

THE NATIONAL QUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE: THE NEW RATING SYSTEM

Research shows that a child's experience in their first five years sets the course for the rest of their life.

In recognition of this, the Australian Government, in partnership with all state and territory governments, is making important changes to early childhood education and care in Australia. This will ensure that Australian children get the best possible start.

This is being done through the introduction of a National Quality Framework and a new National Quality Standard and rating system for services.

The new rating system combines the seven quality areas of the new National Quality Standard with a five level rating scale. For more information on the new National Quality Standard, see the full standard online at deewr.gov.au/earlychildhood.

This rating system will help services provide the best possible early childhood education and care by receiving clear feedback about how they are performing, and where they can improve. It will also provide clear information to families about the level of quality a service is providing.

A new national rating system

A new rating system will be introduced with each service being rated on the quality of service they provide. Each service will be assessed on their performance across the seven quality areas that make up the new quality standard and given one overall rating. This overall rating is determined by the rating for each of the seven quality areas. This will provide an overall picture of the quality of a service.

All services will need to display their approval and rating information. Ratings will also be available on the internet.

For the first time this will provide parents with consistent information to help them compare services and work out which service is best for their child. It will also help services know where they need to improve.

There are five levels against which services across Australia will be assessed based on the National Quality Standard.

- **Unsatisfactory:** indicates that a service is not meeting the standard and the regulator is working closely with the service to immediately improve its quality. If there is no improvement the centre will be closed.
- **Operating Level:** indicates that a service is working towards meeting the standard. All new services will commence operation with an Operating Level rating.
- **National Quality Standard:** indicates that a service is meeting the standard.
- **High Quality:** indicates that a service is exceeding the National Quality Standard.
- **Excellent:** indicates that a service demonstrates excellence and is recognised as a leader in the sector. Services will need to apply to be assessed against this rating.

Who will assess services and how often will this happen?

Services across Australia will be assessed by one organisation in their state or territory with oversight from the new national body that is being set up between the Australian Government and the states and territories.

The frequency of assessment will depend on how well a service is performing. The number and frequency of visits will depend on a service's previous quality record, its current rating and any events associated with a risk or change in practice that indicate a service might not be meeting the National Quality Standard.

For new services, following an approval to operate being granted, assessment against the standard and allocation of a rating would occur within three to six months.

A guide to the frequency of assessment is in the table below.

Service rating	Expected frequency of assessment
Excellent	On application and through award for a period of three years.
High quality or better service	Every three years for a full assessment.
National Quality Standard	Every two years for a full assessment.
Operating level	For new services a site visit before the service is approved. An additional visit after three months. For existing services a minimum of one visit a year for a full assessment. Services not meeting the National Quality Standard may require more frequent visits.
Unsatisfactory level	Services will be visited more frequently.

How will the new arrangements for an approval to operate work?

Where services satisfy the requirements of the National Quality Standard, an approval to operate will be issued without a fixed term of approval.

For centre-based services (long day care, outside school hours care and preschool), an approval to operate will be issued once only and nationally, enabling a provider to potentially operate many services across many states and territories.

For family day care, schemes (rather than individual services) will be approved. The rating system will also be applied at the scheme level. Family day care carers will be involved in the assessment process against the National Quality Standard. For example, a selection of carers will be visited for assessment purposes but will not be individually rated themselves.

When will the changes happen?

The changes will be put in place in a step by step approach. This will give early childhood education and care providers across Australia time to get ready and adjust to the new requirements, particularly those relating to staff-to-child ratios and qualifications.

The first changes start in July 2010 during a transition phase where services will begin to undergo assessment against the new standard. From 1 January 2012, all services will be assessed against the new National Quality Standard.

The new framework will be in place by 1 January 2012, with changes to staff-to-child ratios and qualifications being phased in over a number of years.

Where can I find out more?

For more information on these changes you can:

Call: **1800 181 088**

Email: **ECECQualityReformEnquiries@deewr.gov.au**

Visit: **mychild.gov.au**