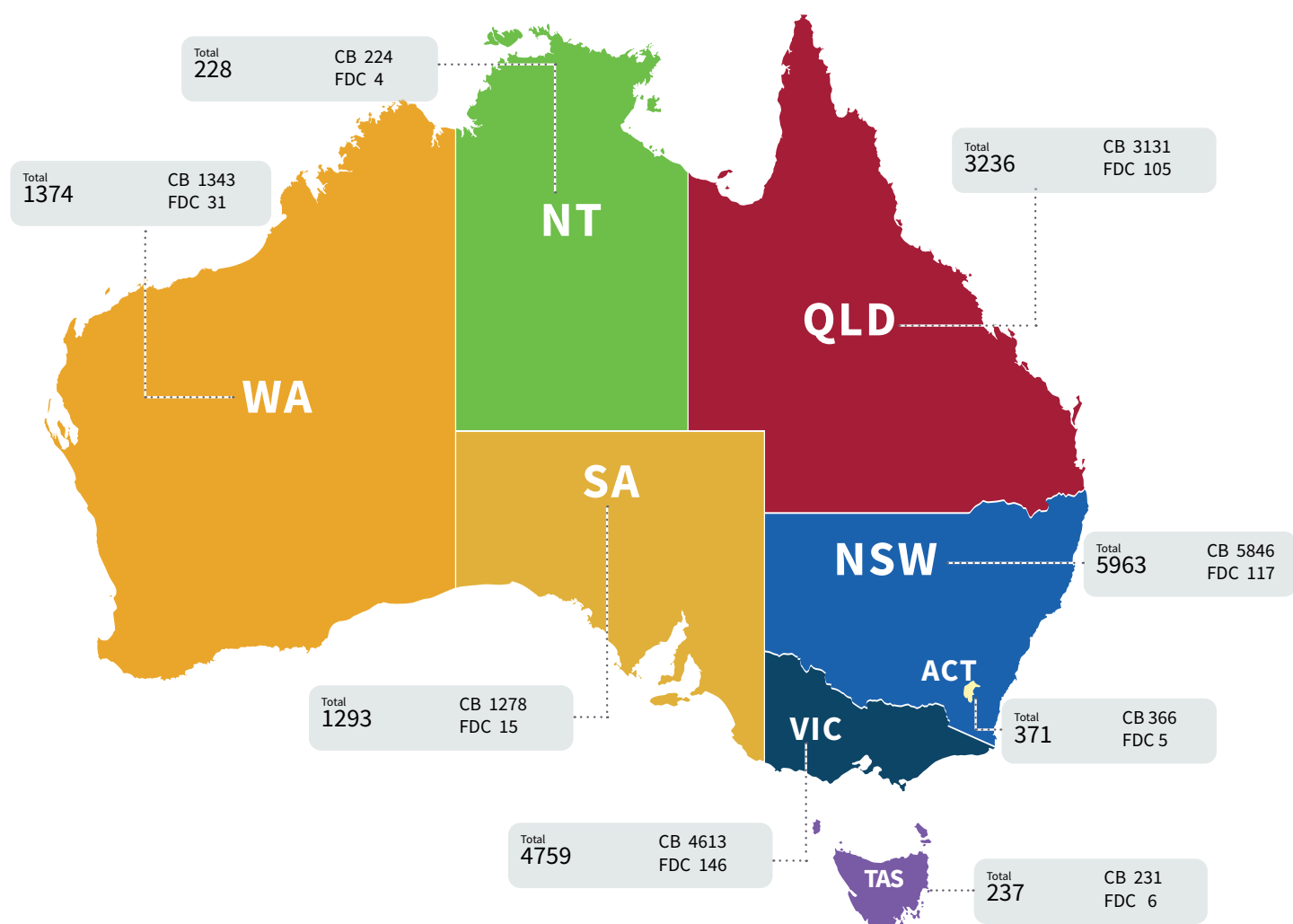
Figure 1: Number of approved services and number of services with a quality rating by quarter



<sup>1</sup> The Excellent rating is awarded for a period of five years. Unless a reapplication for the Excellent rating is received, a service's rating will revert back to Exceeding NQS after this five 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



Total Centre-based (CB) <sup>1</sup>  
**17,032 (98%)**

2%  
Increase on Q4 2022

Total Family day care (FDC) <sup>2</sup>  
**429 (2%)**

-7%  
Decrease on Q4 2022

Total  
**17,461**

2%  
Increase on Q4 2022

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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

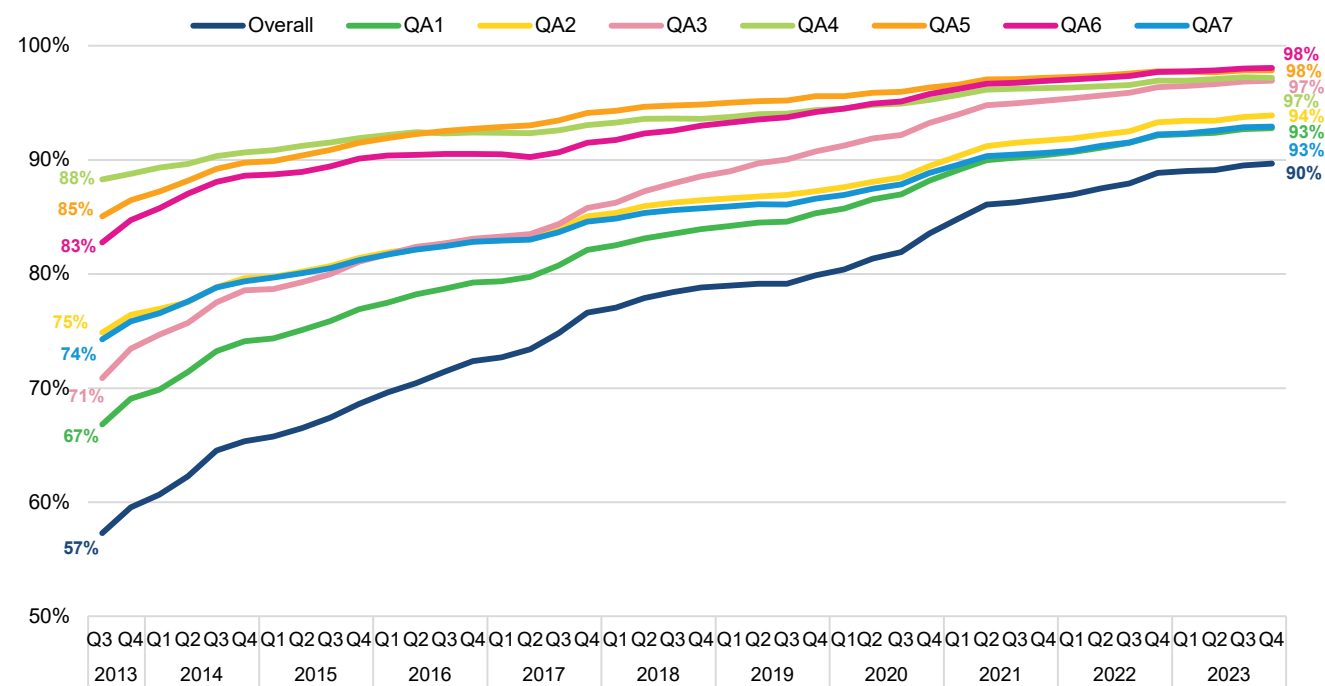


Figure 4: Proportion of services rated Exceeding NQS or above by overall rating and quality area

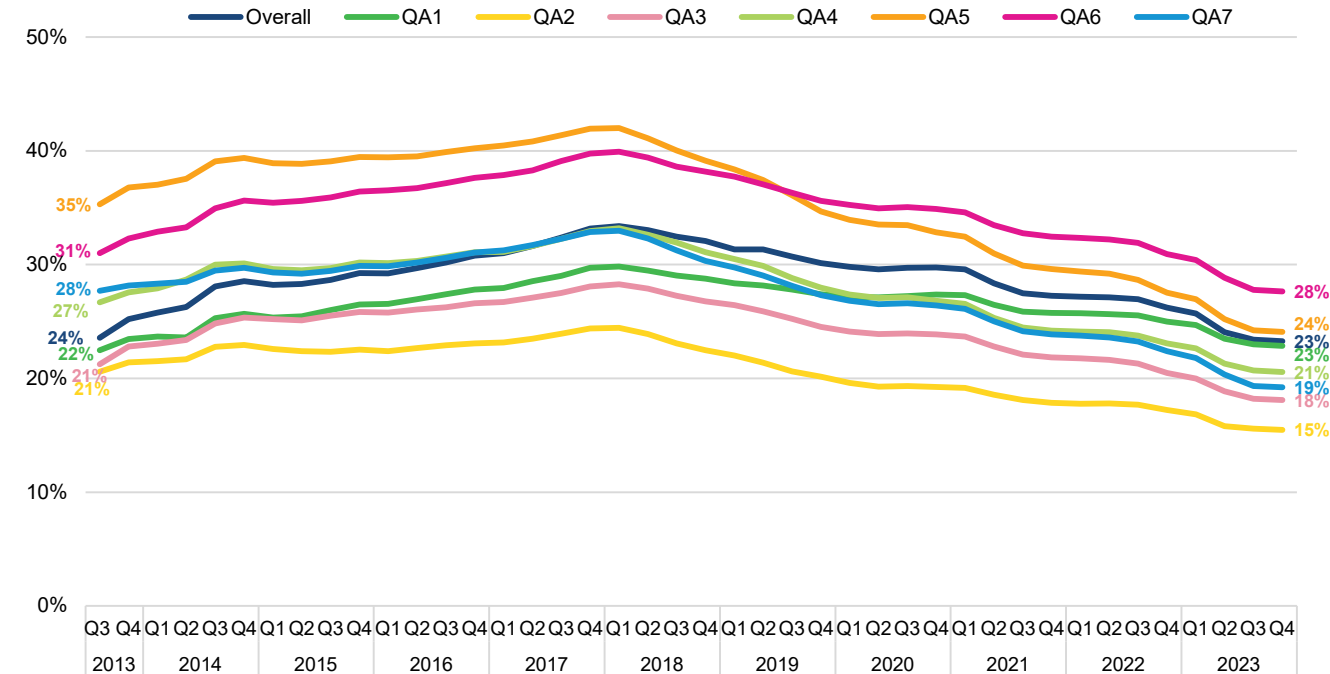


Figure 5: Proportion of services by service type and jurisdiction <sup>1,2,3,4,5</sup>

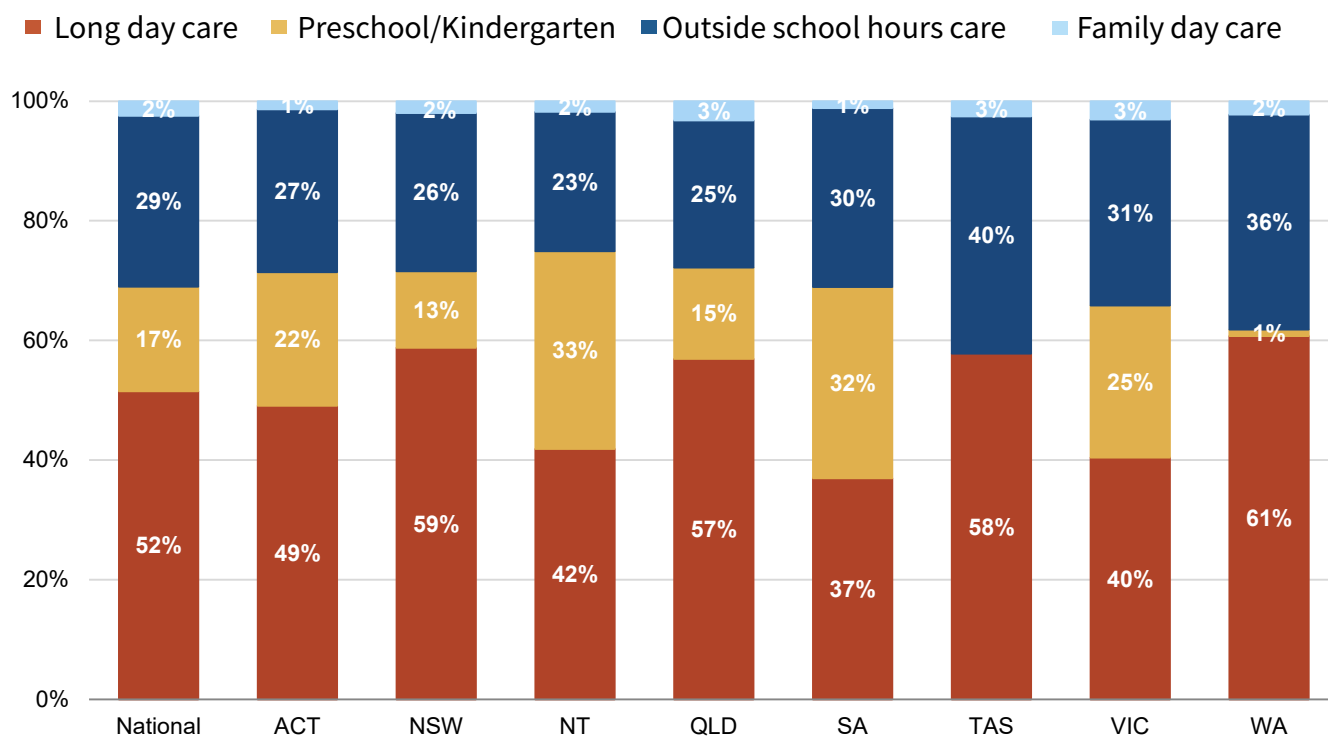


Table 1: Number of services by service type and jurisdiction

	Family day care	Long day care	Preschool/ Kindergarten	Outside school hours care	Other	Total
ACT	5	182	83	101	0	371
NSW	117	3504	762	1580	0	5963
NT	4	95	75	53	1	228
QLD	105	1841	495	795	0	3236
SA	15	478	413	387	0	1293
TAS	6	137	0	94	0	237
VIC	146	1924	1208	1481	0	4759
WA	31	833	15	493	2	1374
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>429</b>	<b>8994</b>	<b>3051</b>	<b>4984</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>17,461</b>

1 NQA ITS data collected on service type is self-reported by providers when applying for service approval, and providers may choose multiple service 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 <sup>1,2,3</sup>

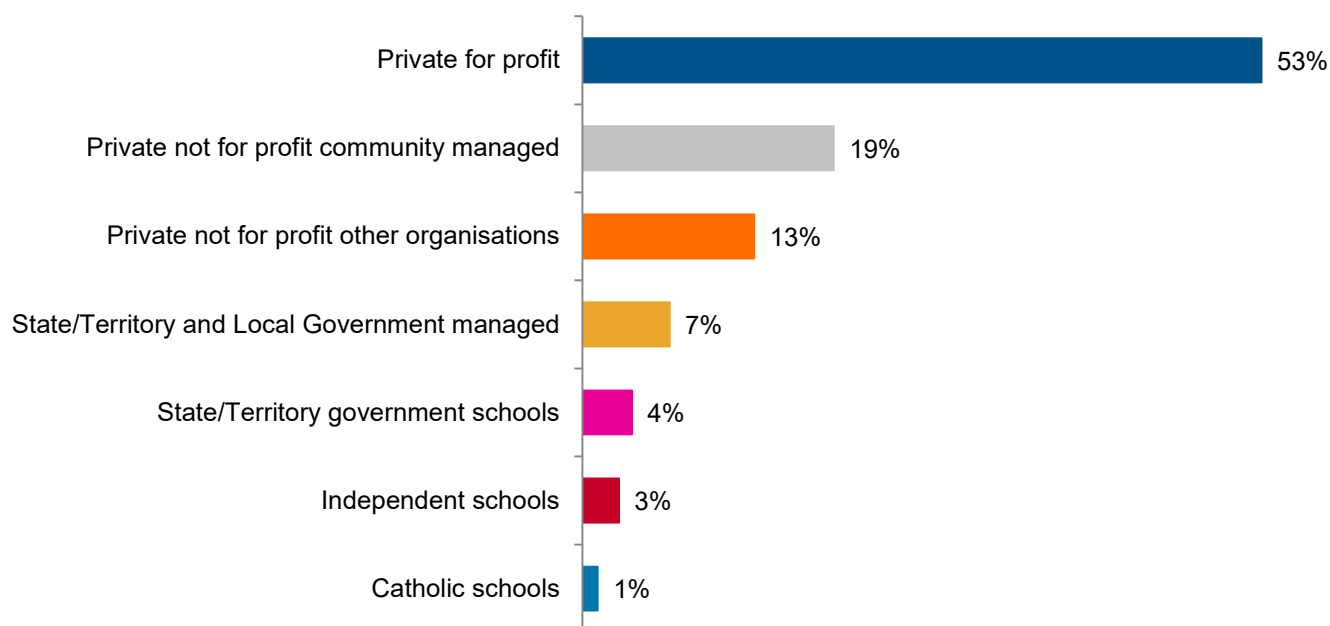


Table 2: Number and proportion of services by provider management type

Provider management type	Number of services	Proportion of services
Private for profit	9171	53%
Private not for profit community managed	3396	19%
Private not for profit other organisations	2321	13%
State/Territory and Local Government managed	1180	7%
State/Territory government schools	672	4%
Independent schools	495	3%
Catholic schools	209	1%
Not stated/Other	17	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>17,461</b>	<b>100%</b>

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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).

<sup>3</sup> 17 services categorised as 'Not stated/Other' excluded for graphical purposes.



Figure 7 shows that 79% 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**

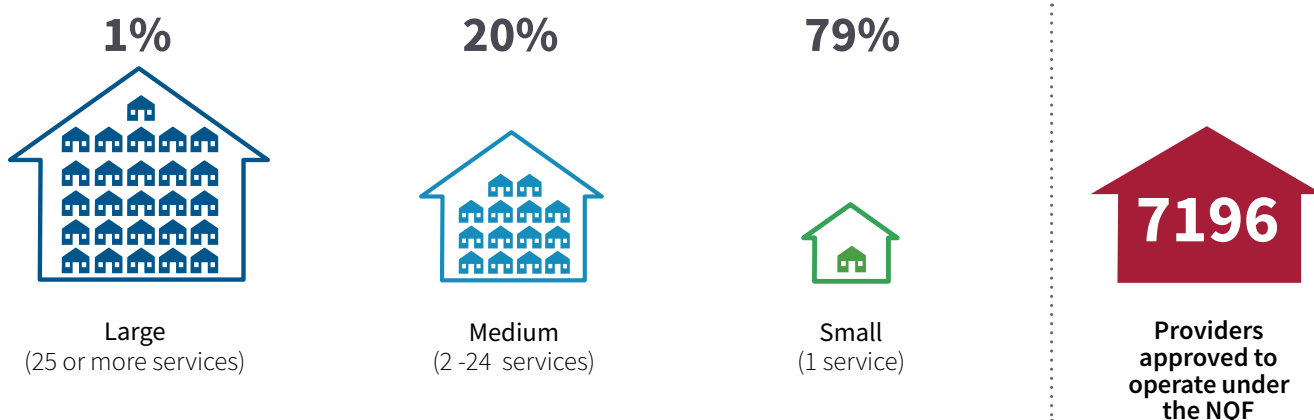
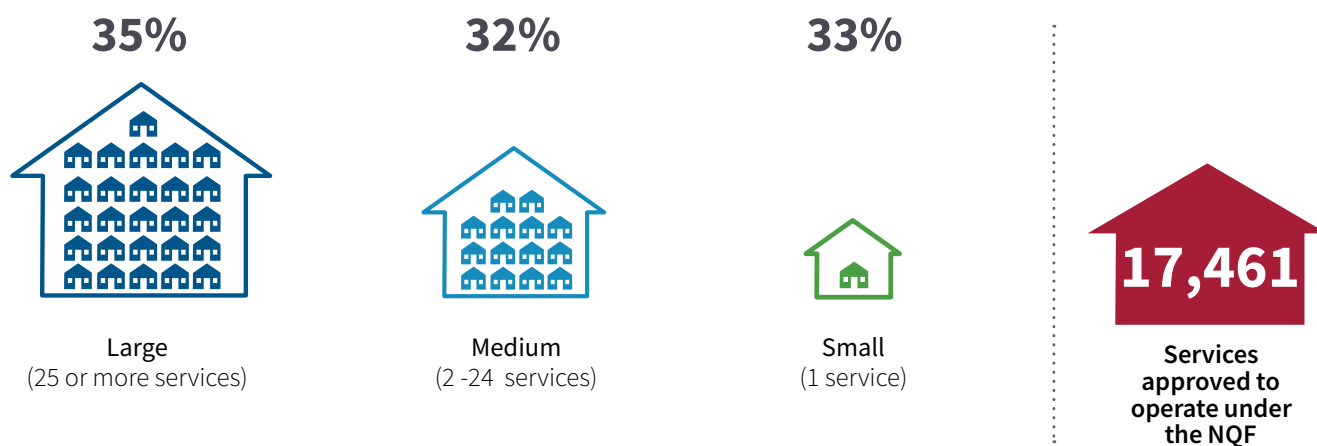


Figure 8 shows that 33% of approved services are operated by small approved providers while 35% of approved services are operated by large approved providers.

**Figure 8: Proportion of approved services by provider size**



# 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 assess and rate newly approved services within 9-18 months of operations commencing.

**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	371	2%	344	93%
NSW	5963	34%	5588	94%
NT	228	1%	214	94%
QLD	3236	19%	3031	94%
SA	1293	7%	1238	96%
TAS	237	1%	214	90%
VIC	4759	27%	4160	87%
WA	1374	8%	1148	84%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>17,461</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>15,937</b>	<b>91%</b>

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

	Family day care	Long day care	Preschool/ Kindergarten	Outside school hours care	Other	Total
ACT	5	168	80	91	0	344
NSW	116	3338	750	1384	0	5588
NT	3	87	74	49	1	214
QLD	88	1725	467	751	0	3031
SA	12	441	407	378	0	1238
TAS	5	130	0	79	0	214
VIC	114	1705	1138	1203	0	4160
WA	30	701	15	401	1	1148
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>373</b>	<b>8295</b>	<b>2931</b>	<b>4336</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>15,937</b>

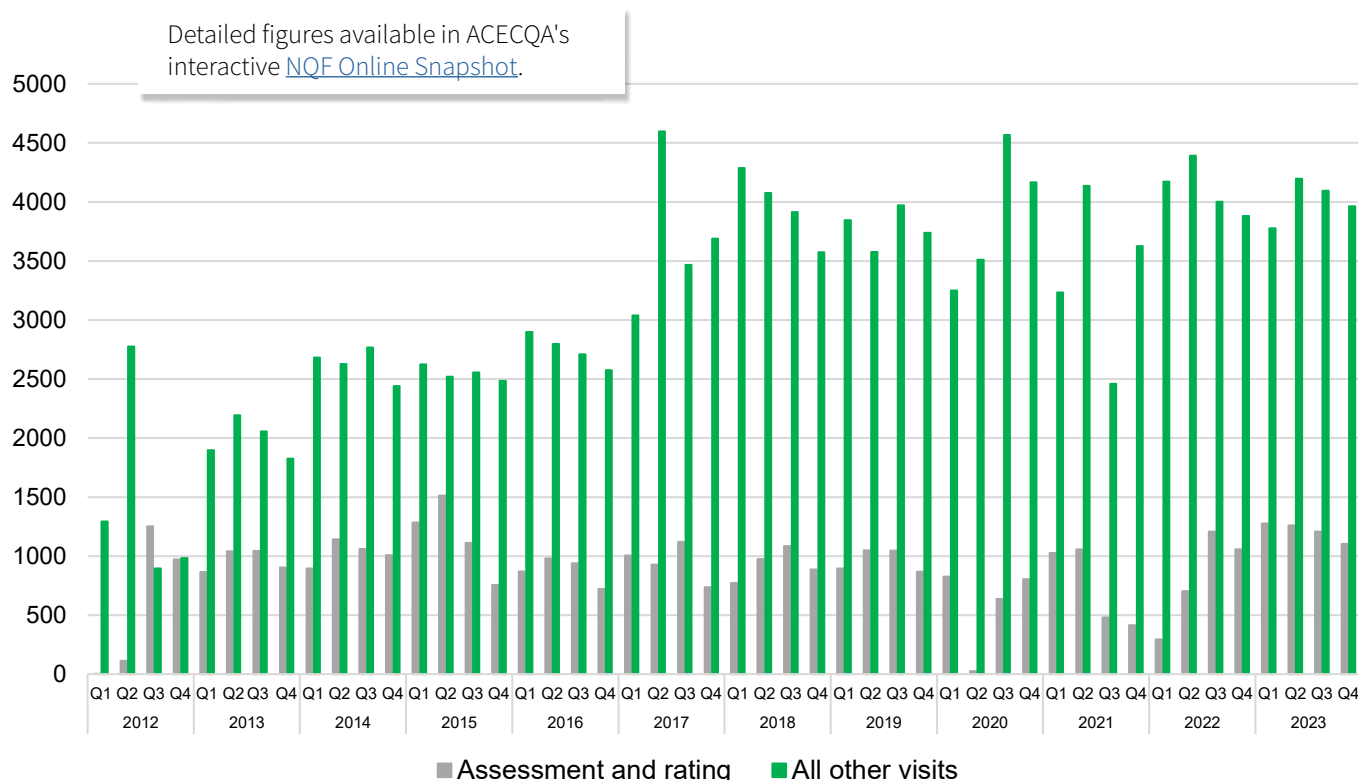
# Service visits

Figure 9 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 9: 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 94% 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**

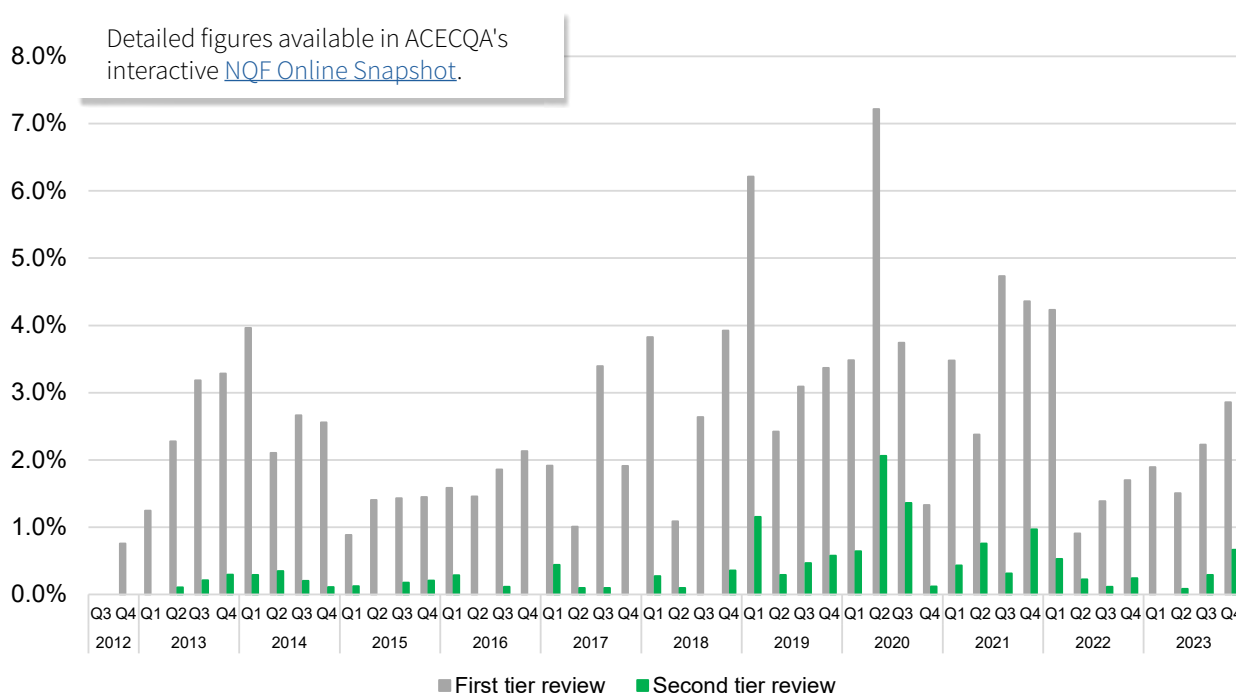
Rating level	Change in rating	%
Higher	905	5.69%
Unchanged	15,001	94.30%
Lower	1	0.01%
<b>Total</b>	<b>15,907</b>	<b>100%</b>

Figure 10 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. In addition, 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 10: 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, 4223 services previously rated Working Towards NQS improved their rating to Meeting NQS after reassessment. While 2276 services previously rated Working Towards NQS received the same rating again after reassessment.

**Table 6: Reassessments by overall quality rating<sup>1</sup>**

		Rating after reassessment				Total
		Significant Improvement Required	Working Towards NQS	Meeting NQS	Exceeding NQS	
Rating before reassessment	Significant Improvement Required	21	80	17	0	<b>118</b>
	Working Towards NQS	55	2276	4223	802	<b>7356</b>
	Meeting NQS	10	1143	5178	1134	<b>7465</b>
	Exceeding NQS	2	419	2072	2274	<b>4767</b>
	Total	<b>88</b>	<b>3918</b>	<b>11,490</b>	<b>4210</b>	<b>19,706</b>

		Rating after reassessment				Improvement rate
		Significant Improvement Required	Working Towards NQS	Meeting NQS	Exceeding NQS	
Rating before reassessment	Significant Improvement Required	18%	68%	14%	0%	<b>82%</b>
	Working Towards NQS	1%	31%	57%	11%	<b>68%</b>
	Meeting NQS	0%	15%	69%	15%	<b>15%</b>
	Exceeding NQS	0%	9%	43%	48%	-

<sup>1</sup> 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.





1 Educational program and practice	Significant Improvement Required	Working Towards NQS	Meeting NQS	Exceeding NQS	Excellent
2 Children's health and safety	<p>Service does not meet one of the seven quality areas or a section of the legislation and there is a significant risk to the safety, health and wellbeing of children.</p> <p>The regulatory authority will take immediate action.</p>	<p>Service provides a safe education and care program, but there are one or more areas identified for improvement.</p>	<p>Service provides quality education and care in all seven quality areas.</p>	<p>Service goes beyond the requirements of the National Quality Standard in at least four of the seven quality areas.</p>	<p>Exceeding rated services that promote exceptional education and care, demonstrate sector leadership, and are committed to continually improving.</p> <p>This rating can only be awarded by ACECQA.</p>
3 Physical environment					
4 Staffing arrangements					
5 Relationships with children					
6 Collaborative partnerships with families and communities					
7 Governance and leadership					
					

Table 7: Overall quality ratings by jurisdiction

	Significant Improvement Required		Working Towards NQS		Meeting NQS		Exceeding NQS		Excellent	Total
ACT	0		61	18%	129	38%	153	44%	1	344
NSW	6		517	9%	3922	70%	1130	20%	13	5588
NT	0		37	17%	155	72%	22	10%	0	214
QLD	1		302	10%	2087	69%	634	21%	7	3031
SA	0		201	16%	582	47%	455	37%	0	1238
TAS	1		33	15%	135	63%	45	21%	0	214
VIC	0		264	6%	2732	66%	1155	28%	9	4160
WA	0		220	19%	843	73%	85	7%	0	1148
TOTAL	8		1635	10%	10,585	66%	3679	23%	30	15,937

Figure 11: Overall quality ratings by service type

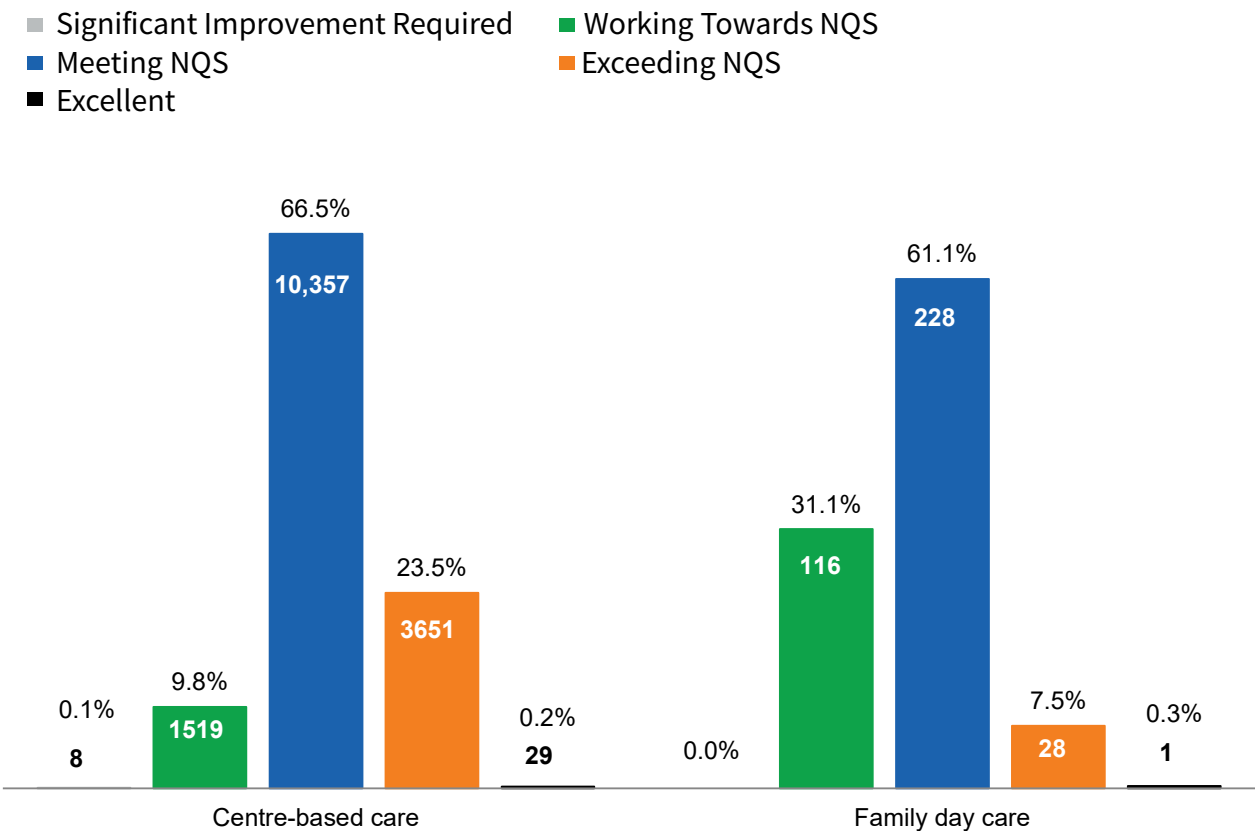


Figure 12: Overall quality ratings by centre-based service type

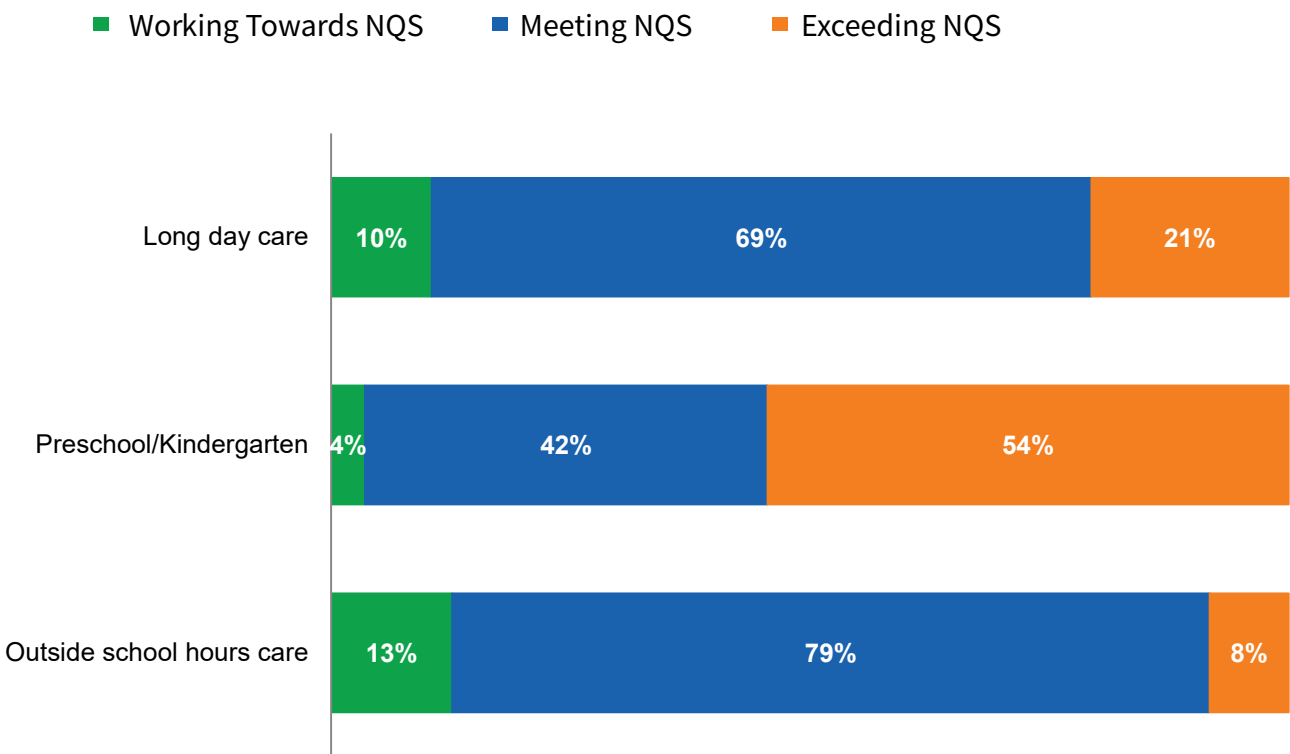
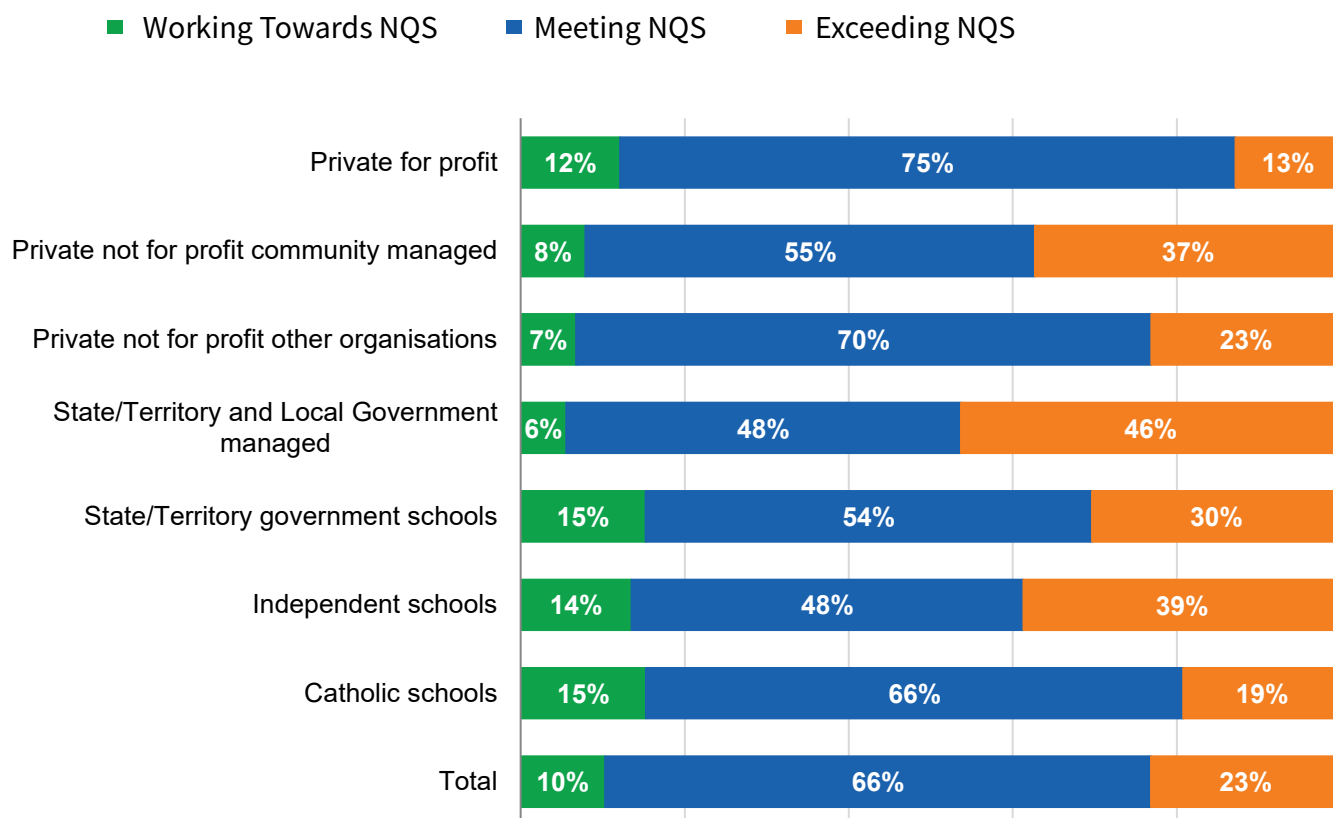


Figure 13 shows the variation in spread of quality ratings between provider management types.

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 12). In contrast, preschools/kindergartens make up only 1% of 'Private for profit' services.

**Figure 13: Overall quality ratings by provider management type<sup>1</sup>**



<sup>1</sup> 17 providers categorised as 'Not stated/Other' excluded for graphical purposes.



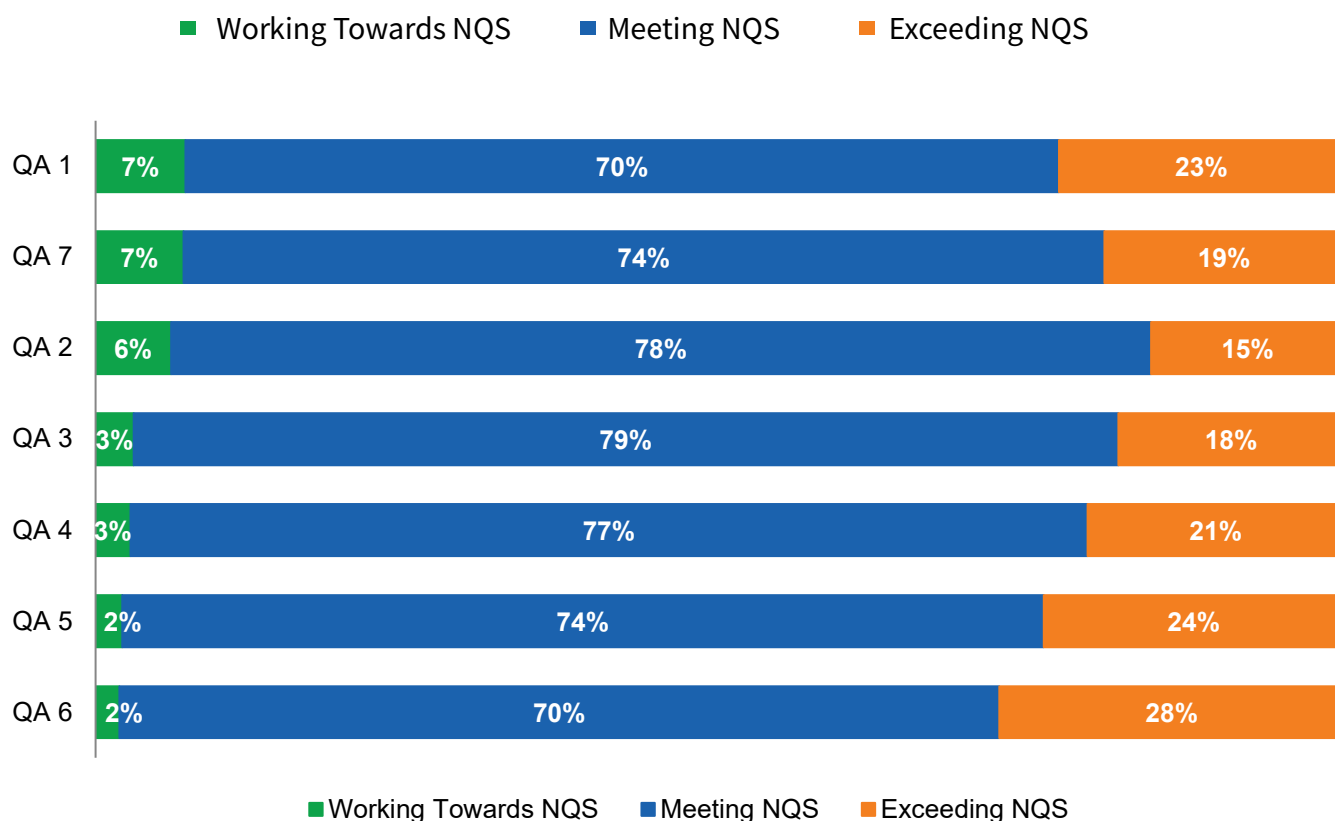
# Quality area ratings

Table 8 and Figure 14 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	2	1148	11,144	3643
Quality Area 7 - Governance and leadership	4	1123	11,747	3063
Quality Area 2 - Children's health and safety	7	965	12,498	2467
Quality Area 3 - Physical environment	1	486	12,565	2885
Quality Area 4 - Staffing arrangements	1	448	12,210	3278
Quality Area 5 - Relationships with children	1	342	11,756	3838
Quality Area 6 - Collaborative partnerships with families and communities	0	306	11,227	4404

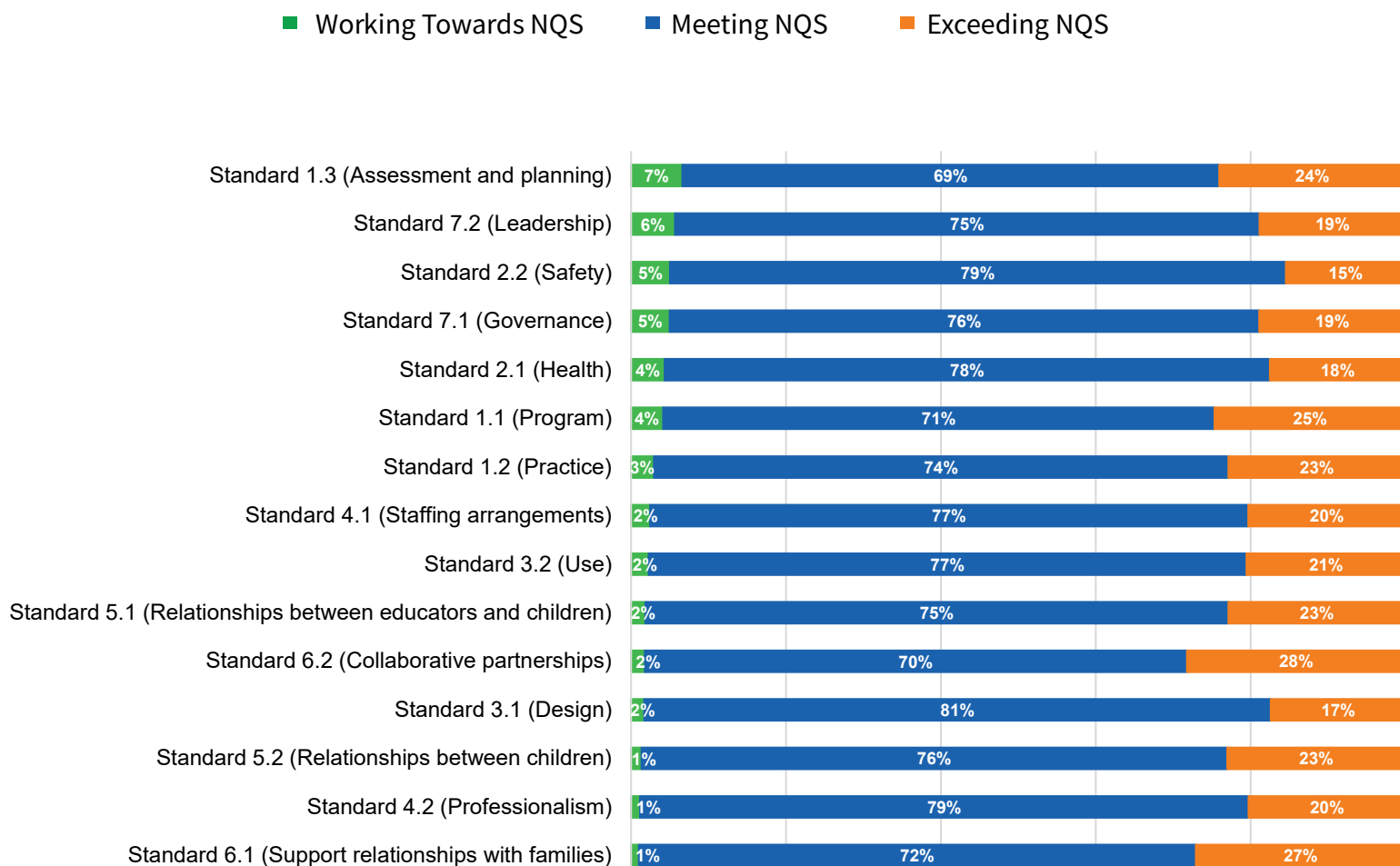
**Figure 14: Quality area ratings**



# Standard level ratings under the 2018 NQS

Figure 15 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 15: 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.

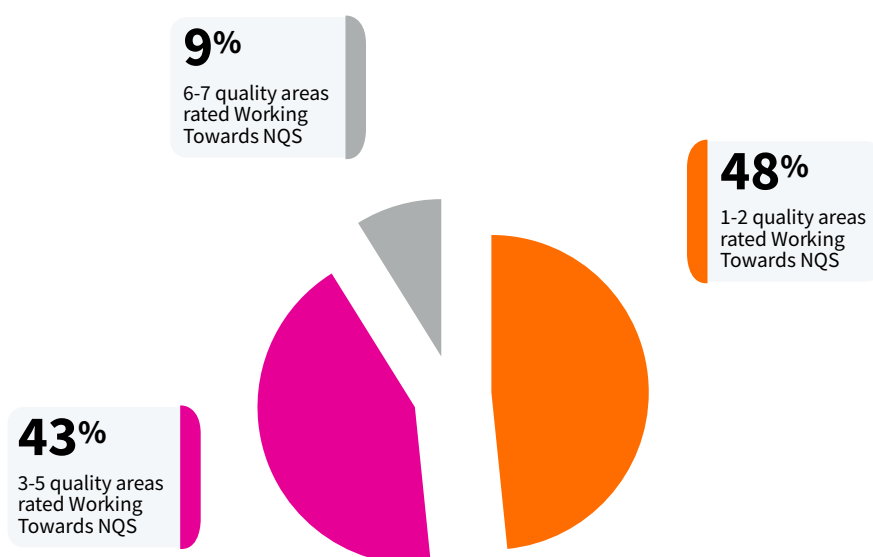
**Table 9: Element level results under 2018 NQS**

2018 NQS Element	% Not Met	2018 NQS Element	% Not Met
1.3.1 (Assessment and planning cycle)	5.6%	3.1.2 (Upkeep)	1.4%
1.3.2 (Critical reflection)	5.5%	3.2.3 (Environmentally responsible)	1.4%
7.1.2 (Management systems)	4.4%	5.2.2 (Self-regulation)	1.3%
7.2.2 (Educational leadership)	3.9%	6.2.3 (Community engagement)	1.2%
2.1.2 (Health practices and procedures)	3.8%	2.1.3 (Healthy lifestyle)	1.1%
2.2.1 (Supervision)	3.7%	5.1.1 (Positive educator to child interactions)	1.1%
7.2.3 (Development of professionals)	3.5%	3.2.2 (Resources support play-based learning)	1.1%
1.1.3 (Program learning opportunities)	2.9%	3.2.1 (Inclusive environment)	1.0%
2.2.2 (Incident and emergency management)	2.5%	2.2.3 (Child protection)	1.0%
4.1.1 (Organisation of educators)	2.3%	4.2.2 (Professional standards)	1.0%
7.2.1 (Continuous improvement)	2.1%	6.2.2 (Access and participation)	0.9%
1.1.1 (Approved learning framework)	2.1%	2.1.1 (Wellbeing and comfort)	0.8%
1.2.3 (Child directed learning)	1.8%	3.1.1 (Fit for purpose)	0.6%
1.1.2 (Child-centred)	1.7%	6.1.3 (Families are supported)	0.6%
1.3.3 (Information for families)	1.7%	4.2.1 (Professional collaboration)	0.6%
1.2.2 (Responsive teaching and scaffolding)	1.6%	6.1.2 (Parent views are respected)	0.5%
5.1.2 (Dignity and rights of the child)	1.5%	6.2.1 (Transitions)	0.4%
1.2.1 (Intentional teaching)	1.5%	6.1.1 (Engagement with the service)	0.4%
7.1.3 (Roles and responsibilities)	1.4%	4.1.2 (Continuity of staff)	0.4%
7.1.1 (Service philosophy and purpose)	1.4%	5.2.1 (Collaborative learning)	0.3%

## Services rated Working Towards NQS

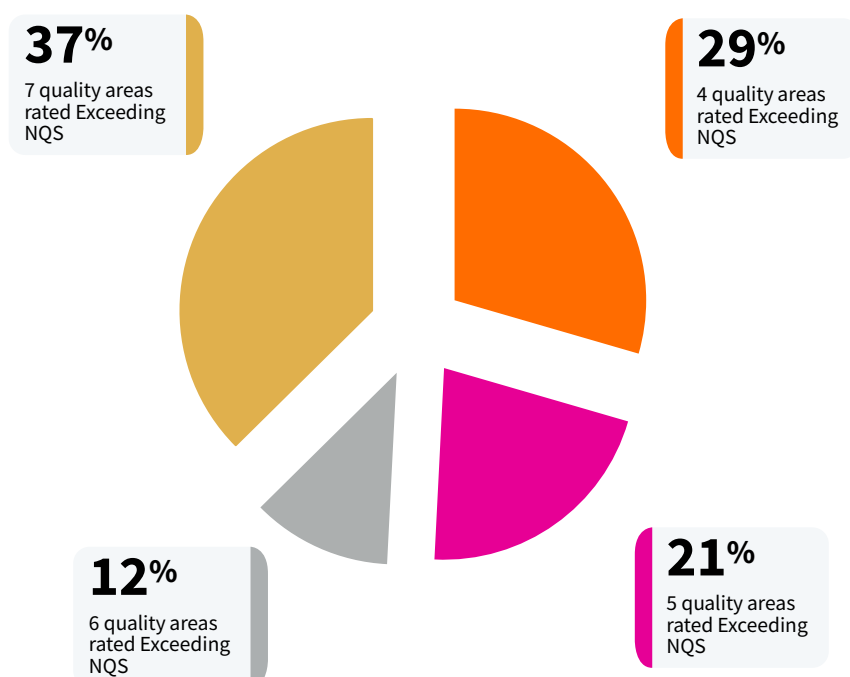
A service receives an overall rating of Working Towards NQS if any of the seven quality areas are rated Working Towards NQS. A quality area is rated Working Towards NQS if any of the standards within that quality area are rated Working Towards NQS.

**Figure 16: Proportion of services rated Working Towards NQS by number of quality areas rated Working Towards NQS**



## Services rated Exceeding NQS

**Figure 17: Proportion of services rated Exceeding NQS by number of quality areas rated Exceeding NQS**



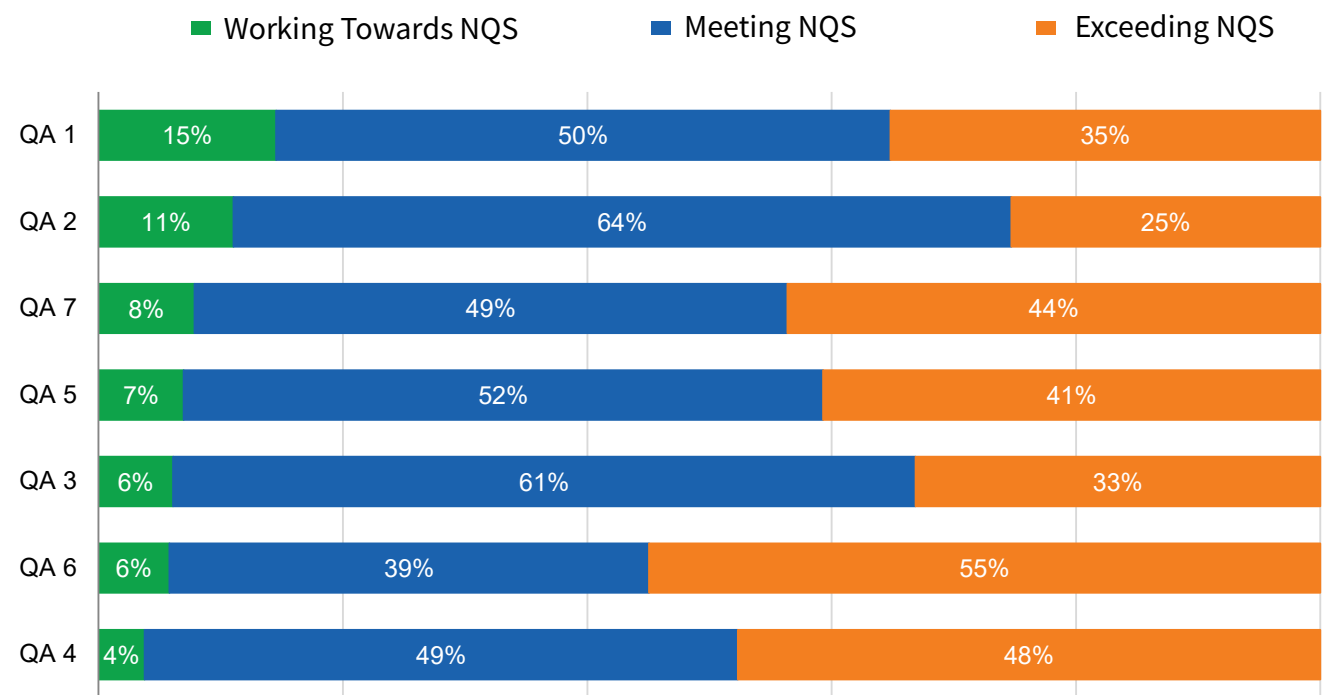


# Australian Capital Territory summary



Figure 18 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 18: Quality area ratings



### Contact details

Education Directorate  
Children’s Education and Care Assurance  
[www.education.act.gov.au/early-childhood](http://www.education.act.gov.au/early-childhood)

# New South Wales summary

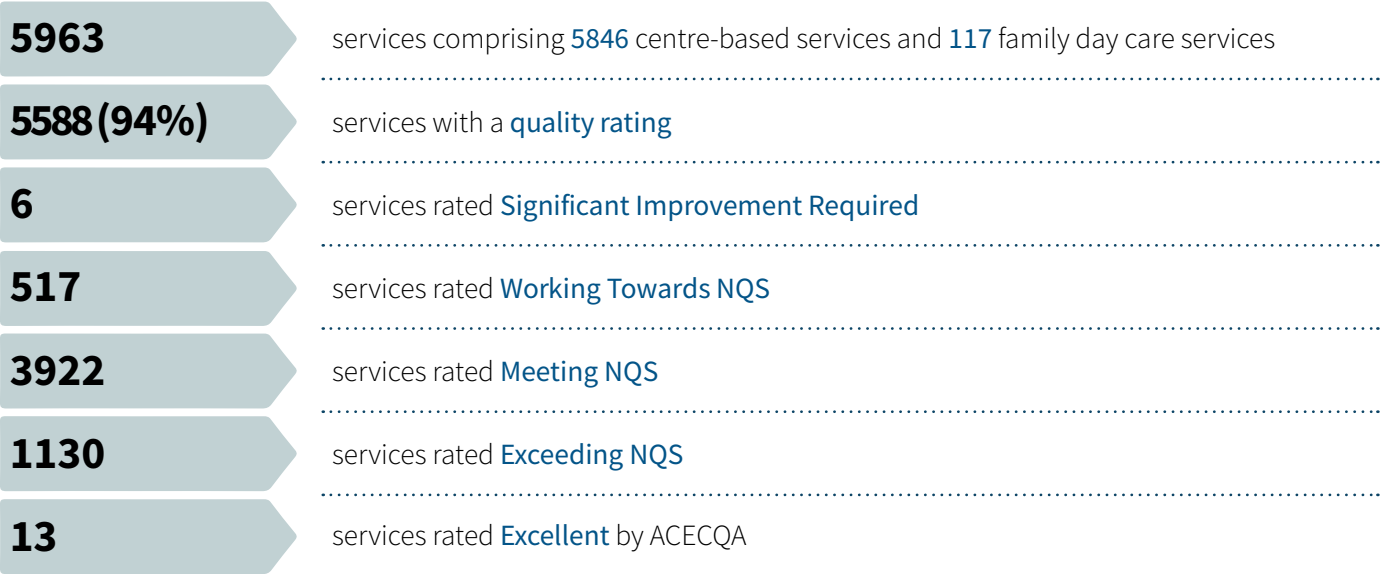
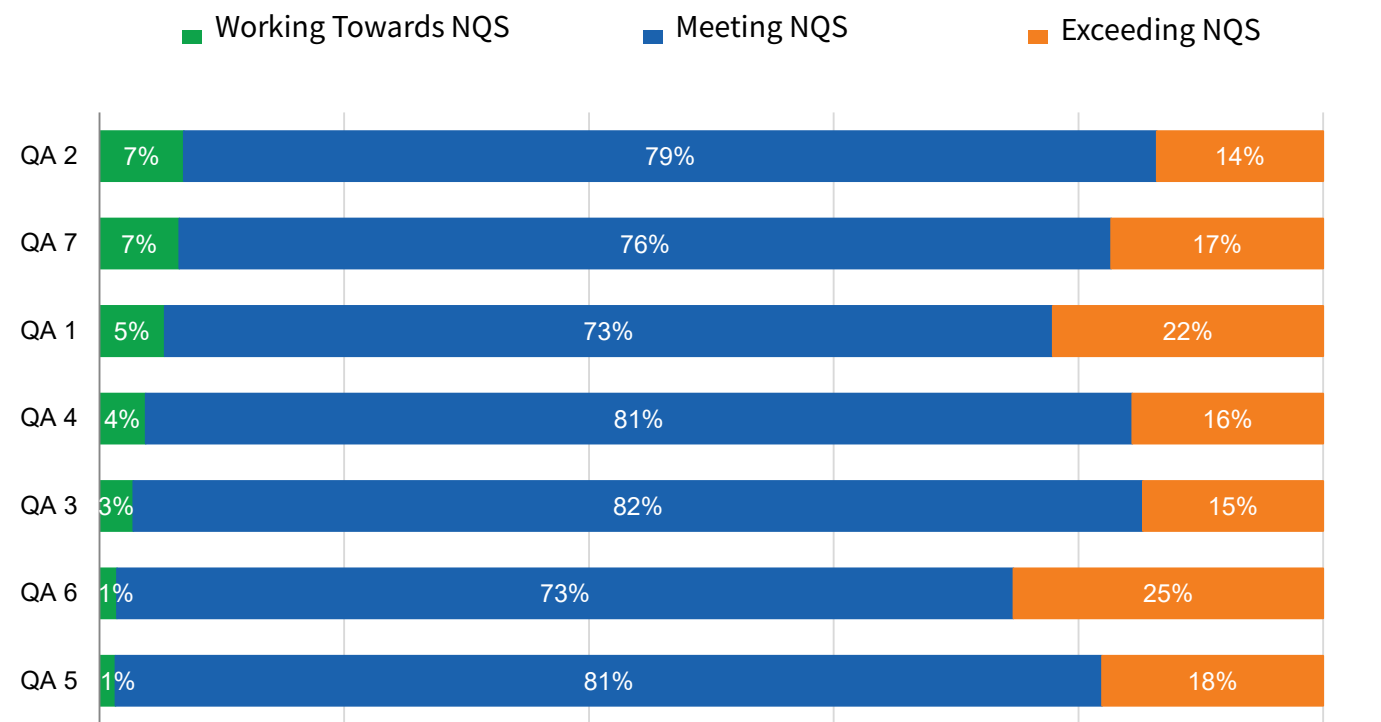


Figure 19 ranks the seven quality areas of the NQS in descending order based on the proportion of services rated Working Towards NQS in each quality area.

Figure 19: Quality area ratings



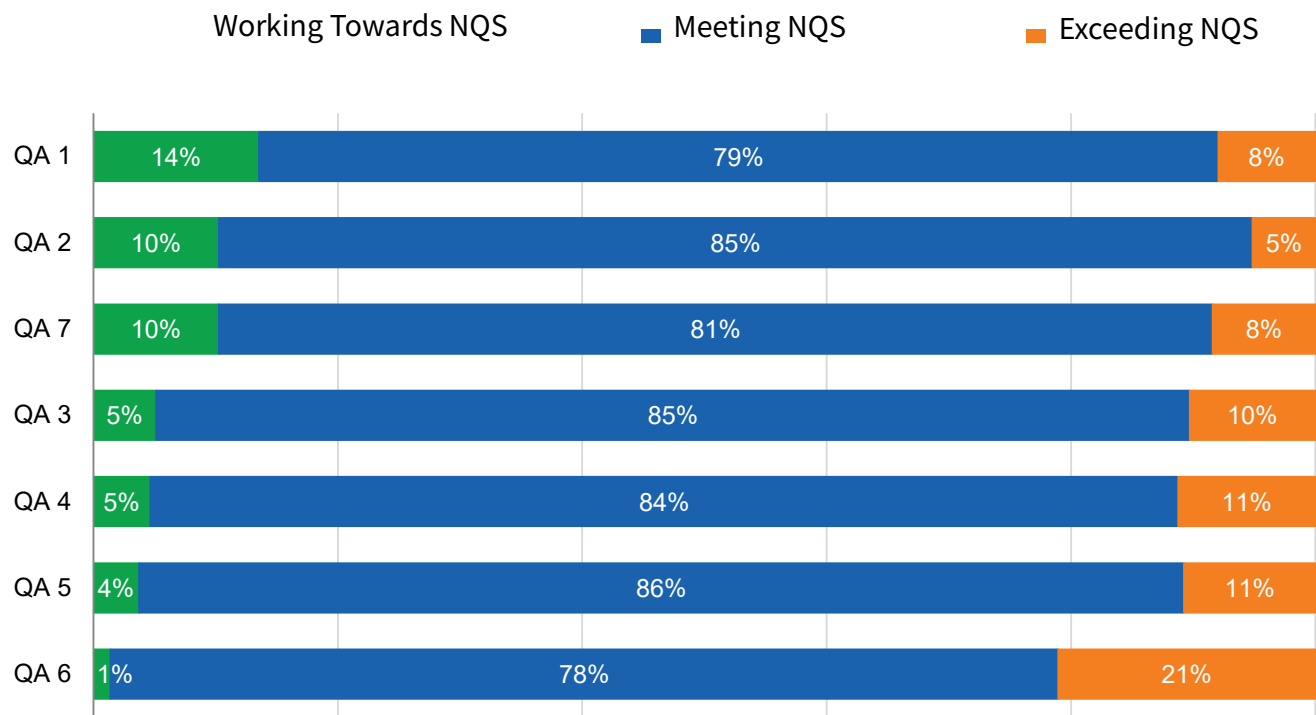
**Contact details**  
Department of Education  
Early Childhood Education Directorate  
[www.education.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education](http://www.education.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education)

# Northern Territory summary



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

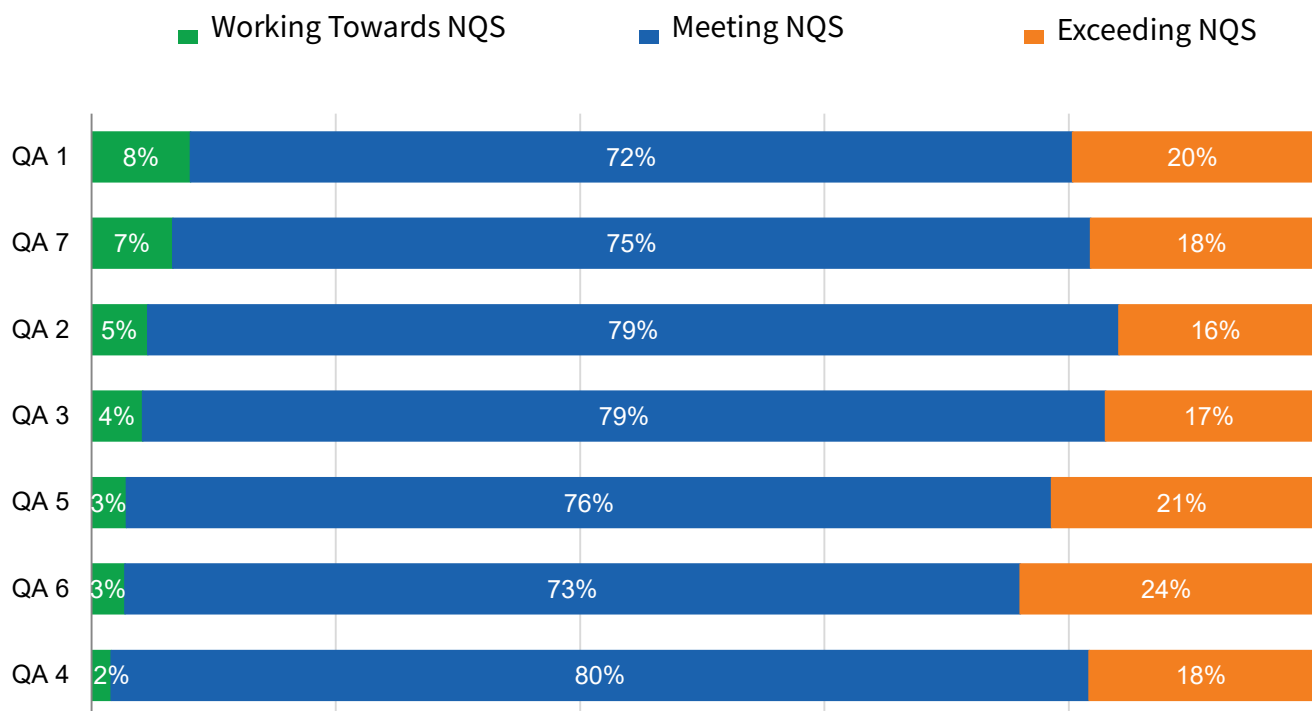
Department of Education  
Quality Education and Care NT  
[www.nt.gov.au/learning/early-childhood](http://www.nt.gov.au/learning/early-childhood)

# Queensland summary

3236	services comprising 3131 centre-based services and 105 family day care services
3031 (94%)	services with a quality rating
1	service rated Significant Improvement Required
302	services rated Working Towards NQS
2087	services rated Meeting NQS
634	services rated Exceeding NQS
7	services 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  
Early Childhood Regulatory Authority  
[www.earlychildhood.qld.gov.au](http://www.earlychildhood.qld.gov.au)

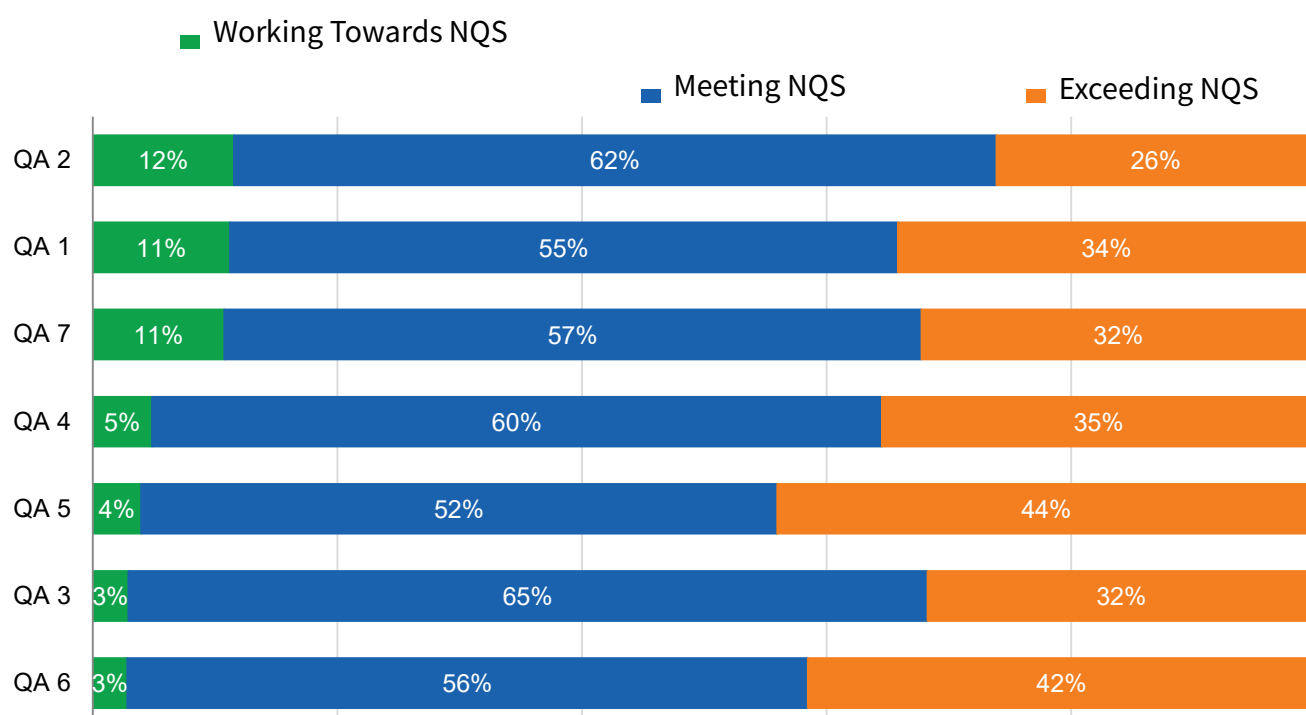


# South Australia summary

<b>1293</b>	services comprising <b>1278</b> centre-based services and <b>15</b> family day care services
<b>1238 (96%)</b>	services with a <b>quality rating</b>
<b>201</b>	services rated <b>Working Towards NQS</b>
<b>582</b>	services rated <b>Meeting NQS</b>
<b>455</b>	services rated <b>Exceeding NQS</b>

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

Education and Early Childhood Services Registration and Standards  
Board of South Australia  
[www.esb.sa.gov.au/early-childhood](http://www.esb.sa.gov.au/early-childhood)

# Tasmania summary

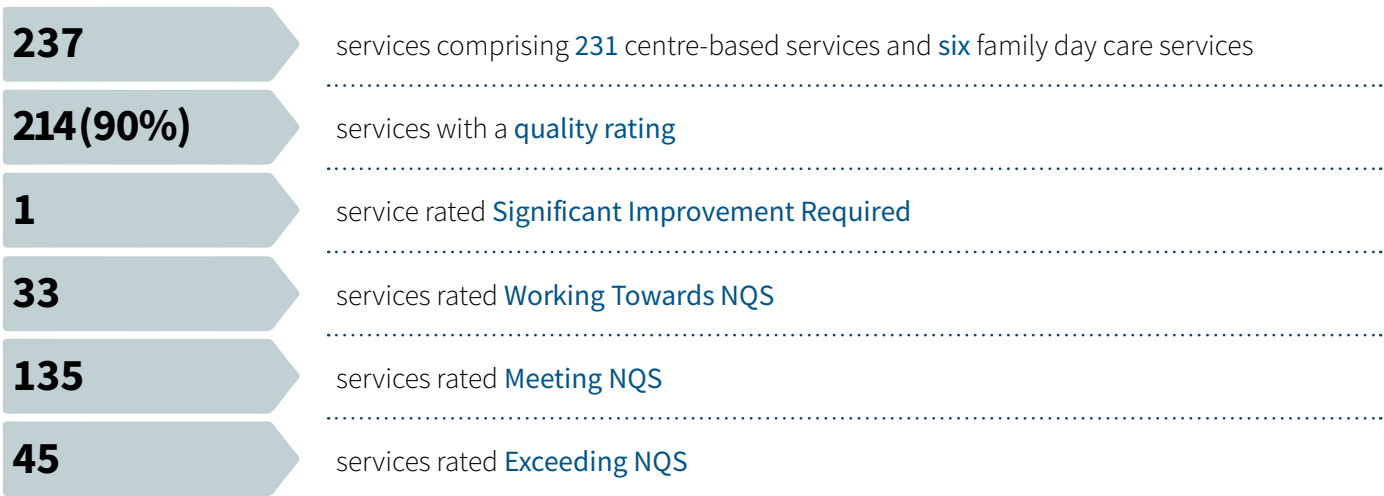
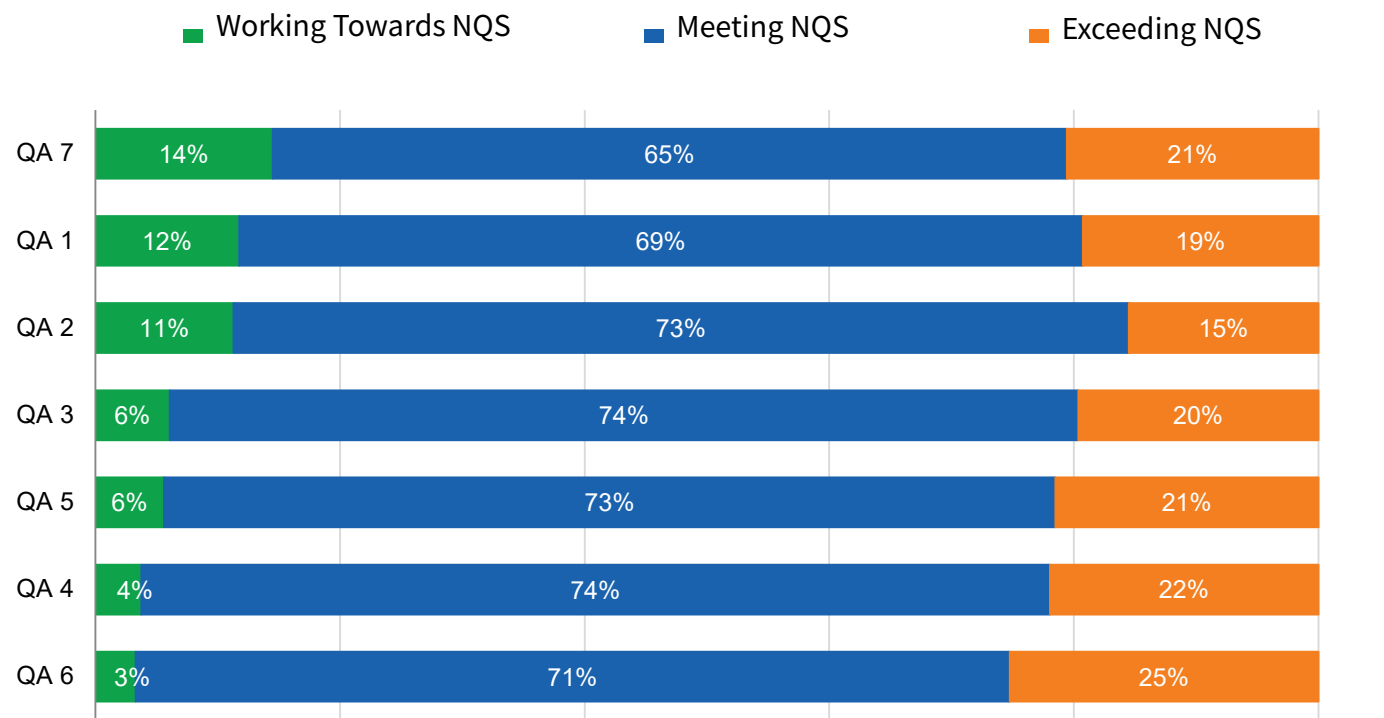


Figure 23 ranks the seven quality areas of the NQS in descending order based on the proportion of services rated Working Towards NQS in each quality area.

Figure 23: Quality area ratings



Contact details

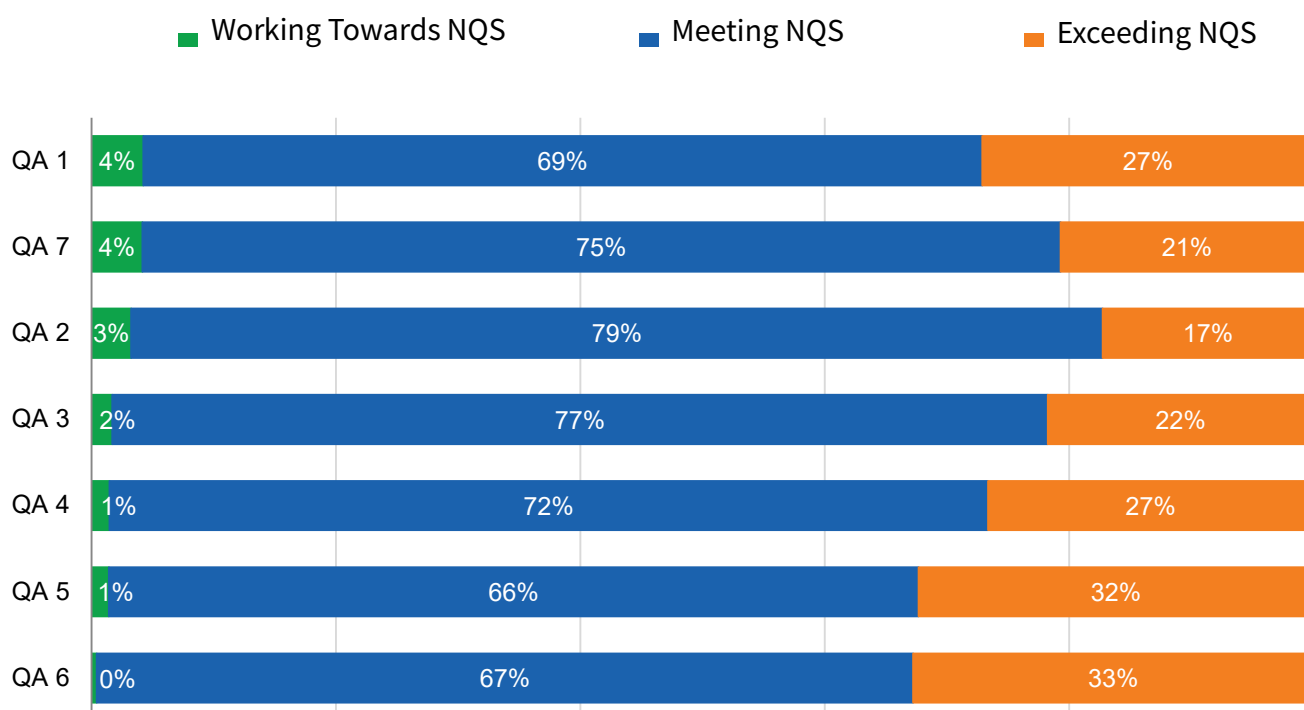
Department for Education, Children and Young People  
Education and Care Unit  
[www.educationandcare.tas.gov.au](http://www.educationandcare.tas.gov.au)

# Victoria summary

<b>4759</b>	services comprising <b>4613</b> centre-based services and <b>146</b> family day care services
<b>4160 (87%)</b>	services with a <b>quality rating</b>
<b>264</b>	services rated <b>Working Towards NQS</b>
<b>2732</b>	services rated <b>Meeting NQS</b>
<b>1155</b>	services rated <b>Exceeding NQS</b>
<b>9</b>	services rated <b>Excellent</b> by ACECQA

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

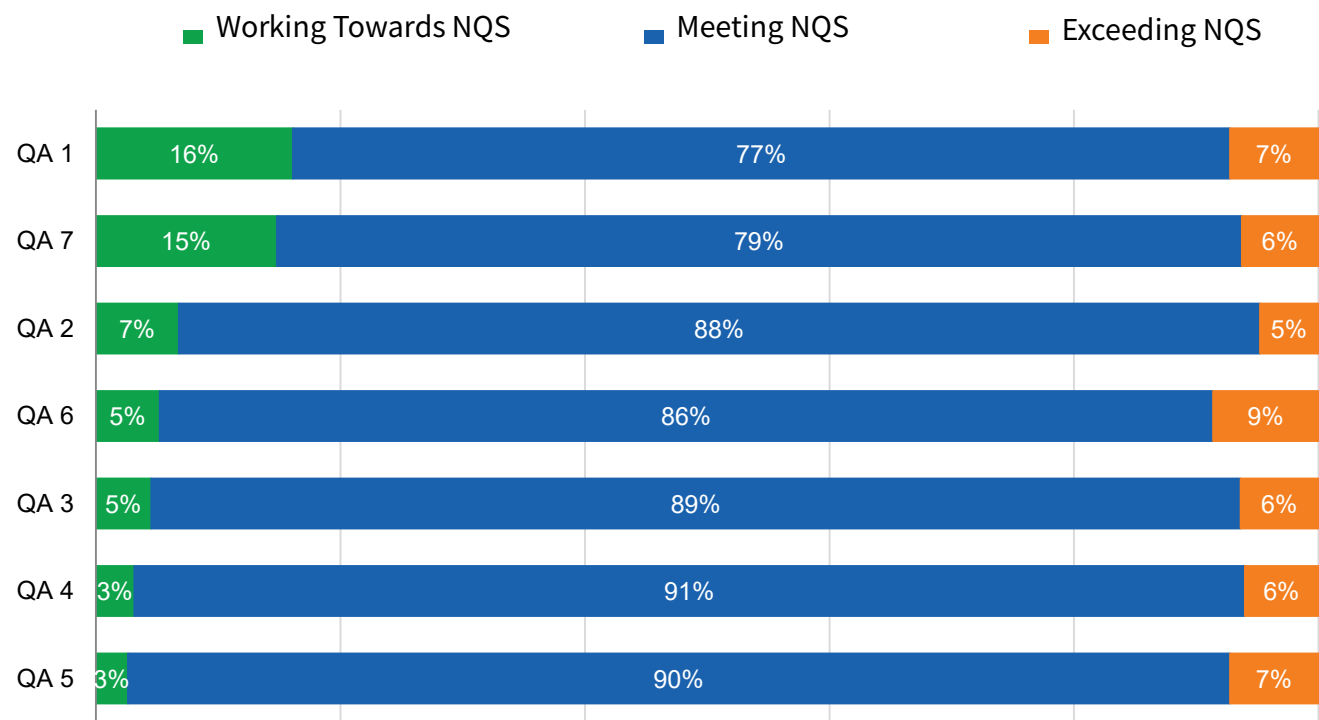
Department of Education and Training  
 Quality Assessment and Regulation Division  
[www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/regulation](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/regulation)

# Western Australia summary



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 Communities  
Education and Care Regulatory Unit  
[www.wa.gov.au/organisation/departments-of-communities/education-and-care-regulatory-unit](http://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/departments-of-communities/education-and-care-regulatory-unit)



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