

Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority

NQF Annual Performance Report

National Quality Framework



December 2024



Australian Children's
Education & Care
Quality Authority

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

Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) (2024), *National Quality Framework Annual Performance Report*, ACECQA, Sydney.

FOREWORD FROM THE ACECQA CHAIR

I am pleased to present the 2024 National Quality Framework (NQF) Annual Performance Report on behalf of the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA).

ACECQA's functions include guiding, monitoring and reporting on the NQF's administration, evaluating progress made against its objectives, and promoting national consistency. This report forms part of our ongoing reporting and evaluation activities.

The NQF was introduced in 2012 and is an internationally recognised framework for quality in children's education and care services. The objectives of the NQF include:

- ensuring the safety, health and wellbeing of children attending services
- improving their educational and developmental outcomes
- promoting continuous improvement in service quality
- improving public knowledge and access to information about service quality
- reducing regulatory and administrative burden.

The NQF guiding principles are that:

- the rights and best interests of children are paramount
- children are successful, competent and capable learners
- the principles of equity, inclusion and diversity underpin the National Law
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander cultures are valued
- the role of parents and families is respected and supported
- best practice is expected in service provision.

Furthering the objectives of the NQF, this year once again saw evidence of continuous quality improvement. The overall proportion of children's education and care services rated Meeting National Quality Standard (NQS) or above has hit 90%, up from 62% ten years ago and 79% five years ago. Given that all elements across all seven quality areas must be met to be rated Meeting NQS or above, it is very pleasing to see the overwhelming majority of services achieving the high quality bar the NQS sets.

Quality improvements have been particularly noteworthy for both outside school hours care and family day care services, with 88% of the former rated Meeting NQS or above and 72% of the latter. Four years ago, the respective proportions were 75% and 50%.

Given that quality outcomes for children depend upon a highly skilled, well supported and professionally recognised workforce, it is pleasing to see the progress being made in implementing *Shaping Our Future*, the national children's education and care workforce strategy (2022-2031), as well as the findings from our latest survey of approved providers. The survey confirms that overall support for the NQF remains very strong, with almost 97% of respondents indicating their support.

On behalf of ACECQA, I would like to thank our government partners and all the service providers, teachers, educators and service staff for their commitment to continuous improvement, and realising the vision that children have the best start in life through quality education and care.

Annette Whitehead
ACECQA Chair

OVERVIEW OF THE EDUCATION AND CARE SECTOR

As at 30 June 2024:

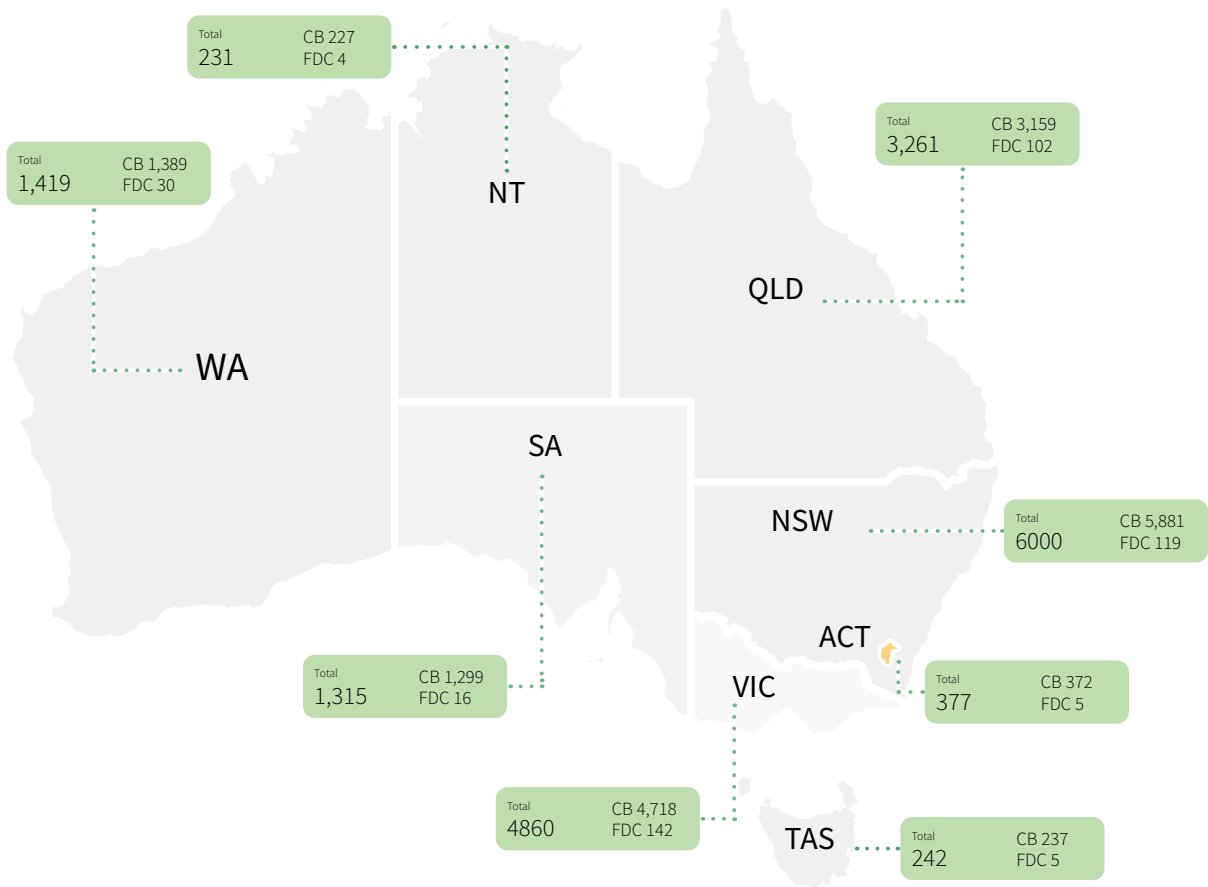
- around 7200 providers were approved to operate children's education and care services under the National Quality Framework (NQF), with 79% of these approved to operate a single service
- in total, providers were approved to operate around 17,700 services (up from less than 16,500 services three years ago – an 8% increase), including:
 - » 9143 long day care services (52% of approved services)
 - » 5044 outside school hours care services (28%)
 - » 3092 preschools/kindergartens (17%)
 - » 423 family day care services (2%)
- 'private for profit' providers operated more than two-thirds (70%) of long day care services, 65% of family day care services and more than half (53%) of outside school hours care services, but only 1% of preschools/kindergartens
- half (50%) of preschools/kindergartens were operated by 'private not for profit community managed' providers, with more than a fifth (22%) being 'state/territory and local government managed'
- more than 16,000 (91%¹) services had a published quality rating against the National Quality Standard (NQS), with 90% rated Meeting NQS or above
- of the roughly 1600 services rated Working Towards NQS, half (50%) received the rating due to not meeting between one to four of the 40 elements of quality
- more than 3500 services were rated Exceeding NQS, with more than 1100 receiving a rating of Exceeding NQS for all 15 standards of quality.

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

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

1 The proportion of services with a quality rating will not reach 100% at any one time because a small proportion 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.

SECTOR PROFILE

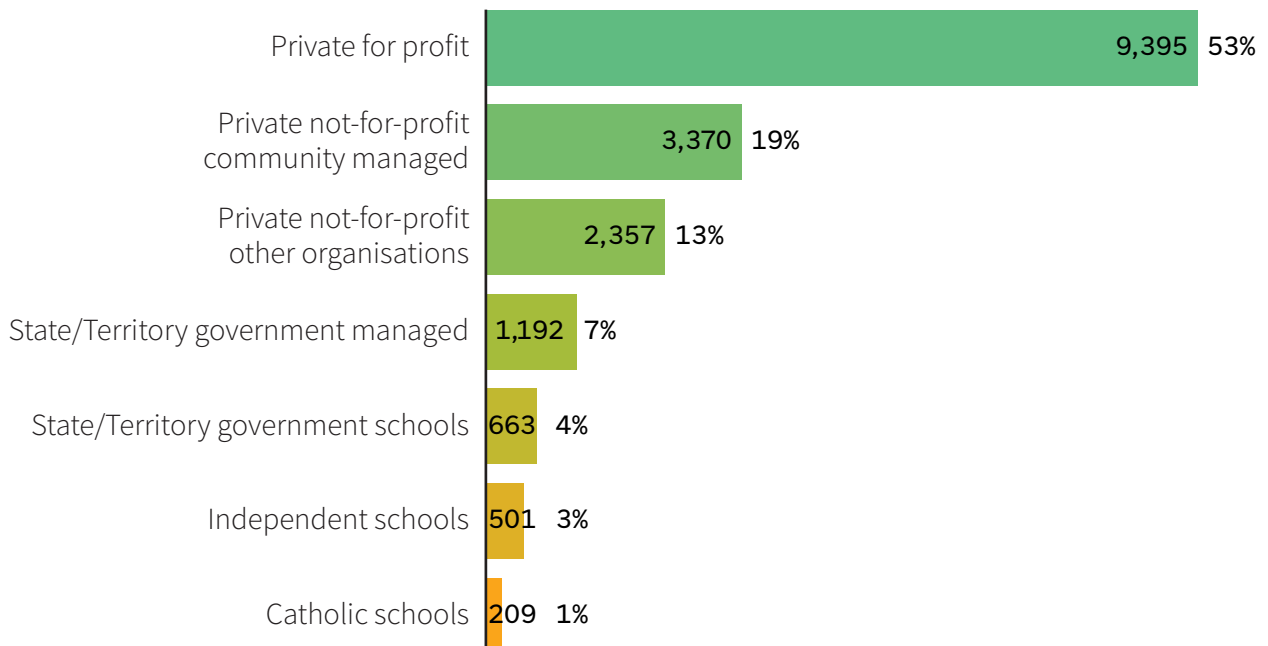


Total Centre-based (CB)
17,282 (98%)
+2% Increase on Q2 2023

Total Family day care (FDC)
423 (2%)
-6% Decrease on Q2 2023

Total
17,705
+2% Increase on Q2 2023

Number and proportion of services by provider management



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Research shows quality education and care early in life leads to better health, education and employment outcomes. The early years are critical for establishing self-esteem, resilience, healthy growth and capacity to learn.

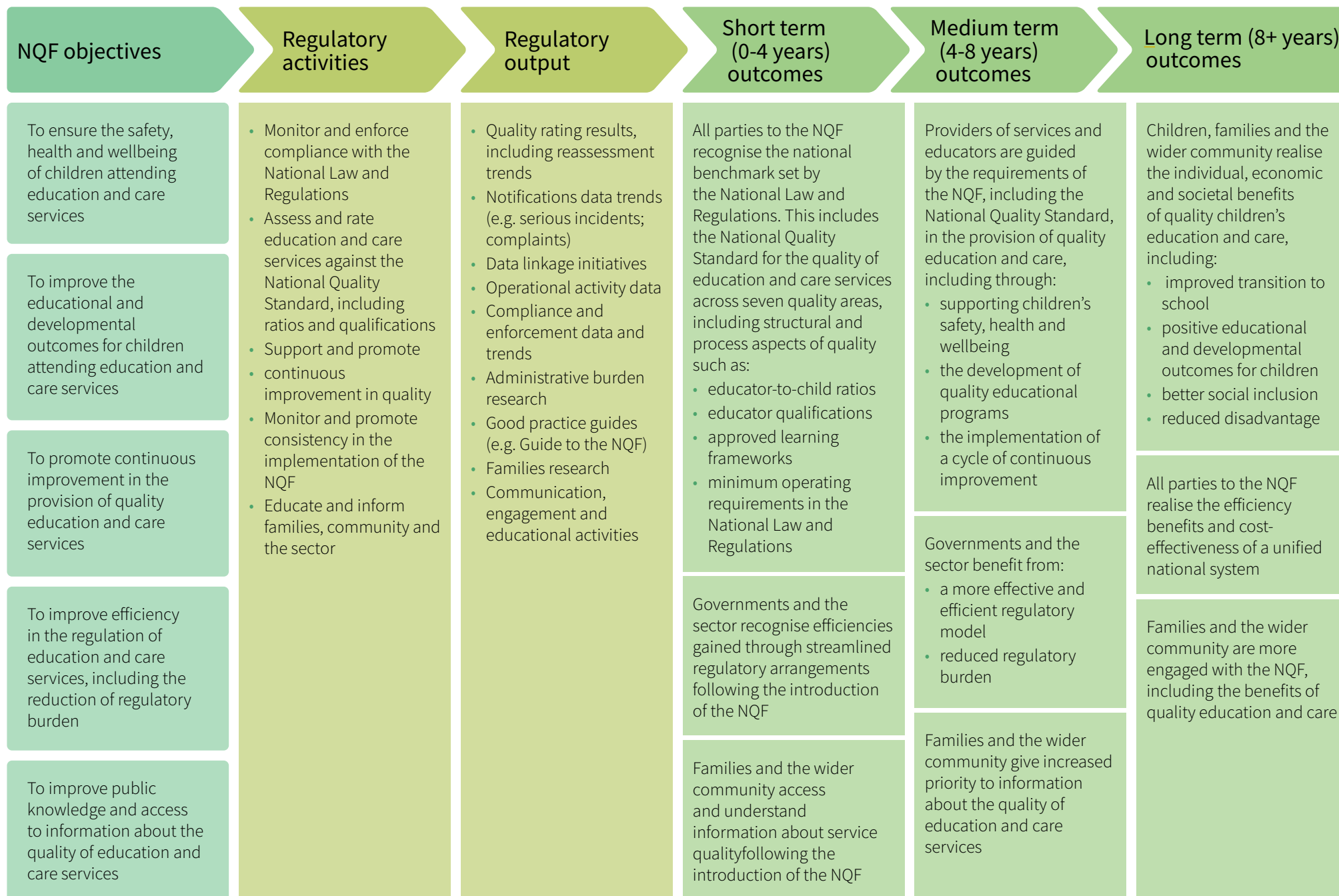
The [NQF](#) provides a national approach to regulation and assessment for children's education and care services across Australia. Governments regulate over 17,500 services under the NQF, with more than 1.4 million children attending these services.

The [Education and Care Services National Law](#) and [National Regulations](#) govern the minimum standards and requirements that all providers of approved services must meet. The [National Quality Standard](#) sets the benchmark for service quality and the [approved learning frameworks](#) provide the basis for delivering quality educational programs to all children attending early childhood and outside school hours care services.

The NQF Evaluation Framework guides all of ACECQA's research and evaluation work and was developed so that governments and their regulatory agencies have an agreed way of understanding whether and how the NQF is meeting its objectives (see [Figure 1](#)).

This report is one of several activities undertaken by ACECQA to monitor and report on the administration of the NQF. Most of the data used in this report is sourced from the National Quality Agenda IT System (NQA ITS), as at 30 June 2024. The data is also published on ACECQA's website.

Figure 1: NQF Evaluation Framework



QUALITY OVER TIME

Figure 2 shows that the proportion of children’s education and care services rated Meeting NQS or above by state and territory regulatory authorities has increased every year since the NQF was introduced.

As at 30 June 2024, 90% of services with a published quality rating achieved Meeting NQS or above overall, with between 93-98% of services rated Meeting NQS or above for each of the individual quality areas that comprise the National Quality Standard.

Figure 2: Proportion of services with a published quality rating achieving Meeting NQS or above by overall rating and quality area

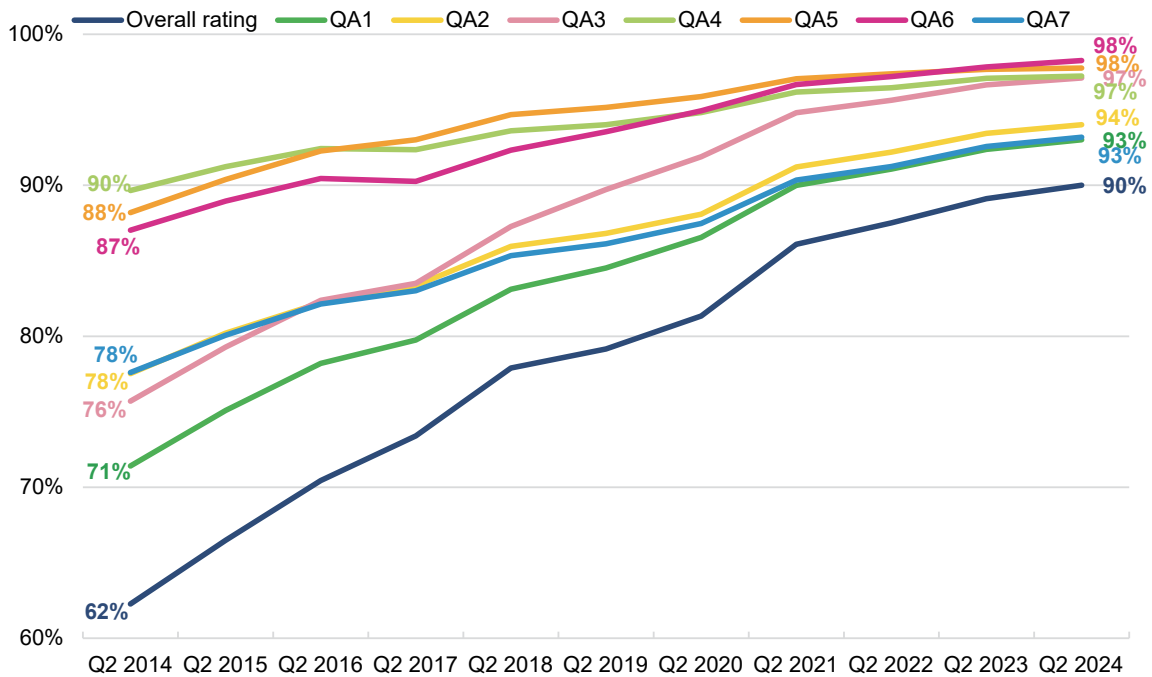


Table 1 presents the previous overall ratings alongside the reassessed overall ratings for those services that have been quality assessed and rated multiple times by state and territory regulatory authorities.

More than two-thirds (68%) of services rated Working Towards NQS improved their overall quality rating at reassessment, while 15% of services rated Meeting NQS improved their overall quality rating to Exceeding NQS.

Just under half (48%) of services rated Exceeding NQS retain that rating at reassessment.

Table 1: Overall quality ratings before and after reassessment, as at 30 June 2024²

		Rating after reassessment				
		Significant Improvement Required	Working Towards NQS	Meeting NQS	Exceeding NQS	Total
Rating before reassessment	Significant Improvement Required	21	85	17	0	123
	Working Towards NQS	63	2,345	4,388	810	7,606
	Meeting NQS	11	1,238	5,887	1,212	8,348
	Exceeding NQS	2	442	2,255	2,451	5,150
	TOTAL	97	4,110	12,547	4,473	21,227

		Rating after reassessment				
		Significant Improvement Required	Working Towards NQS	Meeting NQS	Exceeding NQS	Improvement rate
Rating before reassessment	Significant Improvement Required	17%	69%	14%	0%	83%
	Working Towards NQS	1%	31%	58%	11%	68%
	Meeting NQS	0%	15%	71%	15%	15%
	Exceeding NQS	0%	9%	44%	48%	—

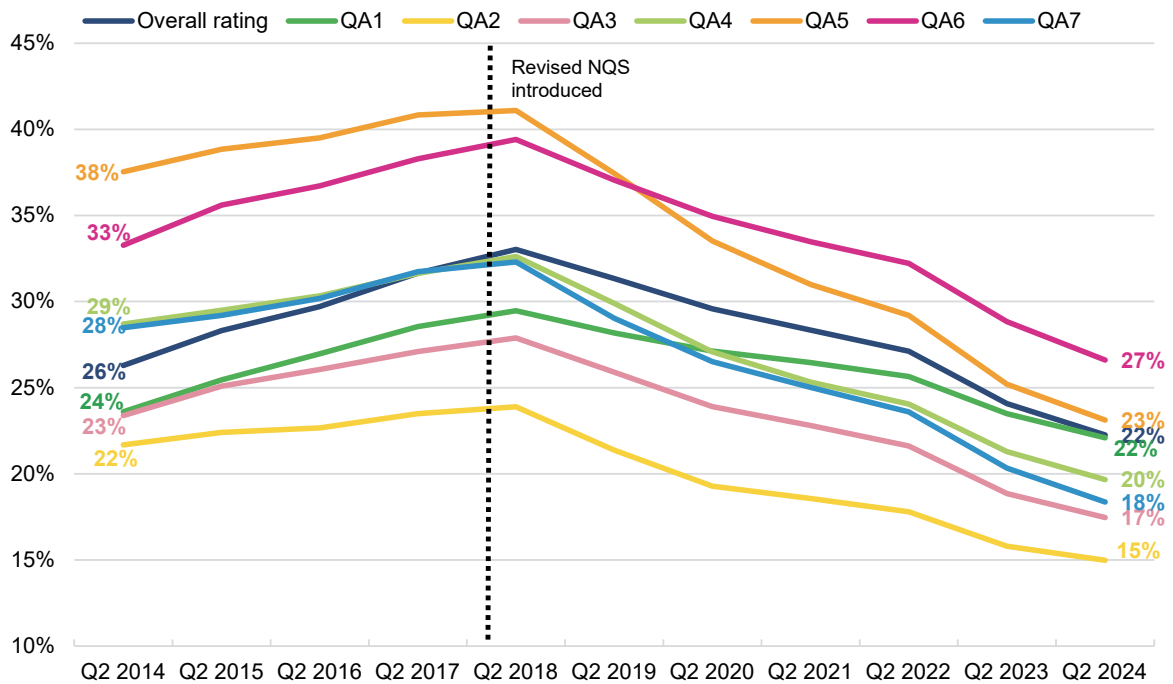
² Reassessments include the following processes described in the National Law: i. Partial reassessment and re-rating requested by provider; ii. Partial reassessment and re-rating instigated by the regulatory authority; iii. Full reassessment and re-rating requested by provider; iv. Full reassessment and re-rating instigated by the regulatory authority.

A revised, streamlined version of the NQS commenced on 1 February 2018, which also made it more challenging for a service to achieve an overall rating of Exceeding NQS.

Figure 3 shows that just over one-fifth (22%) of services achieved Exceeding NQS or above overall as at 30 June 2024, down from one-third (33%) as at 30 June 2018.

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

Figure 3: Proportion of services with a published quality rating achieving Exceeding NQS or above by overall rating and quality area

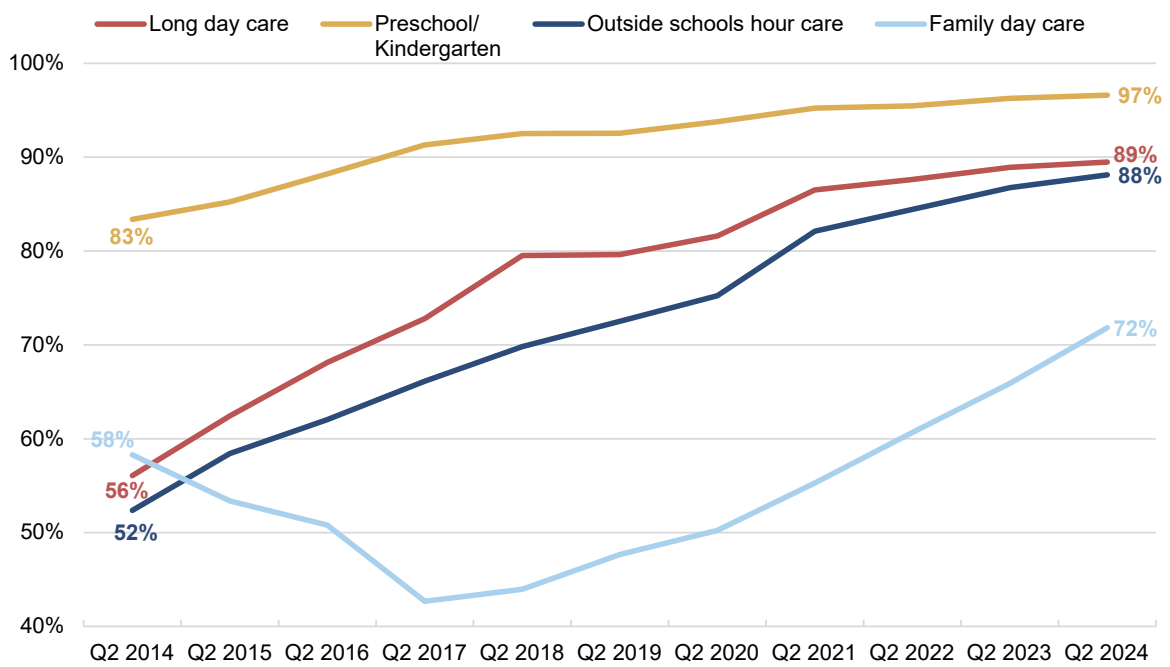


QUALITY RATINGS BY SERVICE TYPE

Figure 4 shows the marked improvement in the proportion of family day care and outside school hours care services rated Meeting NQS or above over the past six years.

As at 30 June 2024, 72% of family day care services are rated Meeting NQS or above, up from 44% as at 30 June 2018. For outside school hours care services over the same period, 88% are rated Meeting NQS or above as at 30 June 2024, up from 70% as at 30 June 2018.

Figure 4: Proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above by service type



CHAPTER SUMMARY



Children's health and safety

- At the request of the Australian Government, ACECQA undertook a review of child safety arrangements under the NQF in 2023. The review confirmed that the NQF is a robust regulatory scheme with a strong focus on continuous quality improvement to ensure children are safe, healthy and thriving in approved education and care services.
- 94% of services with a published quality rating achieve Meeting National Quality Standard or above for children's health and safety – the highest proportion since the introduction of the NQF in 2012.
- The rate of reported serious incidents in 2023/24 was 148 per 100 approved services, higher than the rate of 139 in 2022/23 and 124 in 2021/22.
- The rate of confirmed breaches in 2023/24 was 201 per 100 approved services, higher than the rate of 193 in 2022/23 and 162 in 2021/22. The most frequently breached requirements of the National Law and Regulations relate to:
 - » protection of children from harm and hazards (Section 167)
 - » supervision of children (Section 165)
 - » emergency and evacuation procedures (Regulation 97)
 - » upkeep of premises, furniture and equipment (Regulation 103).



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Educational program and practice

- 93% of services with a published quality rating achieve Meeting NQS or above for educational program and practice – the highest proportion since the introduction of the NQF in 2012.
- For the first time, more than three-quarters (76%) of family day care services are rated Meeting NQS or above, up from half (50%) six years ago.
- There is a high degree of correlation between performance against educational program and practice (Quality Area 1), and leadership (Standard 7.2). This demonstrates the critical role of educational leadership in ensuring high quality educational programs.
- There is also a high degree of correlation between relationships with children (Quality Area 5) and educational practice (Standard 1.2), program (Standard 1.1) and professionalism (Standard 4.2). This demonstrates the importance of positive relationships with children, as well as the importance of high quality practice, program and professionalism in fostering and maintaining these relationships.



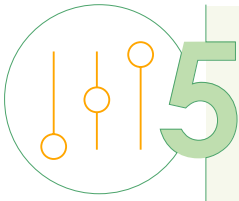
Children from vulnerable and disadvantaged backgrounds

- Children from disadvantaged backgrounds reap the greatest benefit from quality early education and care.
- Australian researchers from the Australian Education Research Organisation and the Queensland Brain Institute recently found that children who attended a service rated Exceeding NQS had consistently lower rates of developmental vulnerability.
- While the proportion of services in the most disadvantaged areas rated Meeting NQS or above has increased steadily since 2017, there remains a persistent and widening gap when compared to the proportion of services in the most advantaged areas.
- Differences between socioeconomic areas exist across all service types, with the most pronounced differences being for preschools/kindergartens rated Exceeding NQS or above.



Workforce

- *Shaping Our Future*, the national children's education and care workforce strategy (2022-2031), represents a long-term commitment to the workforce by Australian governments and sector stakeholders, with the overarching vision being for the children's education and care sector to have a sustainable, high-quality workforce of teachers and educators that is highly respected and valued by the broader community.
- Almost 10% of services hold a staffing waiver, with the proportion rising to 16% for long day care services. These waivers mostly relate to temporary issues in meeting early childhood teacher staffing requirements.
- The number of enrolments in the Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care has decreased from just under 75,000 in 2016 to less than 25,000 in 2023, with the current entry requirement having a significant impact on the number of people who are eligible to apply to undertake the qualification.
- Less than one third (30%) of early childhood initial teacher education students who commenced their studies in 2019 completed their studies within four years. This may in part be due to a high proportion of students completing their studies part-time while they are employed in the sector.



5

Service provider perceptions of the NQF

- Governments have been committed to monitoring and reducing unnecessary burden associated with the National Quality Framework since its introduction in 2012.
- In keeping with ACECQA's function under the National Law to establish consistent, effective and efficient procedures for the operation of the NQF, ACECQA's research focuses on measuring the perceptions of providers of education and care services regarding the administrative requirements of the NQF.
- In June 2024, ACECQA invited all approved providers to participate in the seventh survey on this topic. Overall, 2,100 approved providers responded, equating to a response rate of 34%.
- The survey found:
 - » overall support for the NQF remains strong, above 95% across all seven surveys undertaken by ACECQA.
 - » the proportion of respondents selecting a rating of 'very burdensome' for their perception of administrative burden has slightly decreased in the latest survey, ending a sequence of increases since the 2017 survey.
 - » across all specified administrative requirements of the NQF, high perceptions of burden have reduced in 2024 from 2022 levels. The largest decreases in perceived burden related to quality assessment and rating visits, documenting children's learning, quality improvement plans, and waivers.
 - » while perceived burden has reduced from 2022 levels, quality assessment and rating visits and quality improvement plans continue to be considered highly burdensome, with almost three in five (59%) and over half (53%) of respondents in 2024 viewing them that way.
 - » approaching two-thirds (61%) of respondents agreed that, overall, the benefits of the changes arising from the 2019 NQF Review outweighed the burden they placed on them.



CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND SAFETY

OVERVIEW

The Education and Care Services National Law and National Regulations set out the minimum requirements for approved providers to operate services under the National Quality Framework.

These include hygiene and safe food practices, incident policies and procedures, risk assessments, and emergency and evacuation procedures.

At the request of the Australian Government, ACECQA undertook a [review of child safety](#) arrangements under the NQF in 2023. The review confirmed that the NQF is a robust regulatory scheme with a strong focus on continuous quality improvement to ensure children are safe, healthy and thriving in approved education and care services. However, the review found it could be further enhanced in a number of child safety areas. Governments are considering their collective response to the review.

One area in which the review highlighted the need for additional safeguards relates to the taking, sharing and storing of photos and/or videos of children. While any future requirements in this and other areas are being considered, ACECQA in partnership with all governments has released a set of recommended [child safe practices](#) for the use of electronic devices in early childhood education and care services.

Quality Area 2 (Children's health and safety) of the National Quality Standard focuses on practices that support and promote children's wellbeing.

CHILDREN’S HEALTH AND SAFETY QUALITY RATINGS

Figure 1.1 shows the performance of approved services against Quality Area 2 over the last decade. As at 30 June 2024, 94% of services with a published quality rating achieved Meeting NQS or above, the highest proportion since the introduction of the NQF in 2012.

Figure 1.1: Proportion of services with a published quality rating achieving Meeting NQS or above for children’s health and safety

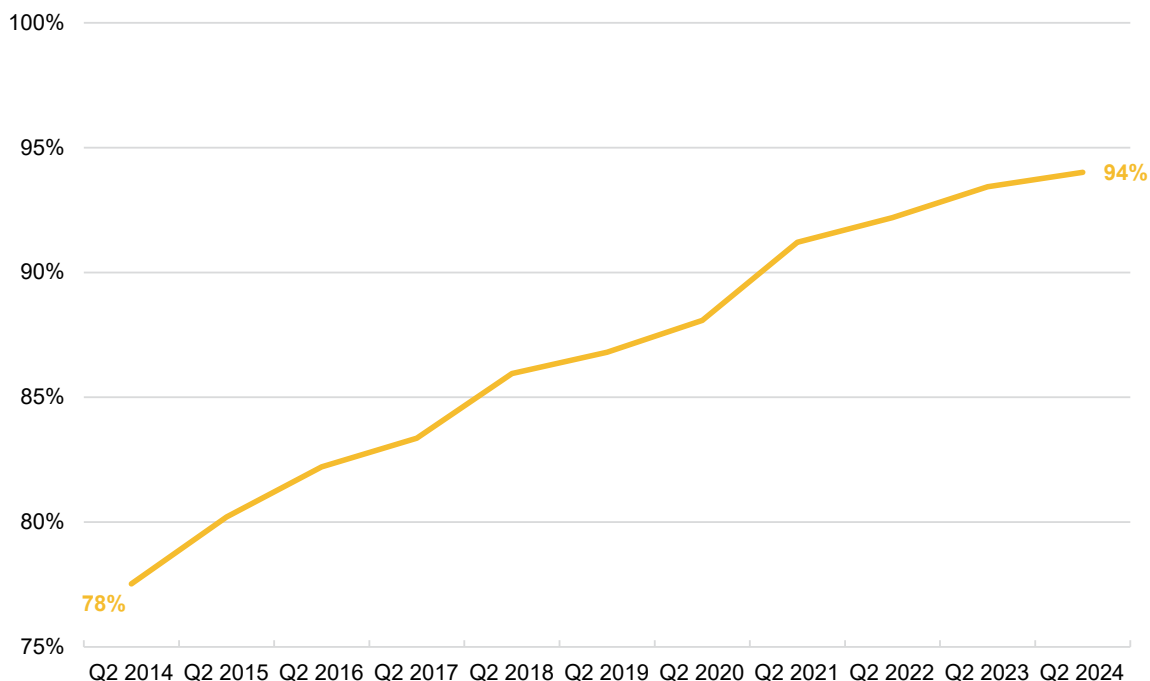


Figure 1.2 shows that preschools/kindergartens continue to have the highest proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above for Quality Area 2, with long day care and outside school hours care services both at 93%.

For the first time, more than 80% of family day care services are rated Meeting NQS or above, up from less than 60% six years ago.

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

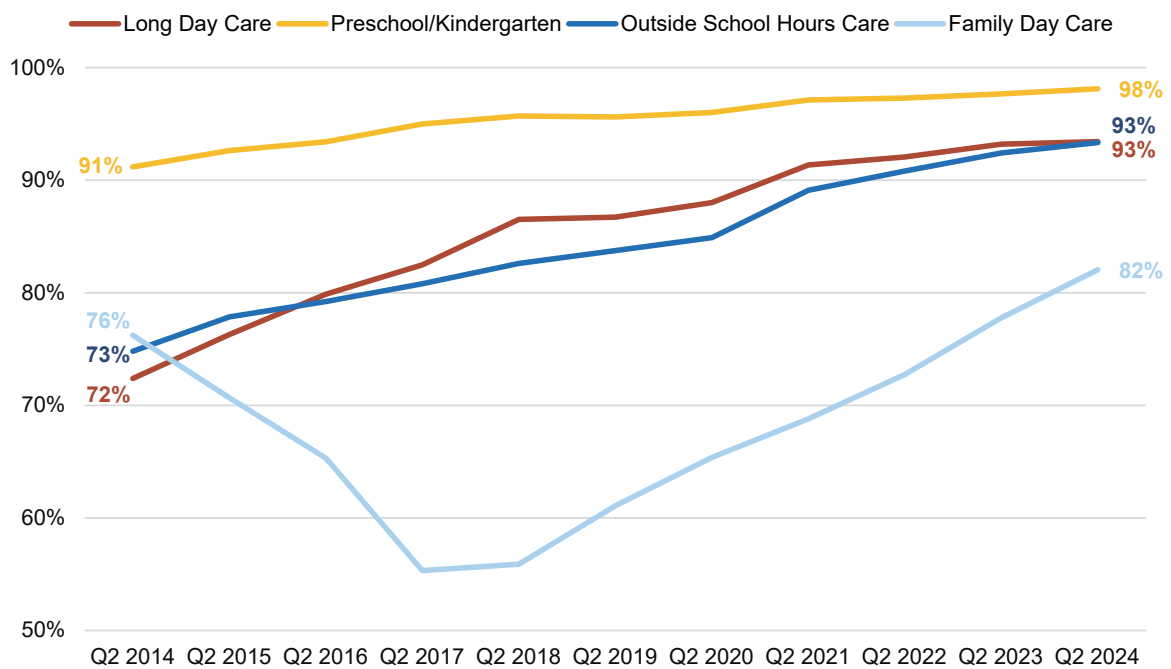
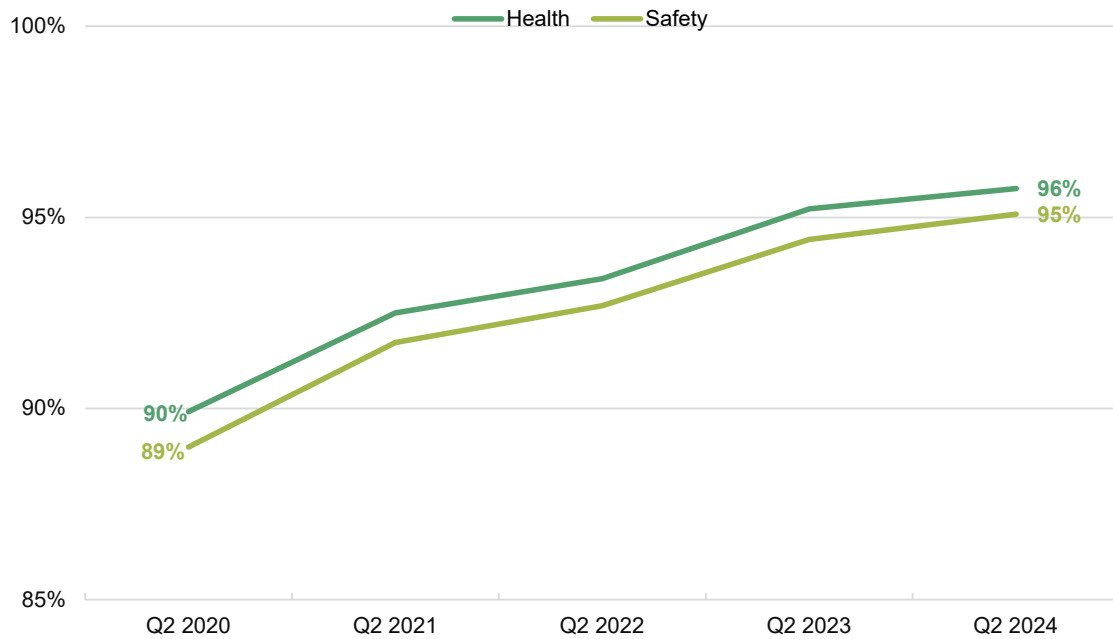


Figure 1.3 shows year-on-year improvement in approved services' performance across both standards within Quality Area 2.

As at 30 June 2024, 96% of services were rated Meeting NQS or above for their health practices, and 95% for their safety practices.

Figure 1.3: Proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above for health and safety



SERIOUS INCIDENTS

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

It is important to note that most reported serious incidents result in no formal compliance action being required by state and territory regulatory authorities.

It is also very challenging to make robust comparisons of the rate of reported serious incidents across service types or financial years for a number of reasons. In common with other sectors, dealing with both the likely 'over' and 'under' reporting of serious incidents from different parts of the sector is particularly difficult.

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

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

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

- Exceptional health and safety standards
- Lax reporting procedures
- Concern around reputational impact
- Restrictive and risk averse learning and development opportunities for children.

In July 2024, in collaboration with all governments, ACECQA published a [National Decision Tree](#) to help approved providers and their staff identify whether a notification must be made to the regulatory authority (and in what timeframe).

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

Table 1.1: Proportion of reported serious incidents by incident type

Incident type	% of all reported serious incidents							
	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Injury/Trauma/Illness	84.3%	81.3%	79.1%	78.6%	79.9%	78.1%	77.8%	77.4%
Emergency services attended	9.0%	10.4%	12.0%	12.9%	11.5%	12.5%	12.6%	12.5%
Child missing or unaccounted for	5.5%	6.6%	7.2%	7.0%	7.2%	7.9%	8.0%	8.4%
Child locked in/out of the service	0.9%	1.3%	1.3%	1.2%	1.2%	1.3%	1.4%	1.5%
Child taken away or removed	0.3%	0.4%	0.4%	0.3%	0.3%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%

Figure 1.4 shows that in 2023/24 there was a rate of 148 reported serious incidents per 100 approved services, higher than the rate of 139 in 2022/23.

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

Figure 1.4: Rate of reported serious incidents per 100 approved services

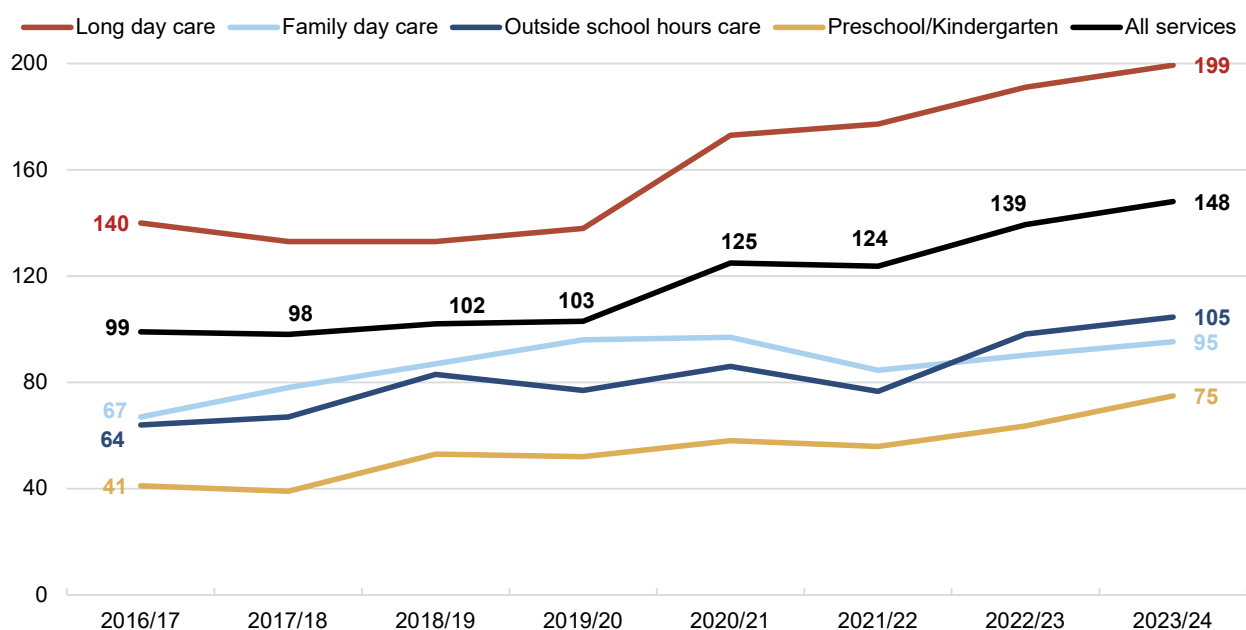
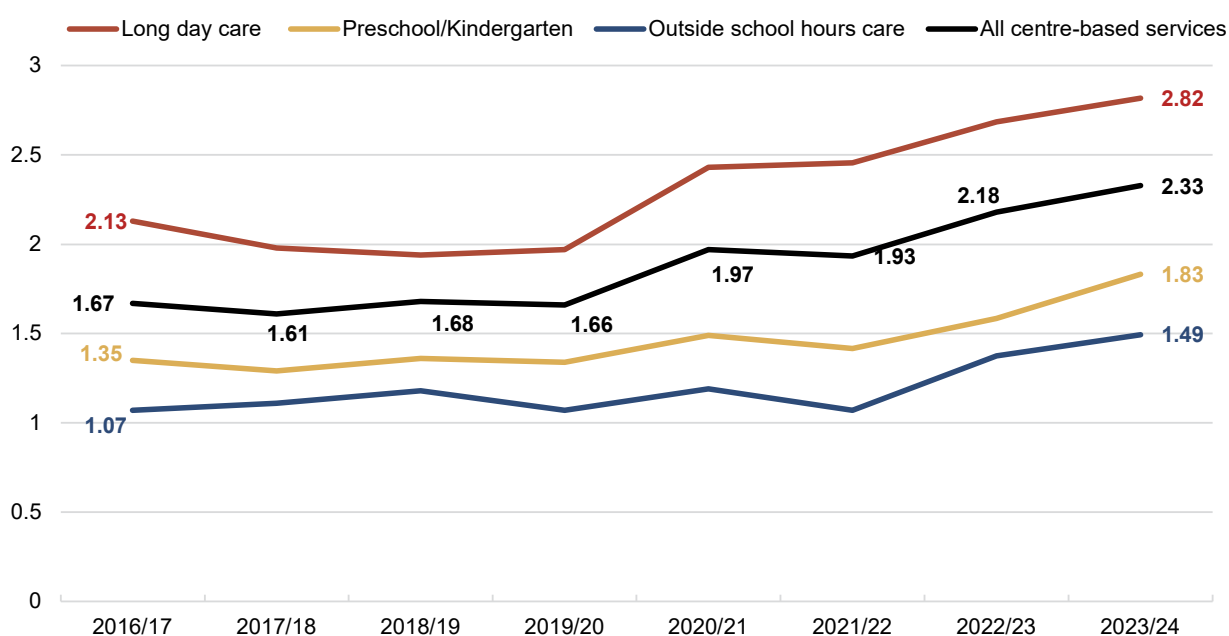


Figure 1.5 shows that in 2023/24 there was a rate of 2.33 reported centre-based service serious incidents per 100 approved places, higher than the rate of 2.18 in 2022/23.

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

Figure 1.5: Rate of reported centre-based service serious incidents per 100 approved places^{3,4}



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

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

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

Figure 1.6 shows that more than half (56%) of all approved services reported one or more serious incidents in 2023/24. For long day care services, the proportion is two-thirds (67%).

Figure 1.6: Proportion of services reporting one or more serious incidents

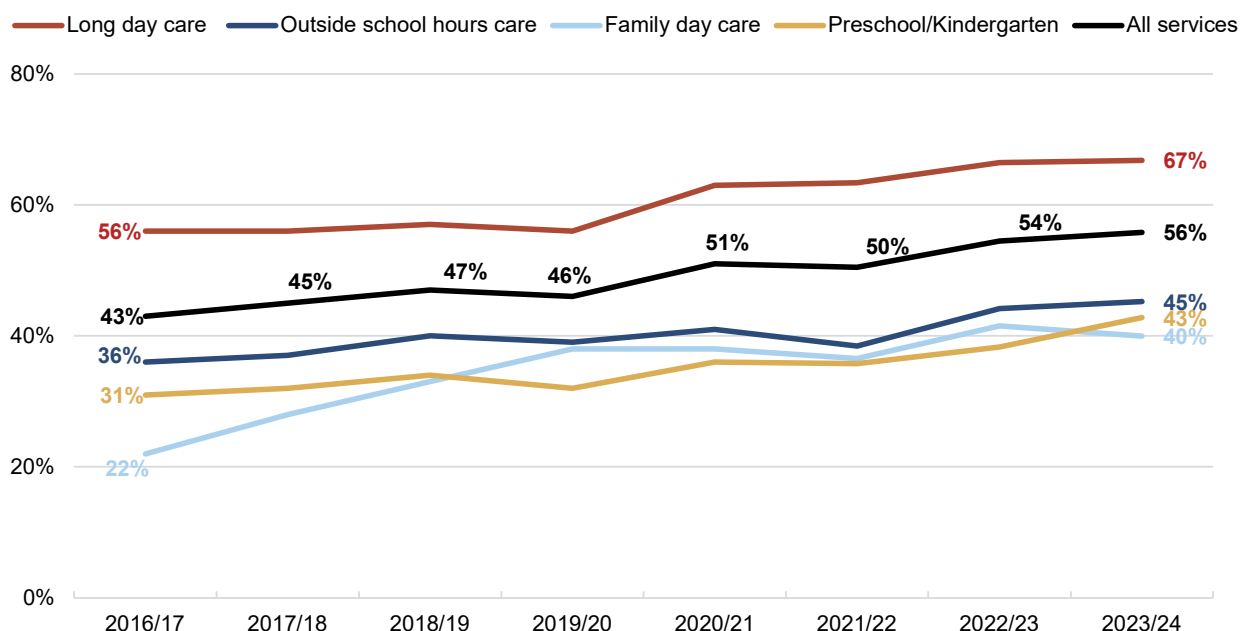


Table 1.2 shows that services with higher quality ratings are consistently more likely to report serious incidents than those with lower quality ratings. In 2023/24, services rated Exceeding NQS continue to have the highest rate of reported serious incidents – 155 per 100 approved services.

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

Rating (at end of financial year)	Rate per 100 approved services						
	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Working Towards NQS	86	93	93	112	106	137	142
Meeting NQS	99	102	107	127	128	143	152
Exceeding NQS	114	113	110	136	133	146	155
All services (including unrated)	98	102	103	125	124	139	148

CONFIRMED BREACHES

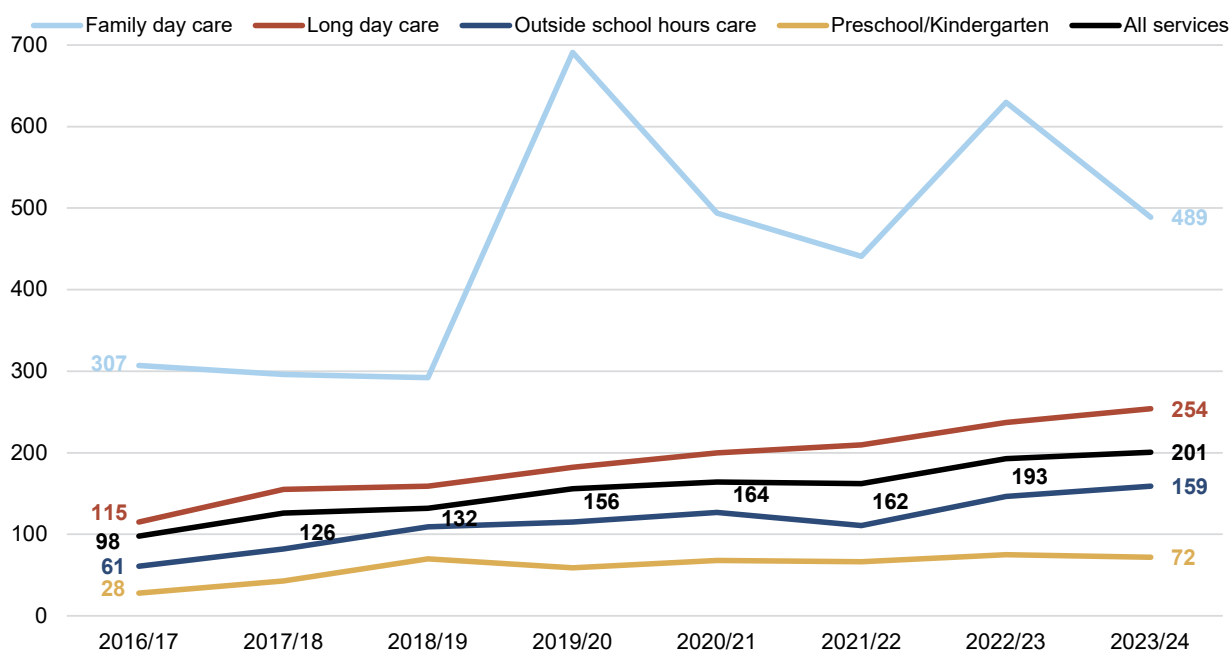
A 'confirmed breach' occurs when a state or territory regulatory authority finds that relevant legislation, regulations or conditions at a children's education and care service have not been adhered to, with the situation then being required to be rectified.

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 and the same service can be the subject of several confirmed breaches.

Figure 1.7 shows that in 2023/24 there was a rate of 201 confirmed breaches per 100 approved services, up from a rate of 193 in 2022/23.

Year on year fluctuations in rates of confirmed breaches for family day care services are likely the result of targeted compliance and monitoring activities undertaken by state and territory regulatory authorities.

Figure 1.7: Rate of confirmed breaches⁵



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

Figure 1.8 shows that 47% of approved services had one or more confirmed breaches in 2023/24, with more than half (57%) of long day care services having one or more.

Figure 1.8: Proportion of services with one or more confirmed breaches

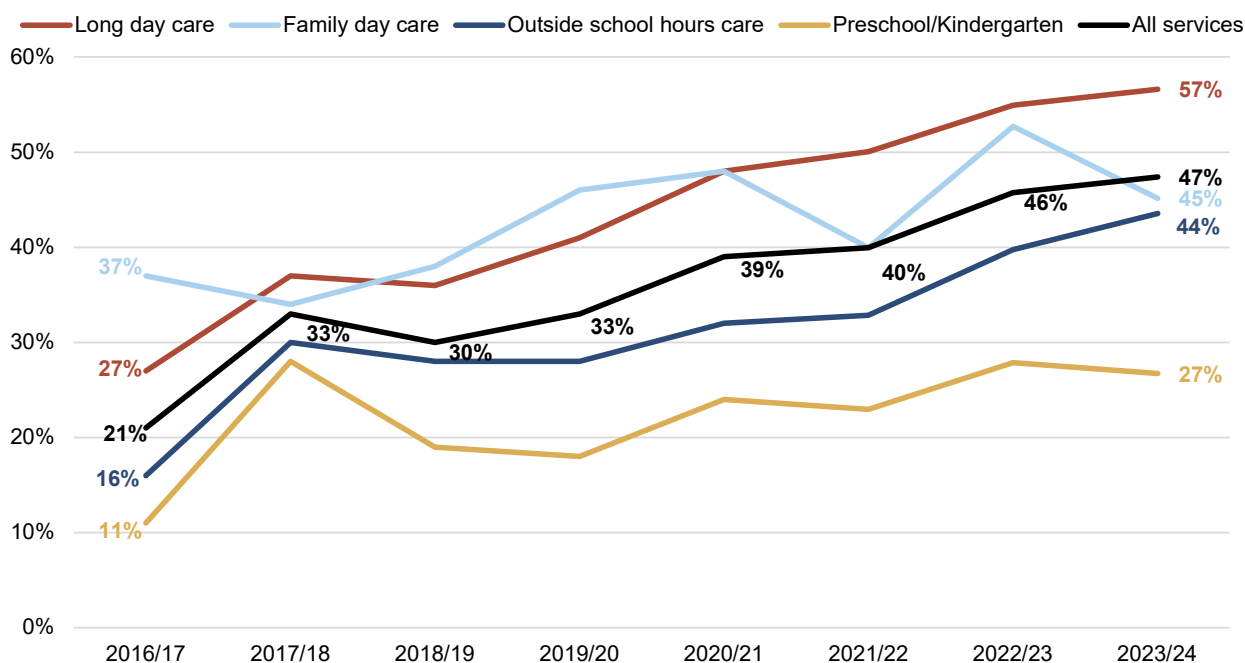


Table 1.3 shows that services with higher quality ratings are consistently less likely to have confirmed breaches than those with lower quality ratings. In 2023/24, services rated Exceeding NQS had a rate of 96 confirmed breaches per 100 approved services, compared to a rate of 192 for services rated Meeting NQS, and a rate of 495 for services rated Working Towards NQS.

Table 1.3: Rate of confirmed breaches by overall quality rating

Rating (at end of financial year)	Rate per 100 approved services						
	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Working Towards NQS	225	227	333	388	327	478	495
Meeting NQS	108	119	118	142	160	179	192
Exceeding NQS	64	71	70	88	91	92	96
All services (including unrated)	125	132	156	164	162	193	201

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

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

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

The seven most frequently breached sections of the National Law account for more than 80% of all breaches in 2023/24.

Table 1.4: Most frequently breached sections of the National Law

Section	Offence	% of all confirmed breaches of the National Law							
		16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23	2023/24
167	Failure to protect children from harm and hazards	30%	29%	28%	29%	29%	31%	33%	29%
165	Inadequate supervision of children	16%	21%	20%	19%	19%	22%	22%	24%
174	Failure to notify certain information to the regulatory authority	10%	9%	8%	7%	9%	9%	8%	7%
172	Failure to display prescribed information	7%	7%	6%	6%	10%	9%	7%	7%
166	Use of inappropriate discipline	3%	3%	5%	5%	5%	6%	6%	7%
169	Failure in relation to staffing arrangements	5%	5%	7%	6%	4%	4%	4%	5%
51	Failure to comply with the conditions on service approval	4%	3%	3%	3%	3%	2%	2%	4%

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

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

Issues that may lead to confirmed breaches include:

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

The eight most frequently breached regulations of the National Regulations account for almost half of all breaches in 2023/24.

Regulation 84C was introduced into the National Regulations as part of a suite of changes stemming from the [2019 NQF Review](#).

Table 1.5: Most frequently breached regulations of the National Regulations

Regulation	Requirement	% of all confirmed breaches of the National Regulations							
		16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24
97	Emergency and evacuation procedures	7%	10%	11%	13%	13%	13%	13%	13%
103	Premises, furniture and equipment to be safe, clean and in good repair	11%	10%	9%	9%	10%	12%	13%	12%
170	Policies and procedures to be followed	5%	5%	5%	5%	6%	8%	7%	7%
84C	Risk assessment for purposes of sleep and rest policies and procedures	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	4%
155	Interactions with children	2%	1%	2%	2%	1%	2%	2%	3%
77	Health, hygiene and safe food practices	4%	2%	2%	2%	1%	2%	2%	3%
173	Prescribed information to be displayed	5%	5%	5%	4%	3%	4%	4%	3%
145	Staff record	2%	1%	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%	3%

SERVICE VISITS

As part of the quarterly [NQF Snapshot](#), ACECQA publishes the total number of quality assessment and rating visits compared to all other visits undertaken by state and territory regulatory authorities. 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 and confirmed breaches, 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 visits than assessment and rating visits, emphasising the significant amount of regulatory work that occurs outside of quality assessment and rating.

2



EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM AND PRACTICE

OVERVIEW

High quality early education and care improves children’s wellbeing and their cognitive, physical, social and emotional outcomes. These benefits are most prominent among vulnerable groups, such as children experiencing economic disadvantage or disability, and children from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.^{6,7}

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

6 OECD (2020), *Early Childhood Education: Equity, Quality, and Transitions: Report for the G20 Education Working Group*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

7 OECD (2021), *Measuring What Matters for Child Well-being and Policies*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM AND PRACTICE QUALITY RATINGS

Figure 2.1 shows the performance of approved services against Quality Area 1 over the last decade. As at 30 June 2024, 93% of services with a published quality rating achieved Meeting NQS or above, the highest proportion since the introduction of the NQF in 2012.

Figure 2.1: Proportion of services with a published quality rating achieving Meeting NQS or above for educational program and practice

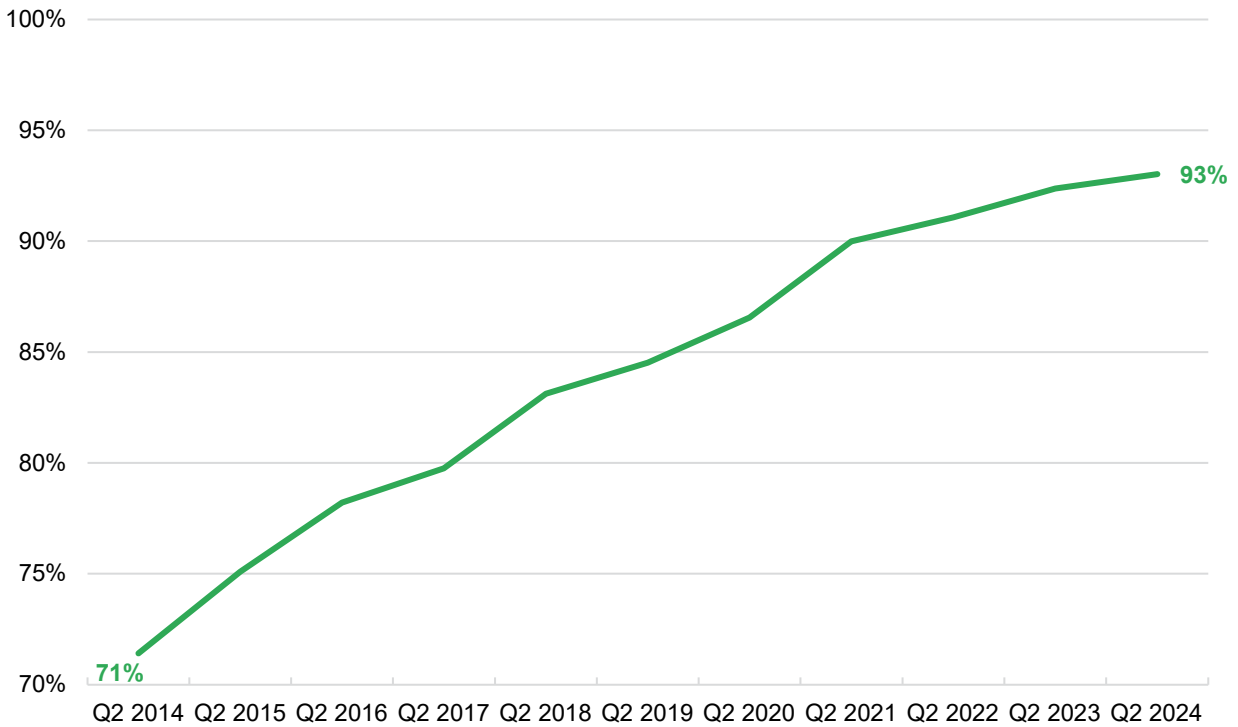


Figure 2.2 shows that preschools/kindergartens continue to have the highest proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above for Quality Area 1, with long day care and outside school hours care services also above 90%.

For the first time, more than three-quarters (76%) of family day care services are rated Meeting NQS or above, up from half (50%) six years ago.

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

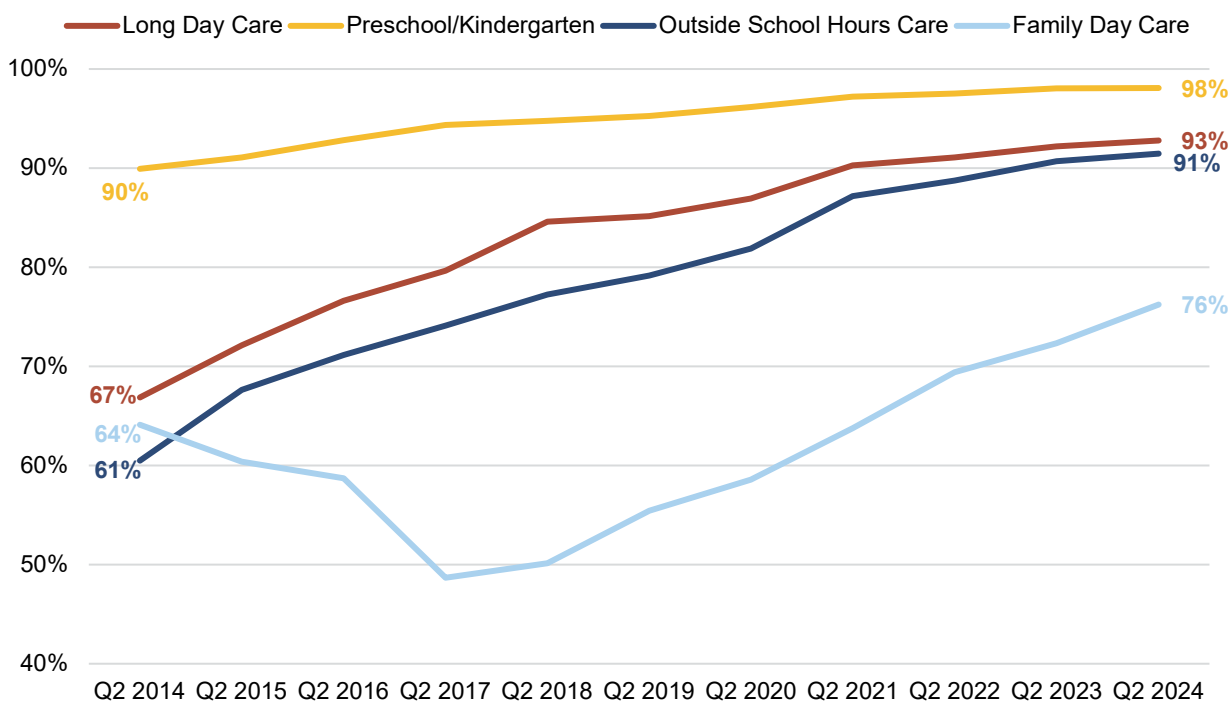
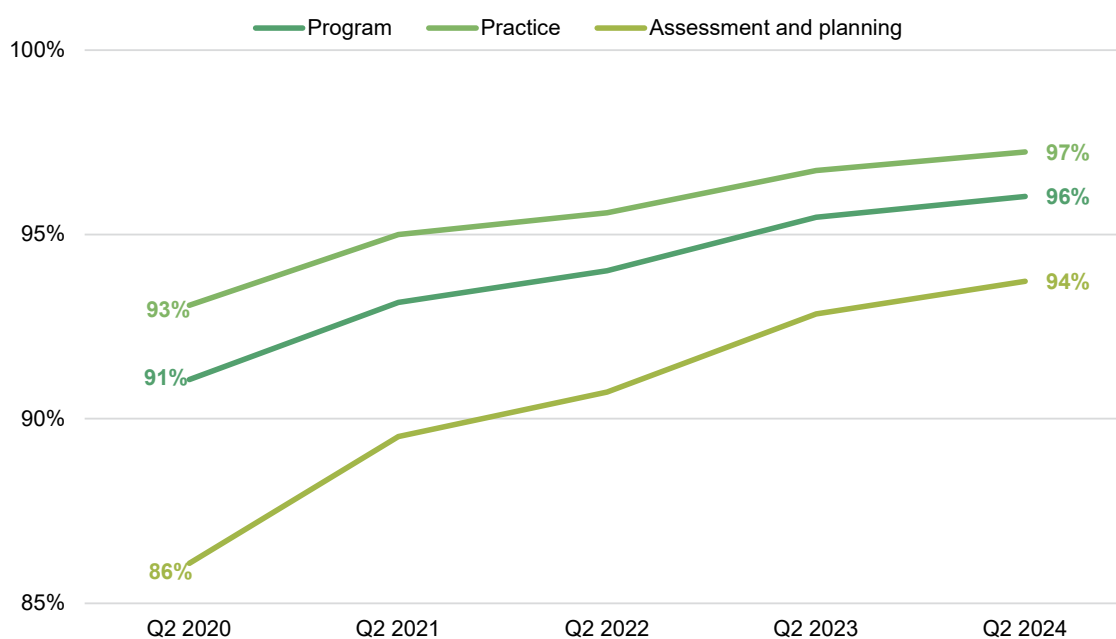


Figure 2.3 shows year-on-year improvement in approved services' performance across all three standards within Quality Area 1.

As at 30 June 2024, 97% of services were rated Meeting NQS or above for their educational practice, 96% for their educational program, and 94% for their educational assessment and planning.

State and territory regulatory authorities and ACECQA work together to produce information and resources to support services in their commitment to continuous quality improvement, several focused upon [Quality Area 1](#).

Figure 2.3: Proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above for educational program, practice, and assessment and planning



RELATIONSHIPS WITH CHILDREN, PROFESSIONALISM AND EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Quality Area 5 of the National Quality Standard focuses on relationships with children, including between educators and children, and among children themselves. Quality Area 4 focuses on staffing arrangements, including professionalism of educators and Quality Area 7 focuses on governance and leadership, including the role of a service’s educational leader.

The correlation analysis in **Figure 2.4** confirms the important relationship between these quality areas and Quality Area 1.

Green cells indicate a higher level of correlation between specified quality areas and standards, yellow and orange cells indicate moderate levels of correlation, while red cells indicate relatively low levels of correlation.

In addition to the expected high degree of correlation between performance at the quality area level and performance against the standards that make up that quality area (indicated by unshaded cells), there is a high degree of correlation between educational program and practice (Quality Area 1), and leadership (Standard 7.2). This demonstrates the critical role of educational leadership in ensuring high quality educational programs.

There is also a high degree of correlation between relationships with children (Quality Area 5) and educational practice (Standard 1.2), program (Standard 1.1) and professionalism (Standard 4.2). This demonstrates the importance of positive relationships with children, as well as the importance of high quality practice, program and professionalism in fostering and maintaining these relationships.

Figure 2.4: Correlation analysis matrix⁸ (quality areas to standards), as at 30 June 2024

	QA1	QA2	QA3	QA4	QA5	QA6	QA7
Standard 1.1	0.87	0.62	0.65	0.68	0.73	0.72	0.67
Standard 1.2	0.89	0.61	0.65	0.69	0.75	0.72	0.65
Standard 1.3	0.92	0.63	0.64	0.68	0.71	0.71	0.71
Standard 2.1	0.67	0.86	0.64	0.63	0.63	0.62	0.66
Standard 2.2	0.64	0.92	0.64	0.62	0.61	0.60	0.67
Standard 3.1	0.63	0.62	0.92	0.65	0.66	0.64	0.61
Standard 3.2	0.67	0.60	0.85	0.64	0.67	0.68	0.61
Standard 4.1	0.67	0.60	0.63	0.92	0.70	0.69	0.65
Standard 4.2	0.69	0.58	0.65	0.90	0.73	0.72	0.65
Standard 5.1	0.72	0.59	0.65	0.70	0.95	0.71	0.62
Standard 5.2	0.71	0.58	0.65	0.70	0.93	0.72	0.62
Standard 6.1	0.67	0.56	0.62	0.66	0.70	0.94	0.64
Standard 6.2	0.68	0.56	0.62	0.66	0.69	0.92	0.63
Standard 7.1	0.68	0.68	0.63	0.67	0.64	0.67	0.91
Standard 7.2	0.73	0.64	0.63	0.68	0.64	0.69	0.92

⁸ Higher numbers indicate higher levels of correlation between individual quality areas and standards.

3



CHILDREN FROM VULNERABLE AND DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS

OVERVIEW

Children from disadvantaged backgrounds reap the greatest benefit from quality early education and care.⁹ In long term research from the United States, disadvantaged children who were randomised to receive early education in the 1960s were, by age 40, significantly more likely to have finished high school, had higher median earnings and were less likely to have been in contact with the criminal justice system than their peers in the control group.¹⁰ By age 50, the children of the original participants experienced better health and educational outcomes than children of the control group.¹¹

Australian researchers from the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) and the Queensland Brain Institute recently found that children who attended a service rated Exceeding NQS had consistently lower rates of developmental vulnerability. The analysis also looked at how service ratings in each quality area predicted rates of developmental vulnerability in each Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) domain. Children who attended services rated as Exceeding NQS in Quality Areas 1 (Educational program and practice), 3 (Physical environment) and 5 (Relationships with children) were consistently less likely to be developmentally vulnerable.¹²

In this chapter, we examine the relationship between overall service quality ratings and SEIFA (Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas).¹³ SEIFA is a widely used area-level marker of relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage.

9 Barnett, W. S. (2008). *Preschool education and its lasting effects: Research and policy implications*. Boulder and Tempe: Education and the Public Interest Center & Education Policy Research Unit. Retrieved 24 June 2024 from <http://epicpolicy.org/publication/preschooleducation>

10 Schweinhart L. J., Montie J., Xiang Z., Barnett W. S., Belfield C. R., Nores M. (2005). *Lifetime effects: The High/Scope Perry Preschool study through age 40*. High/Scope Press.

11 Garca, J. L., Heckman, J. J., Leaf, D. E., & Prados, M. J. (2020). Quantifying the Life-Cycle Benefits of an Influential Early-Childhood Program. *The journal of political economy*, 128(7), 2502–2541.

12 Rankin, P., Staton, S., Jones, A., Potia, A. H., Houen, S., Healey, B., & Thorpe, K. (2024). *Linking quality and child development in early childhood education and care: Technical report*. Australian Education Research Organisation. <https://www.edresearch.edu.au/summaries-explainers/research-summaries/linking-quality-and-child-development-early-childhood-education-and-care>

13 The Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) indexes are based on information from the five-yearly Census. 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 (ISRAD) classification. Some services are excluded from SEIFA classifications because of poor quality address matching.

QUALITY RATINGS BY SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF AREAS

Figure 3.1 shows the overall quality rating of services in the most disadvantaged and advantaged areas. While the proportion of services in the most disadvantaged areas rated Meeting NQS or above has increased steadily since 2017, there remains a persistent and widening gap when compared to the proportion of services in the most advantaged areas.

There is a similar gap in terms of services rated Exceeding NQS or above. As at 30 June 2024, 20% of services in the most disadvantaged areas were rated Exceeding NQS or above, compared with 28% of services in the most advantaged areas.

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

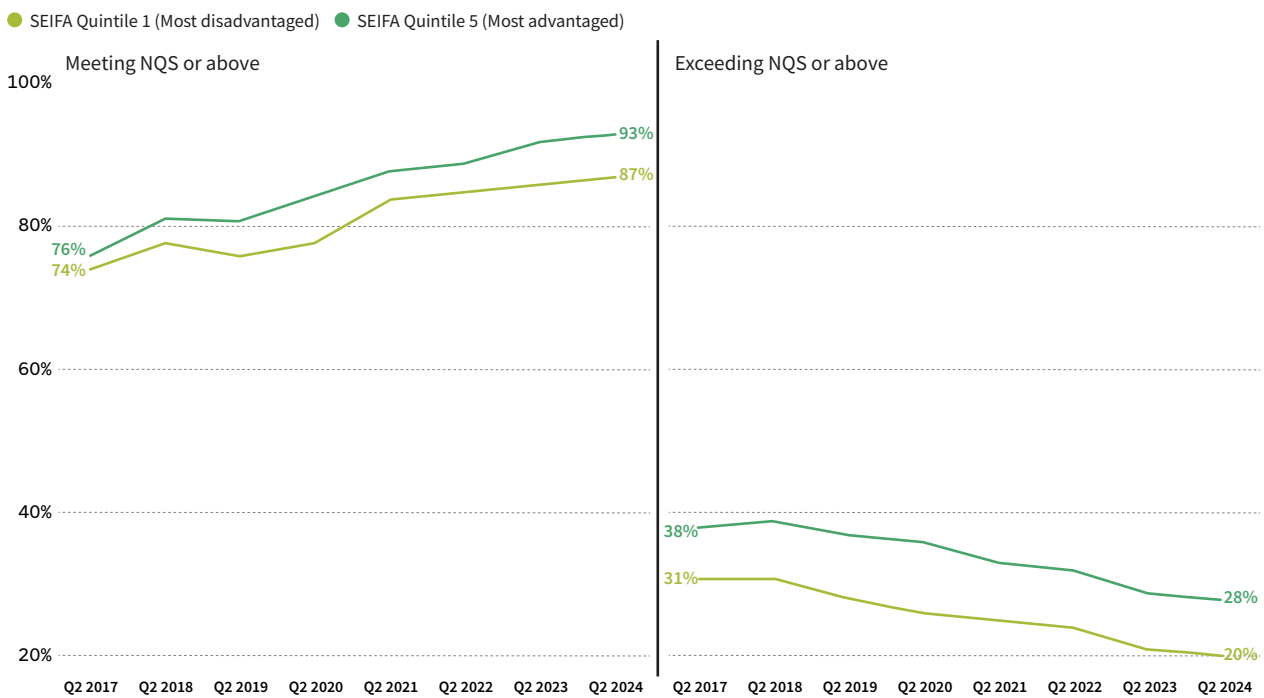
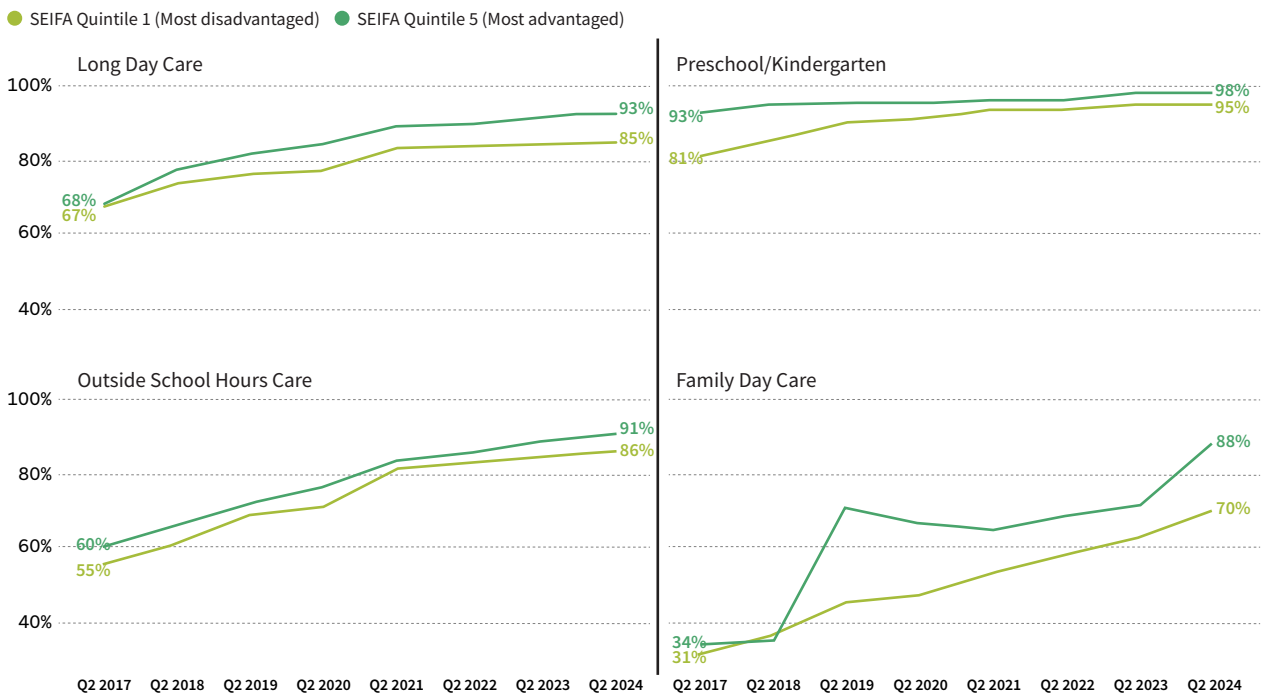


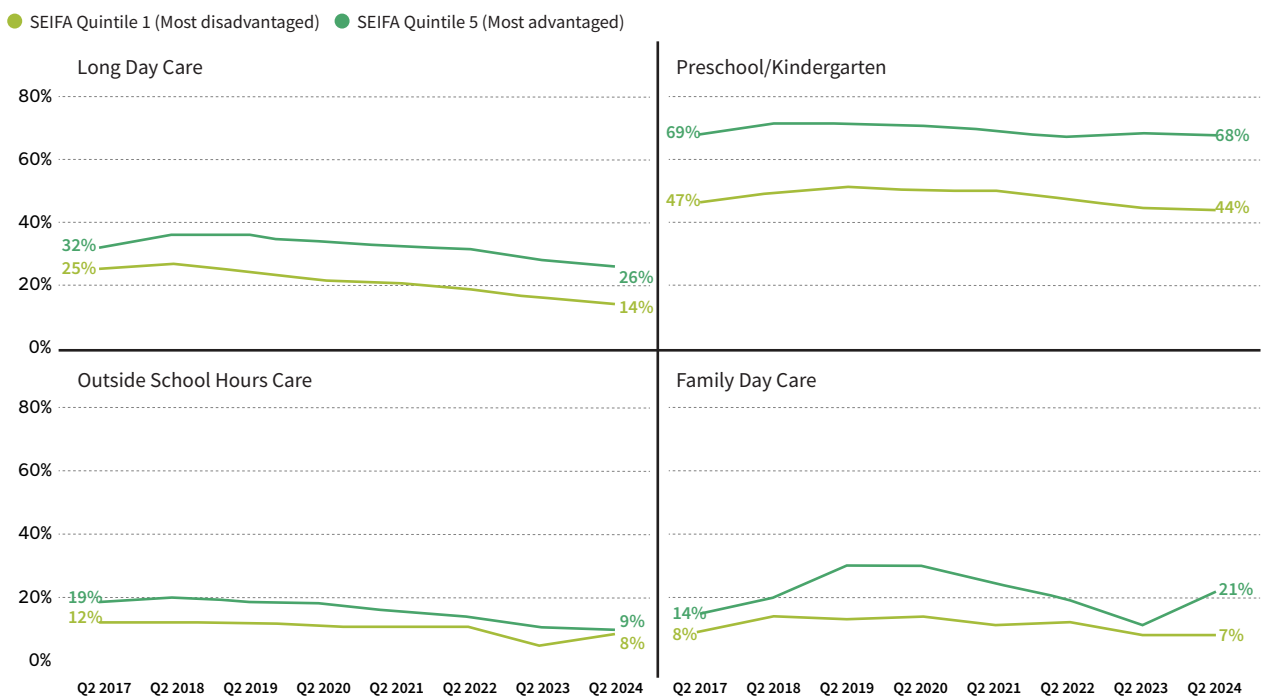
Figure 3.2 shows the overall quality ratings of services in the most disadvantaged and advantaged areas by service type. While the size of the gap varies, from one percentage point for outside school hours care services rated Exceeding NQS or above to 24 percentage points for preschools/kindergartens rated Exceeding NQS or above, it exists for all four service types at both Meeting NQS and above, and Exceeding NQS and above.

Figure 3.2: Comparison of overall quality ratings between the most disadvantaged and most advantaged areas by service type

Meeting NQS or above



Exceeding NQS or above



While services in the most disadvantaged areas are less likely to be rated Exceeding NQS, several are achieving exceptional quality, including those that have applied for and been awarded the Excellent rating. Two examples are below

Bubup Wilam Aboriginal Child and Family Centre Inc

Bubup Wilam is an Aboriginal Community Controlled service based in Melbourne, Victoria. ACECQA awarded Bubup Wilam the Excellent rating in November 2023.

Examples of exceptional practice at the service include:

- supporting children's transition to school by strengthening their sense of identity and belonging through the Possum Skin Project. In the project, children collaboratively design an artwork to portray their identity, which is burned onto a possum skin pelt by an adult and given to the children to take with them to school.
- employing an Aboriginal general practitioner and other allied health professionals, such as an occupational therapist and mental health counselor, to conduct screenings and interventions to support children's health and wellbeing.
- developing the Bubup Wilam Early Years Curriculum Framework, which sits alongside the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF), to bring a rich and culturally strong approach to the children's learning and outcomes.

KU Macquarie Fields

KU Macquarie Fields in New South Wales applied for and was granted the Excellent rating by ACECQA in August 2022.

Examples of exceptional practice at the service include:

- creating Individual Education Plans in consultation with each family to co-design a shared vision for the growth and development of each child. Learning trajectories and shared goals are established and meetings with internal and external specialists and inclusion agencies are scheduled to support each child's development, learning and wellbeing.
- embedding the Marte Meo (On One's Own Strength) approach to enable educators and families to notice and analyse children's strengths and communication cues. The service uses video as a tool to strengthen partnerships and relationships with families by offering strength-based video clips to showcase children's competence and engagement within the physical learning environment.
- established a Healthy Eating program in response to a community-wide need. The program shares information and includes family cooking lessons.
- hosting frequent pedagogy meetings to support dialogue around practice, ethical decision making, responsive engagement with families, and prospective professional development opportunities.

4



WORKFORCE

OVERVIEW

The [Alice Springs \(Mparntwe\) Education Declaration](#) acknowledges that the early years provide the foundation for learning in school and beyond.

Building on this, [Shaping Our Future](#), the national children’s education and care workforce strategy (2022-2031), represents a long-term commitment to the workforce by Australian governments and sector stakeholders.

The 21 nationally agreed actions in the strategy are being monitored via an [online dashboard](#), with the strategy’s overarching vision being for the children’s education and care sector to have a sustainable, high-quality workforce of teachers and educators that is highly respected and valued by the broader community.

In mid-2024, the ACECQA Board made a number of [determinations](#) as part of actions FA5-1 (Review staffing and qualification requirements under the NQF, with a focus on early childhood teachers and outside school hours care educators), and FA5-2 (Review requirements for early childhood teaching programs under the NQF) of the strategy.

The sector workforce has been the significant focus of several recent reviews, including Jobs and Skills Australia’s [capacity study](#), the Productivity Commission’s [inquiry](#), and the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership’s (AITSL’s) [in focus report](#) as part of the Australian Teacher Workforce Data (ATWD) initiative.

While a skilled and supported workforce is integral to the provision of children’s education and care across all aspects of the National Quality Standard, Quality Area 4 (Staffing arrangements) specifically focuses upon staffing.

STAFFING ARRANGEMENTS QUALITY RATINGS

Figure 4.1 shows the performance of approved services against Quality Area 4 over the last decade. As at 30 June 2024, 97% of services with a published quality rating achieved Meeting NQS or above, the highest proportion since the introduction of the NQF in 2012.

Figure 4.1: Proportion of services with a published quality rating achieving Meeting NQS or above for staffing arrangements

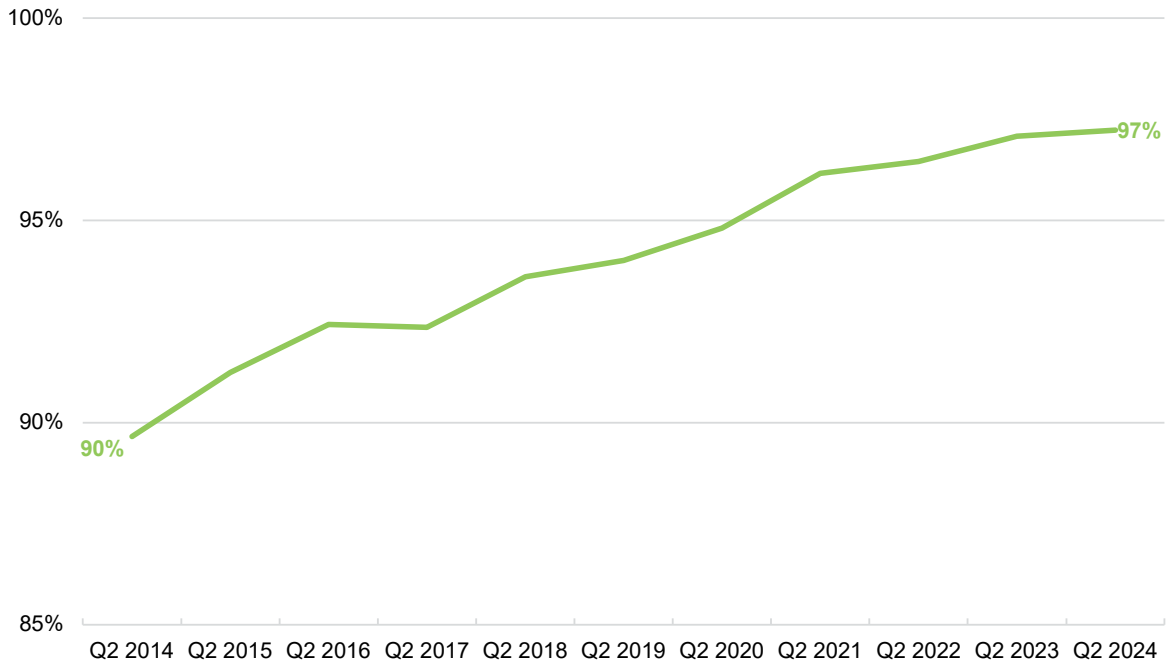
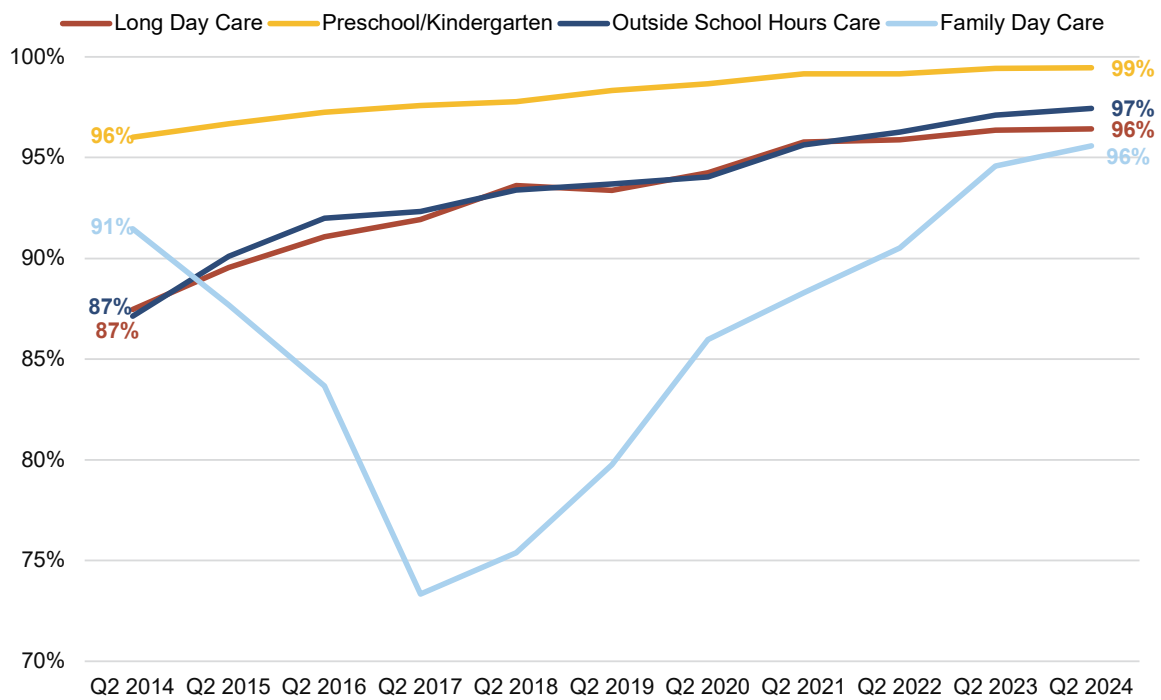


Figure 4.2 shows that preschools/kindergartens continue to have the highest proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above for Quality Area 4, closely followed by outside school hours care, long day care and family day care services.

For the first time, more than 95% of family day care services are rated Meeting NQS or above, up from three-quarters (75%) six years ago.

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



STAFFING WAIVERS

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

Approved providers can apply for a service waiver, where an issue is likely to be ongoing, or a temporary waiver, where the issue can be addressed within 12 months.

The vast majority of staffing waivers are temporary arrangements to help with short term staffing challenges, particularly in relation to early childhood teacher staffing requirements. For example, the early childhood teacher has left the service and the approved provider is actively recruiting to the role. They typically do not relate to, or impact upon, educator-to-child ratio requirements.

Figure 4.3 shows that, as at 30 June 2024, 9.2% of services held a staffing waiver. Previous increases in the proportion of services with staffing waivers reflect the short-term difficulties some providers had in meeting new staffing requirements that came into effect on 1 January 2014 and 1 January 2016.

The recent high proportions follow the introduction of new staffing requirements on 1 January 2020, the impact of COVID-19, as well as persistent workforce challenges, particularly in relation to early childhood teachers.

Figure 4.3: Proportion of services with a staffing waiver¹⁴



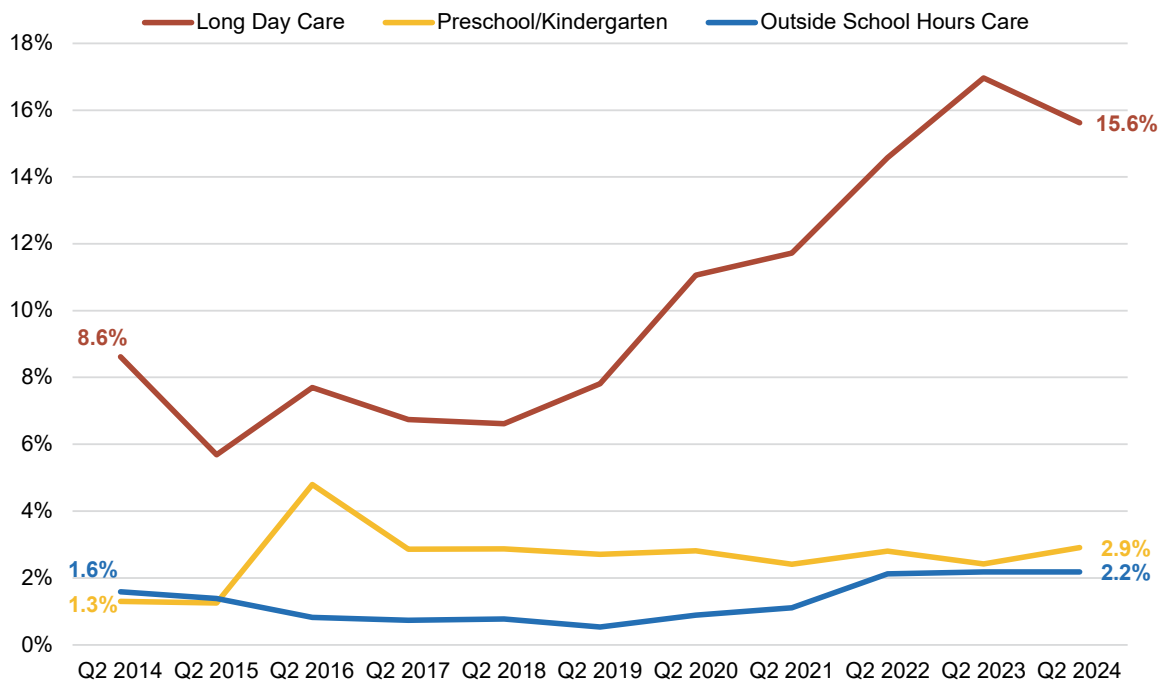
¹⁴ Description of the [2014 requirements](#), [2016 requirements](#) and [2020 requirements](#).

Figure 4.4 shows the proportion of staffing waivers for each of the three types of centre-based service.

As at 30 June 2024, 15.6% of long day care services held a staffing waiver, compared with 2.9% of preschools/kindergartens and 2.2% of outside school hours care services.

Additional detail regarding trends in staffing waivers is available as part of ACECQA's [NQF Online Snapshot](#).

Figure 4.4: Proportion of services with a staffing waiver, by centre-based service type



VOCATIONAL EDUCATION DATA

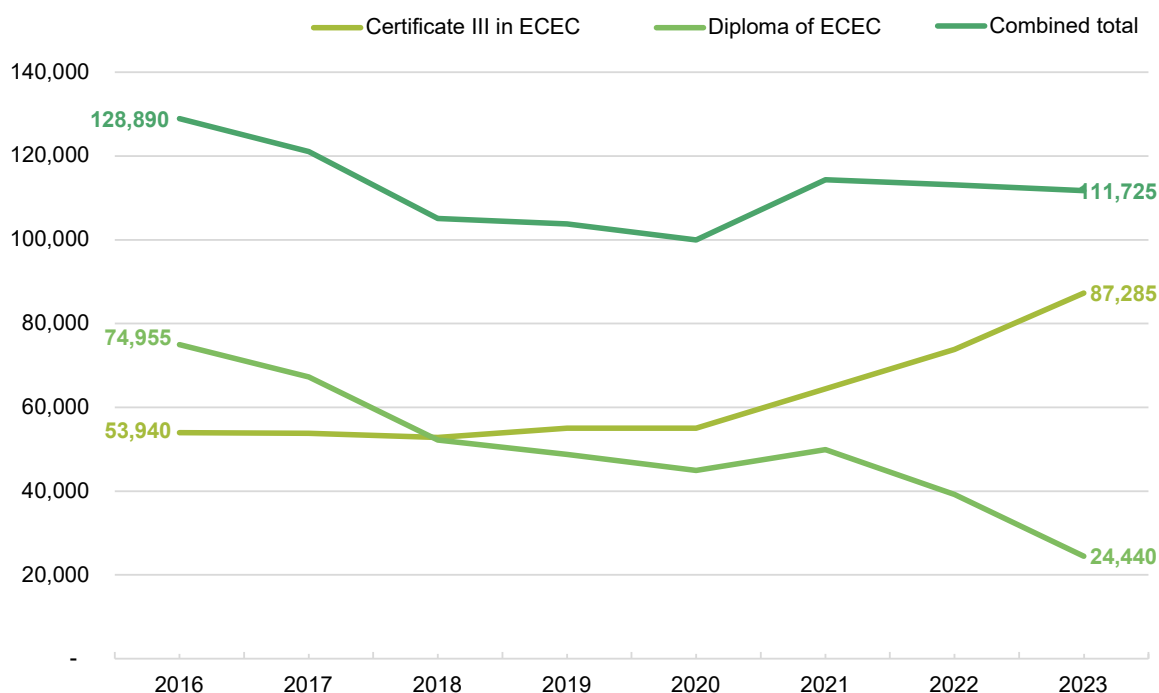
The majority of educators in the children’s education and care sector hold vocational education and training (VET) level qualifications, typically at a certificate III or diploma level. More than 300 Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) are approved by the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA)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

Figure 4.5 shows the total enrolments in the two major early childhood VET courses between 2016 and 2023. The number of enrolments in the Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) has remained above 50,000, increasing to a high of over 87,000 in 2023.

In contrast, the number of enrolments in the Diploma of ECEC has decreased from just under 75,000 in 2016 to less than 25,000 in 2023. The combined total enrolments across the two qualifications was almost 112,000 in 2023, slightly down on 2022 numbers.

The current entry requirement for the Diploma of ECEC is having a significant impact on the number of people who are eligible to apply to undertake the qualification. In June 2024, [HumanAbility](#), the Jobs and Skills Council for children’s education and care, commenced a project seeking to amend the Diploma entry requirements to recognise previous versions of the Certificate III in ECEC and/or similar qualifications combined with workforce experience. The project will also develop tools to support two recognition pathways into the Diploma.

Figure 4.5: Vocational education enrolment numbers¹⁵

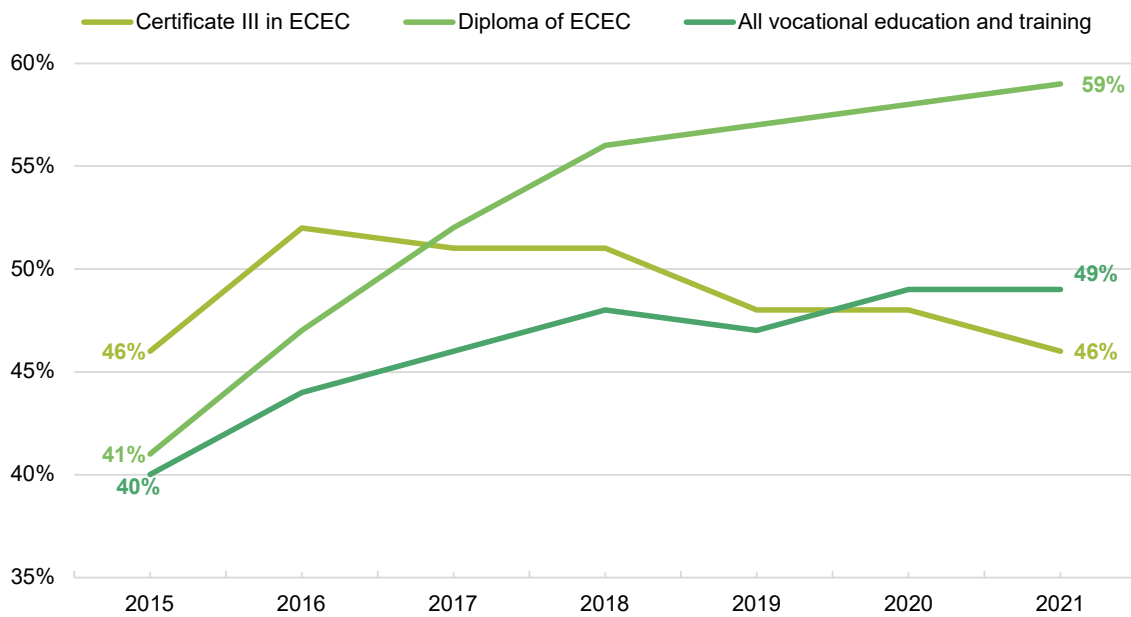


¹⁵ [NCVER, Total VET students and courses](#) – historical data is refreshed each year.

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

Figure 4.6 shows completion rates for students undertaking the Diploma of ECEC are forecast to grow year on year. Almost three-fifths (59%) of students who enrolled in the Diploma of ECEC are expected to complete their qualification.

Figure 4.6: Vocational education completion rates¹⁶



¹⁶ NCVER, customised unpublished completion rates as of October 2023. 2017–2018 completion rates are actual (observed), while 2019–2021 completions rates are projected.

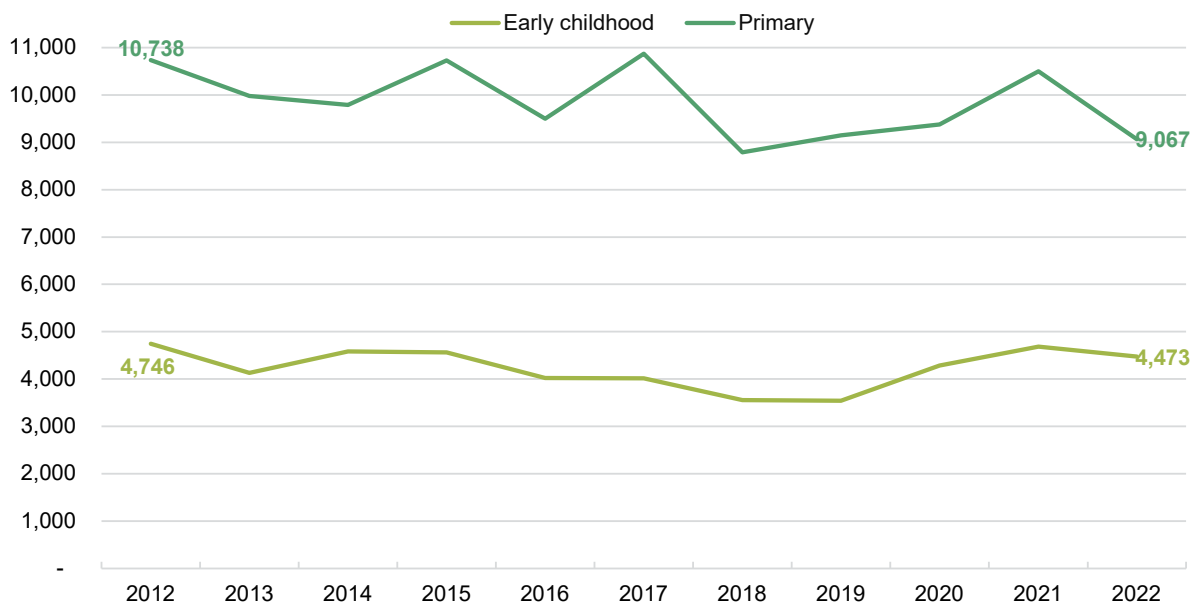
HIGHER EDUCATION DATA

Figure 4.7 shows the number of students commencing early childhood and primary initial teacher training degrees at Australian higher education institutions for the decade between 2012 to 2022.

Commencement numbers for early childhood initial teacher training degrees have fluctuated over the years, from a high of 4,746 in 2012, to a low of 3,541 in 2019, to 4,473 in 2022.

Commencement numbers for primary initial teacher training degrees have also fluctuated, from a high of 10,868 in 2017, to a low of 8,789 in 2018, to 9,067 in 2022.

Figure 4.7: Early childhood and primary initial teacher training degree commencement numbers¹⁷



¹⁷ Source: Australian Government, Higher Education Statistics. Courses are classified by individual higher education institutes, however generally birth to five and birth to eight focused programs are considered 'early childhood' while birth to twelve programs are typically, but not exclusively, considered 'primary'.

Figure 4.8 shows the proportion of early childhood teaching programs by age focus approved by ACECQA since the NQF was established in 2012.

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

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

ACECQA also publishes quarterly data detailing applications received from individuals for NQF qualification approval, as well as migration skills assessment in line with ACECQA’s role as a skills assessing authority as part of Australia’s skilled migration program.

Figure 4.8: Age focus of early childhood teaching programs approved by ACECQA

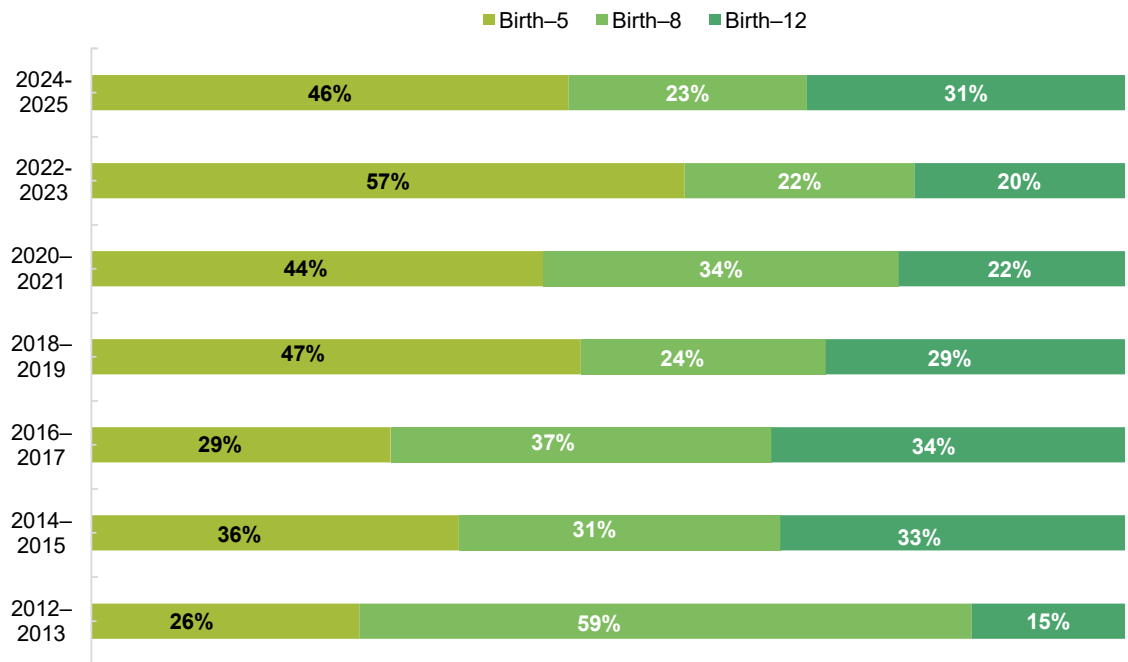
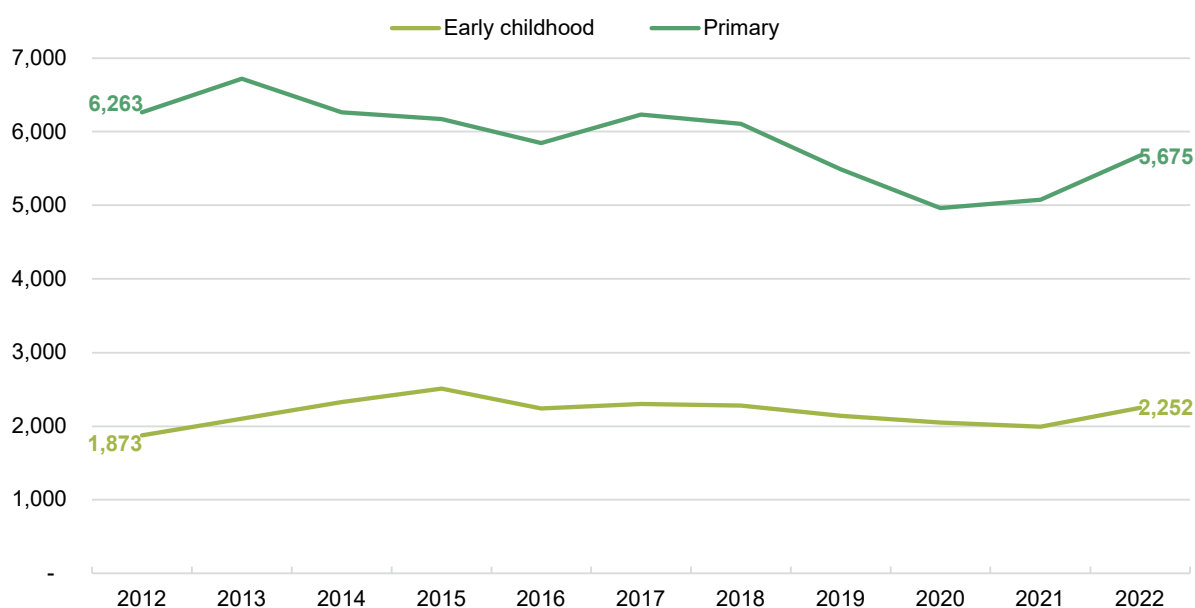


Figure 4.9 shows the number of students completing early childhood and primary initial teacher training degrees at Australian higher education institutes from 2012 to 2022.

Completion numbers for early childhood initial teacher training degrees have remained relatively steady over the years, with a high of 2,509 in 2015, a low of 1,873 in 2012, and a total of 2,252 in 2022.

Completion numbers for primary teaching degrees have fluctuated more, from a high of 6,719 in 2013, to a low of 4,965 in 2020, to 5,675 in 2022.

Figure 4.9: Early childhood and primary initial teacher training degree completion numbers¹⁸

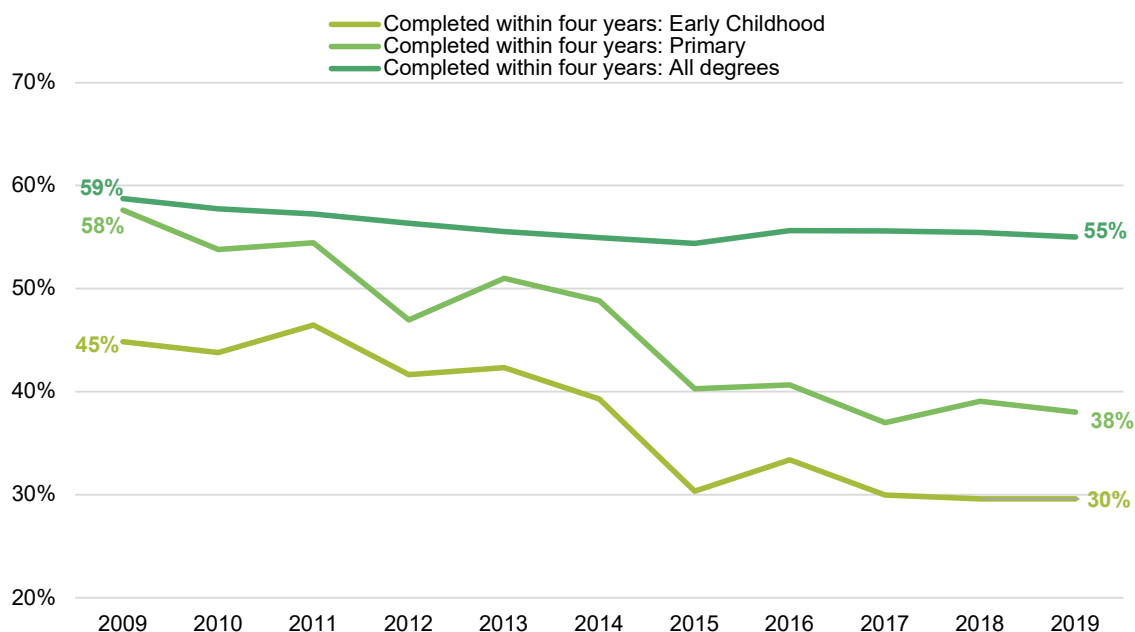


18 Source: Australian Government, Higher Education Statistics. Courses are classified by individual higher education institutes, however generally birth to five and birth to eight focused programs are considered 'early childhood' while birth to twelve programs are typically, but not exclusively, considered 'primary'.

Figure 4.10 shows that less than one third (30%) of early childhood initial teacher education students who commenced their studies in 2019 completed their studies within four years, a similar proportion to previous recent years. This may in part be due to an increased proportion of students completing their studies part-time while they are employed in the sector, as part of the ‘actively working towards’ provisions in the National Regulations.¹⁹

The four-year completion rate for both early childhood and primary initial teacher training degrees continues to be lower than the completion rate for all higher education degrees.

Figure 4.10: Early childhood and primary initial teacher training degree four-year completion rates²⁰

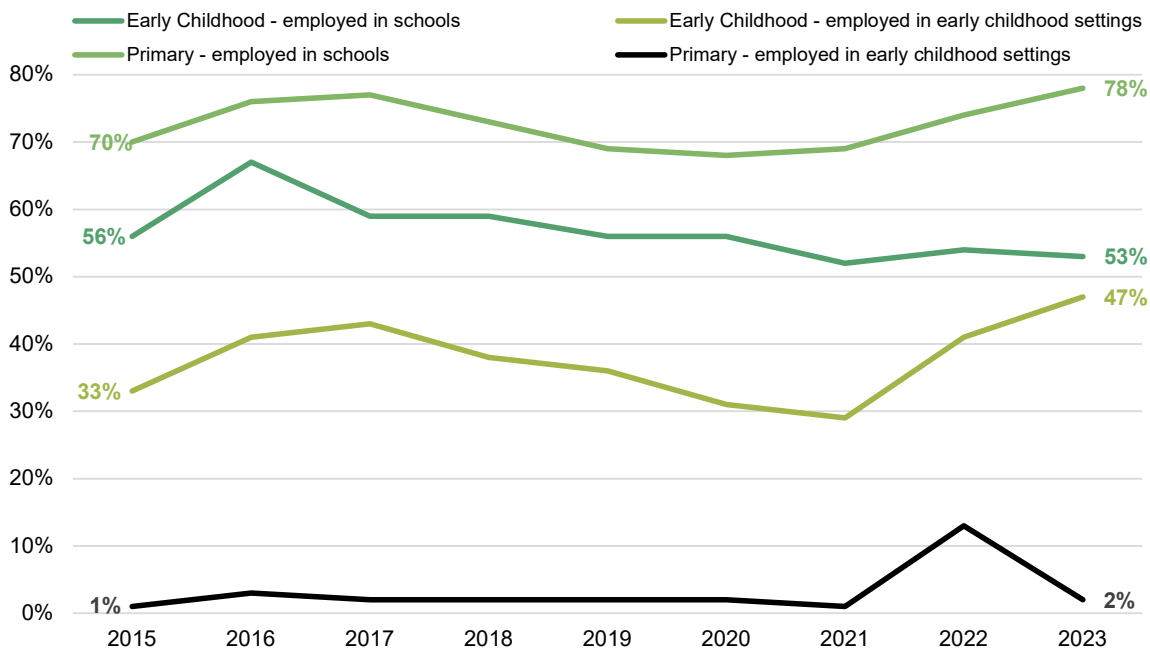


19 Actively working towards (regulation 10) can apply under regulations 126(1) and 127 of the National Regulations.

20 Australian Government, customised data, Commencing ITE students: 4-year completion rates as at September 2024.

Figure 4.11 shows that while the majority (53%) of early childhood graduates continue to seek employment in schools, there was a sizeable uptick between 2021 and 2023 in graduates obtaining employment in early childhood settings.

Figure 4.11 Higher education graduate outcomes²¹



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

5



SERVICE PROVIDER PERCEPTIONS OF THE NQF

OVERVIEW

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

In keeping with ACECQA's function under the National Law to establish consistent, effective and efficient procedures for the operation of the NQF, ACECQA's research focuses on measuring the perceptions of providers of education and care services regarding the administrative requirements of the NQF.

In June 2024, ACECQA invited all approved providers to participate in the seventh survey on this topic. Overall, 2,100²² approved providers responded, equating to a response rate of 34%. Respondents were broadly representative of provider characteristics (including jurisdiction, service type and provider management type), with single service providers moderately underrepresented and medium sized providers (those operating 2-24 services) moderately overrepresented.

²² The denominator for individual questions varies according to whether respondents chose to answer that question.

OVERALL SUPPORT FOR THE NQF

Overall support for the NQF has been above 95% across all seven surveys undertaken by ACECQA.

Table 5.1 shows that overall support for the NQF has remained very steady for the four most recent surveys.

Table 5.1: Overall support for the NQF

	Number of respondents	% of respondents that were supportive of the NQF
2013 survey	2,257	98.1%
2014 survey	2,623	97.9%
2015 survey	1,335	99.3%
2017 survey	2,362	97.1%
2018 survey	2,178	96.8%
2022 survey	1,804	96.9%
2024 survey	1,845	96.7%

OVERALL PERCEPTION OF BURDEN UNDER THE NQF

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

Figure 5.1 shows that the proportion of respondents selecting a rating of very burdensome has slightly decreased in the latest survey, ending a sequence of increases since the 2017 survey.

The proportion of respondents rating their perception of burden between 3-5 also decreased in 2024 compared with 2022.

Figure 5.1: Overall perception of burden under the NQF

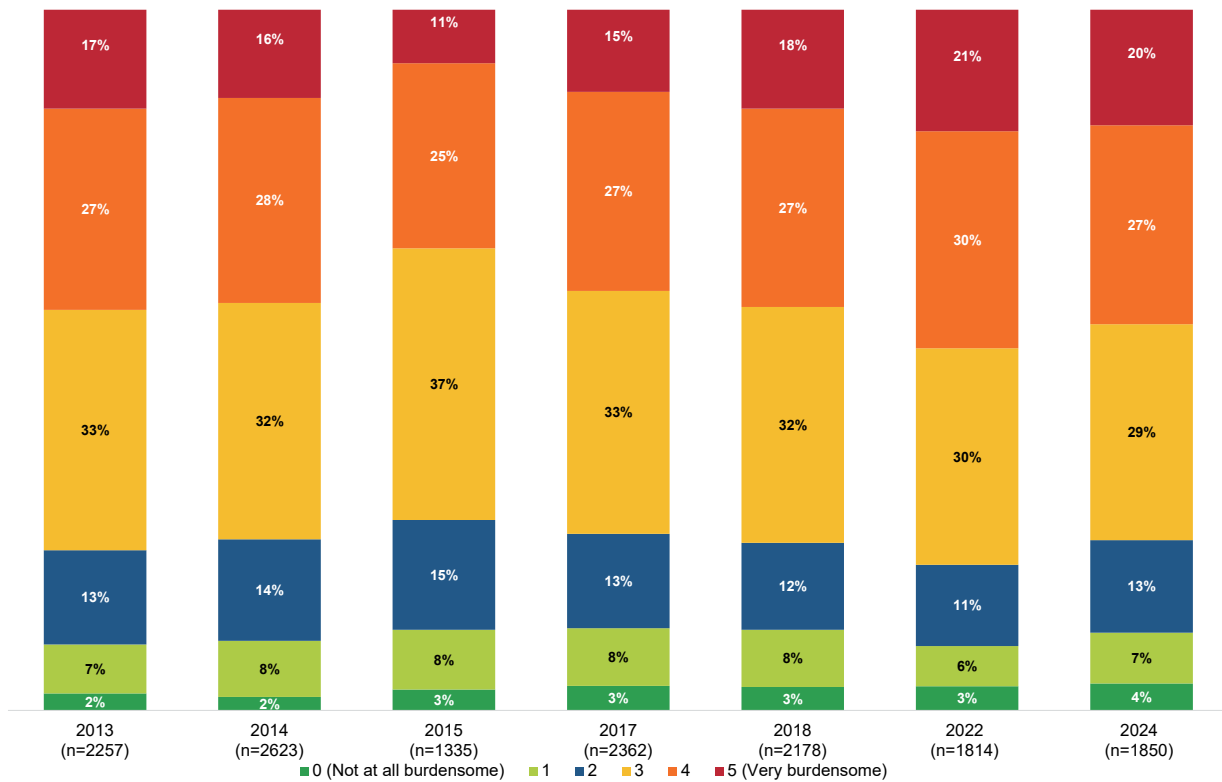


Table 5.2 compares respondents' perceptions by service type and provider size, with a high perception of burden defined as 4 or 5 on the scale from 0 to 5.

The proportion of respondents who reported high overall burden decreased from 50% in 2022 to 47% in 2024.

For the fourth consecutive survey, perceived burden was highest among providers of outside school hours care (51%). Among single service providers, under half (45%) of respondents reported high overall burden, compared with 51% of medium-sized providers and 58% of large providers.

Table 5.2: Respondents with a high perception of burden, by service type and provider size²³

Service type	2017		2018		2022		2024	
	Number of respondents	High perception of burden	Number of respondents	High perception of burden	Number of respondents	High perception of burden	Number of respondents	High perception of burden
OSHC ²⁴	600	46%	558	47%	259	54%	229	51%
LDC ²⁵	1,234	43%	1,210	44%	1,064	50%	1,099	47%
PSK ²⁶	578	44%	695	46%	380	53%	406	46%
FDC ²⁷	250	28%	160	28%	111	37%	116	37%
Total	2,362	42%	2,178	45%	1,814	50%	1,850	47%

Provider size	2017		2018		2022		2024	
	Number of respondents	High perception of burden	Number of respondents	High perception of burden	Number of respondents	High perception of burden	Number of respondents	High perception of burden
Large (25 or more approved services)	45	58%	31	35%	44	64%	40	58%
Medium (2–24 approved services)	507	44%	403	43%	443	56%	443	51%
Small (one approved service)	1,810	41%	1,744	45%	1,327	48%	1,367	45%
Total	2,362	42%	2,178	45%	1814	50%	1,850	47%

²³ High perception of burden = 4 or 5 on a scale of 0-5.

²⁴ Outside school hours care

²⁵ Long Day Care

²⁶ Preschool/Kindergarten

²⁷ Family Care Care

BURDEN ASSOCIATED WITH SPECIFIC ADMINISTRATIVE REQUIREMENTS OF THE NQF

In the 2024 survey, approved providers were again asked about the burden associated with specific requirements of the NQF, with a high perception of burden again defined as 4 or 5 on the scale from 0 to 5.

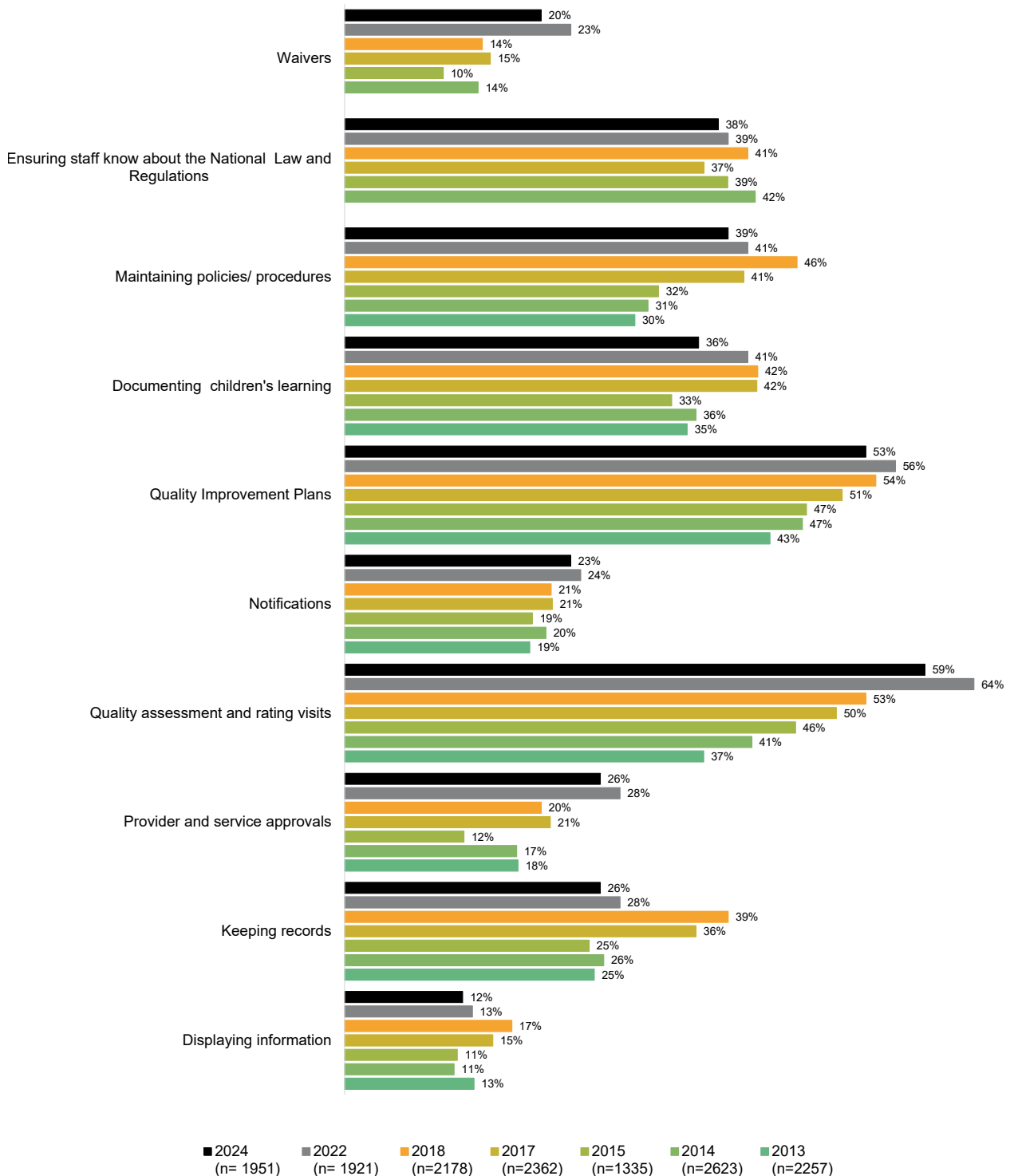
Figure 5.2 shows that across all specified administrative requirements of the NQF, high perceptions of burden have reduced in 2024 from 2022 levels. The largest decreases in perceived burden between the two most recent surveys related to:

- quality assessment and rating visits (-5 percentage points)
- documenting children’s learning (-5 percentage points)
- quality improvement plans (-3 percentage points)
- waivers (-3 percentage points).

While perceived burden has reduced from 2022 levels, possibly as a result of recent support and resources provided to the sector regarding the quality assessment and rating process, quality assessment and rating visits and quality improvement plans continue to be considered highly burdensome, with almost three in five (59%) and over half (53%) of respondents in 2024 viewing them that way. The high perception of burden may be partly driven by service providers feeling that they are continually required to prepare, and be prepared, for a quality assessment and rating visit, and a review of their quality improvement plan.

After peaking in 2018, the perceived burden associated with keeping records and displaying information has returned to among the lowest levels seen over the seven surveys.

Figure 5.2: Proportion of approved providers reporting high perceptions of burden with specified administrative requirements of the NQF²⁸



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

²⁸ Approved providers were not asked about 'ensuring staff know about the National Law and Regulations' or 'waivers' in the 2013 survey.

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

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

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

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

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

More than 1,000 respondents answered the follow-up question in relation to quality assessment and rating visits, and quality improvement plans, with only around a third (34-36%) indicating that they felt their benefit outweighed the associated burden.

Table 5.3: Proportion of providers who considered the benefit of specified NQF administrative requirements outweighed the associated burden²⁹

NQF requirement	2017	2018	2022	2024
Ensuring staff know about the National Law and Regulations (n=734)	71%	70%	67%	67%
Keeping administrative records (n=493)	59%	57%	59%	61%
Maintaining policies and procedures (n=742)	66%	65%	61%	60%
Provider and service approvals (n=511)	55%	53%	54%	56%
Documenting children's learning (n=684)	58%	54%	54%	53%
Notifications to regulatory authorities (n=442)	46%	49%	42%	49%
Waivers (n=390)	39%	49%	36%	41%
Quality Improvement Plans (n=1024)	46%	46%	35%	36%
Quality assessment and rating visits (n=1139)	49%	46%	37%	34%
Displaying information (n=235)	44%	44%	30%	31%

²⁹ The number of respondents differed for each question as providers were only asked this question if they identified the specified requirement as burdensome. The 2024 denominator is shown in brackets.

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

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

- Quality assessment and rating visits – most common reasons were frustration or stress (83%), diverting attention from other activities (78%) and staff hours/time (71%)
- Quality Improvement Plans – most common reasons were staff hours/time (85%) and diverting attention from other activities (76%)
- Maintaining policies and procedures – most common reasons were staff hours/time (90%) and diverting attention from other activities (70%)
- Ensuring staff know about the National Law and Regulations – most common reason was staff hours/time (79%)
- Documenting children’s learning – most common reasons were staff hours/time (89%) and diverting attention from other activities (75%).

EXAMINING PERCEPTIONS OF BURDEN ASSOCIATED WITH QUALITY ASSESSMENT AND RATING VISITS

As noted in **Figure 5.2**, almost three in five (59%) respondents reported quality assessments and rating visits as highly burdensome in this year’s survey.

Table 5.4 compares respondents’ perceptions by service type and provider size.

For the fourth consecutive survey, perceived burden was highest among providers of preschool/ kindergarten (62%), closely followed by outside school hours care and long day care (both 59%).

Levels of perceived burden were similar by provider size in 2024, with it highest for medium-sized providers (62%), followed by large providers (59%) and single service providers (58%).

Table 5.4: Respondents with a high perception of burden associated with quality assessment and rating visits, by service type and provider size³⁰

Service type	2017		2018		2022		2024	
	Number of respondents	High perception of burden	Number of respondents	High perception of burden	Number of respondents	High perception of burden	Number of respondents	High perception of burden
PSK ³¹	578	56%	695	59%	399	68%	422	62%
OSHC ³²	600	52%	558	53%	272	63%	245	59%
LDC ³³	1234	49%	1210	51%	1133	64%	1166	59%
FDC ³⁴	250	36%	160	38%	117	42%	118	45%
Total	2362	50%	2178	53%	1921	64%	1951	59%

Provider size	2017		2018		2022		2024	
	Number of respondents	High perception of burden	Number of respondents	High perception of burden	Number of respondents	High perception of burden	Number of respondents	High perception of burden
Medium (2–24 approved services)	507	53%	403	52%	465	67%	478	62%
Large (25 or more approved services)	45	44%	31	45%	47	57%	41	59%
Small (one approved service)	1810	49%	1744	53%	1409	63%	1432	58%
Total	2362	50%	2178	53%	1921	64%	1951	59%

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

31 Preschool/Kindergarten

32 Outside School Hours Care

33 Long Day Care

34 Family Day Care

CHANGES TO THE NATIONAL QUALITY FRAMEWORK

The 2019 NQF Review recommended changes to the Education and Care Services National Law and National Regulations, as well as additional guidance for the sector to enhance children’s health, safety and wellbeing. Regular reviews of the NQF ensure the regulatory system remains current, achieves its objectives and supports Australia’s approved services to provide high quality education and care.

The main changes that have been implemented relate to the following areas:

- Children’s health and safety
- Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse
- Family day care
- Workforce
- Changes in fees within the NQF system
- Oversight and governance of services and providers.

A summary of the changes is available on the [NQF changes overview](#) page.

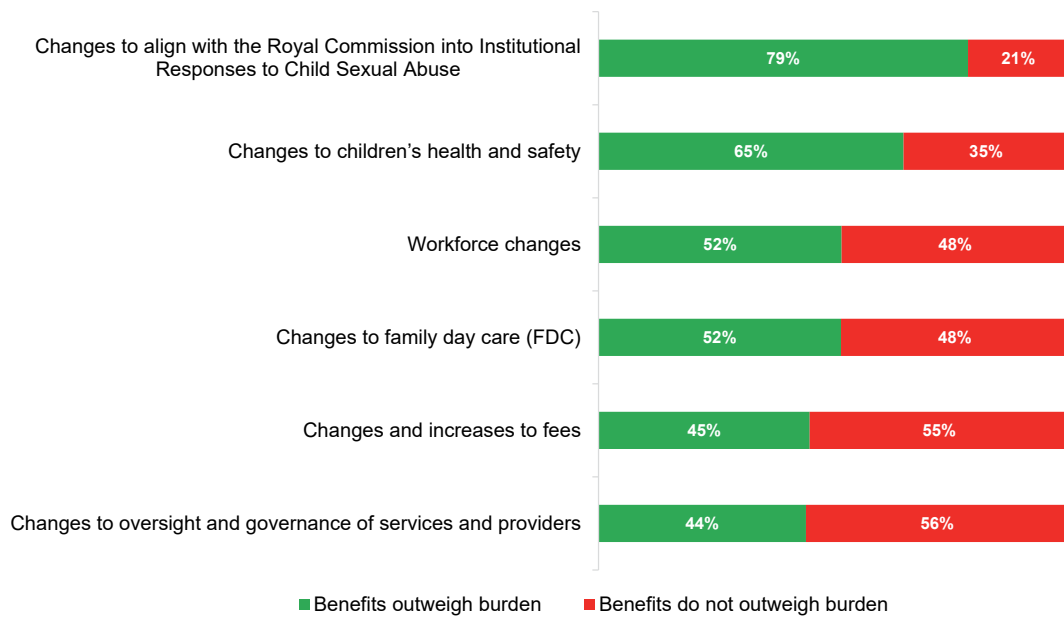
Approaching half (43%) of respondents to the 2024 survey reported that developing/updating policies and procedures to comply with the changes to the NQF was the most burdensome activity associated with the changes.

‘Changes to children’s health and safety’ was selected by the majority (55%) of respondents as contributing most to their perception of burden. No other NQF changes contributed as strongly to perceptions of burden, with changes to oversight and governance of services and providers (43%), changes to align with the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (41%), and workforce changes (36%) being selected as the next most burdensome changes.

As shown in **Figure 5.3**, of those respondents who indicated they found the above changes burdensome, the majority considered these changes more beneficial than burdensome, apart from changes to oversight and governance of services and providers (56% of respondents found these changes more burdensome than beneficial).

Encouragingly, approaching two-thirds (61%) of respondents agreed that, overall, the benefits of the changes arising from the 2019 NQF Review outweighed the burden they placed on them.

Figure 5.3: Provider perceptions about benefit vs burden of changes to the NQF





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