



the really simple guide to ...

MAY 2012

The Assessment and Ratings Process

of a NSW long day care centre or preschool

From January 2012, a new national regulatory system has been put in place for education and care services – this is part of the National Quality Framework (NQF).

This guide is designed as a simple introduction for NSW long day care services and preschools to the Assessment and Ratings process under the NQF.

A preschool or long day care service may be assessed to determine whether, and at what rating level, the service meets the National Quality Standard and the requirements of the National Regulations.

This resource presents the main information services need to know about how they will be assessed and rated.

USING THIS GUIDE



READ MORE

We know you have a lot to do, so this is an essential reading signpost.

WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

... Become familiar with the new Regulations.

WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

The actions you must take to comply with the new world of the National Quality Framework.

GOOD TO KNOW

The sections of the Regulations that have the parts you need to consult more regularly are Chapter 2, Operational Requirements and Chapter 3 which contains the specific parts which apply to NSW services.

GOOD TO KNOW

Snippets of handy information.

Throughout this guide, we refer to **DEC** and **ACECQA**. **DEC** is the NSW Department of Education and Communities. It is the 'regulatory authority' in NSW – in other words, it will assess services under the National Quality Framework and is responsible for ensuring compliance with the *National Regulations*. **ACECQA** is the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority. This is the new national organisation which oversees the NQF.

This resource has been funded by the NSW Department of Education and Communities, specifically as a resource for state-funded services. The information applies to preschools and long day care services, community-based or for-profit.

Community Child Care would like to thank the Department and also the many people from the sector who helped us determine what services wanted to know about the assessment and rating process.

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[What is assessment and rating?]

Under the National Quality Framework, every education and care service is assessed to determine whether, and at what rating level, the service meets the National Quality Standard and the requirements of the National Regulations. After carrying out a rating assessment of a service, DEC must determine the rating level (other than the highest rating level):

- (a) for each quality area stated in the National Quality Standard; and
- (b) for the overall rating of the service.

→ GOOD TO KNOW

DEC may consider certain information for rating purposes. They can:

- (a) ask the Approved Provider for relevant information and documents;
- (b) consider any relevant information disclosed by other government departments.

→ GOOD TO KNOW

The Education Ministers across Australia made a decision last year that publication of services' quality ratings will only occur when the Ministers are satisfied the results of the process are valid and reliable.

[What are the possible ratings?]

The five rating levels within the national quality assessment and rating process are laid out in the National Regulations. They are:

- ▶ **Significant Improvement Required** – given if a service gets a Significant Improvement Required rating for any quality area of the National Quality Standard;
- ▶ **Working Towards National Quality Standard** – given if a service receives a Working Towards National Quality Standard rating for any quality area but does not have a Significant Improvement Required rating for any;
- ▶ **Meeting National Quality Standard** – given if a service receives a Meeting National Quality Standard or Exceeding National Quality Standard for each quality area but does not satisfy the requirements of an overall Exceeding National Quality Standard rating;
- ▶ **Exceeding National Quality Standard** – given if a service is rated at Exceeding National Quality Standard for four or more quality areas, including two of QA1, QA5, QA6 and QA7 and a Meeting NQS rating for each other quality area). If you have preschoolers at your service, you also need to offer a preschool program, or access to one, to obtain this rating.
- ▶ **Excellent** – the criteria for this rating level are still being determined by the ACECQA board (this rating cannot be given by DEC – a separate application needs to be made to ACECQA for rating at this level).

WHAT YOU NEED TO DO ...

- Submit your Quality Improvement Plan when asked by DEC;
- Ensure the Approved Provider or Nominated Supervisor is available on the visit date; and
- Allow DEC *Assessment and Compliance Officers* in to the service to complete an Assessment.



READ MORE

There are three major documents about the Assessment and Ratings process:

- ▶ NQS Assessment and Rating Instrument;
- ▶ ACECQA Guide to Assessment and Rating for Services;
- ▶ ACECQA Guide to Assessment and Rating for Regulatory Authorities.

All can be found at www.cccnsw.org.au/resources/nqf or www.acecqa.gov.au/resources-and-templates/assessment-and-rating-guides-and-instrument/#NQS

[Who does the rating?]

As the NSW Regulatory Authority, DEC carries out the assessment and rating of services for the first four ratings levels. If a service is rated by DEC as Exceeding National Quality Standard, the service can then apply to ACECQA to undergo assessment against the criteria for an Excellent rating.

DEC employs Assessment and Compliance Officers (ACOs) who will undertake assessment visits and work with other departmental officers on ratings of services.

[What can DEC take into account when rating us?]

- ▶ Your current Quality Improvement Plan;
- ▶ Any rating assessment history of the service, including any records of previous ratings;
- ▶ The service's history of compliance;
- ▶ Information gathered during an assessment and rating visit;
- ▶ Any relevant information that DEC receives from any government department, public or local authority or other state or territory Regulatory Authority;
- ▶ Any information available to it about any steps taken by you to rectify any matters identified during the rating assessment;
- ▶ Information relating to any other quality assurance or registration process under an education law applicable to the service; AND
- ▶ Whether the service provides or facilitates access to a preschool program if you provide education and care for preschoolers.

→ GOOD TO KNOW

The *National Quality Standard and Rating Instrument* contains the actual form that Assessment and Compliance Officers use to prepare for the assessment visit and record their observations and evidence during the visit. You can download a copy from the ACECQA website.

[What is the process?]

- ▶ You are requested to submit your QIP;
- ▶ DEC reviews your QIP and other information it may know about your service;
- ▶ A DEC Assessment and Compliance Officer visits your service (at a pre-organised time) to review evidence to help assess and rate your service;

They do this by Observing, Discussing and Sighting.

- ▶ The DEC officer prepares the assessment and rating report after they leave the service.

OBSERVE • DISCUSS • SIGHT

▶ What will the officer observe?

What children, families, educators, co-ordinators and staff members are **doing**.

▶ What will the officer discuss?

Practices within the service (with the Approved Provider, Nominated Supervisor, educators and other staff members).

▶ What will the officer sight?

Documentation required by the *National Law and National Regulations* and other documentation as evidence to support particular practices at the service.

→ GOOD TO KNOW

What happens during an assessment visit?

A DEC Assessment and Compliance Officer (ACO) will record observations and evidence relevant to the particular elements, standards or regulations. The ACO will give you some broad feedback on the day. They are not trying to determine the actual assessment on the spot. This will occur when the ACO gets back to their office to analyse all the information, prepare the report and determine your ratings.

How long will a visit be?

ACECQA has recommended that a visit be at least six hours for a preschool or long day care service and a two-day or three-session visit if a service has more than four rooms. DEC could decide to exceed these minimum time frames.

What happens after the visit?

After the visit, the Assessment and Compliance Officer drafts the report, determines whether elements and regulations were 'met' or 'not met' and determines your rating for each standard. When they have completed all the quality areas, the ACO fills in the standards ratings on the summary table (page 52 of the Assessment and Rating Instrument) and then determines your overall rating.



The Guide to the National Quality Standard provides detailed assessment guidance listed under each element. Read the Guide at www.ccccnsw.org.au/resources/nqf or use the copy that came to your service in the big folder.

WHAT YOU NEED TO DO ...

... Make sure you comment on the draft report before it is finalised if you think there are things that were missed in the assessment visit. Unlike the old NCAC Accreditation process, the report is not drafted on the day, but it will be provided to you for comment prior to it being finalised by DEC.

[How are we rated?]

Elements

- ▶ First, the assessor determines if you have met or not met:
 - Each element of the NQS; and
 - The relevant regulations for each quality area.

Standards Rating

- ▶ Second, the assessor rates each standard of the NQS.
 - The rating depends on whether you have met or not met the elements of that standard.

If this happens	This is the rating you will receive for this Standard
Not met an element or regulation	<i>Working Towards National Quality Standard</i>
Met all elements and regulations	<i>Meeting National Quality Standard</i>
Met or Exceeded all elements and regulations	<i>Exceeding National Quality Standard</i>

Quality Areas Rating

- ▶ Third, the assessor rates each Quality Area of the NQS.

If this happens	This is the rating you will receive for this Quality Area
One or more standards or regulations are not met	<i>Working Towards National Quality Standard</i>
All standards and regulations are met or all are met and 1 standard exceeded	<i>Meeting National Quality Standard</i>
At least 2 standards exceeded and all regulations are met for the Quality Area	<i>Exceeding National Quality Standard</i>
If you do not meet a Quality Area or a relevant regulation for that area in a way that DEC is satisfied constitutes an unacceptable risk to the safety, health or wellbeing of any child	<i>Significant Improvement Required</i>

→ GOOD TO KNOW

Although the focus of an assessment visit is assessment, an assessor will also check that a service is meeting the Regulations for each Quality Area at the same time as assessing your service against the National Quality Standard.

Overall Service Rating

► Fourth, the assessor determines the service's overall rating.

If this happens	This is the rating you will receive
One or more Quality Areas have been rated as Working Towards NQS	<i>Working Towards National Quality Standard</i>
All Quality Areas are rated as Meeting or Exceeding but requirements for receiving an Exceeding NQS rating are not met .	<i>Meeting National Quality Standard</i>
All Quality Areas are rated as Exceeding National Quality Standard or 4 or more areas are rated as Exceeding (including 2 from QA1, QA5, QA6 and QA7), balance as Meeting NQS .	<i>Exceeding National Quality Standard</i>
A Quality Area or a relevant regulation for that Quality Area is rated as Significant Improvement Required	<i>Significant Improvement Required</i>

[Can we get a review?]

By DEC

If you are not happy with your overall service rating or the rating for any quality area, you can request a review by DEC. You must request the review (in writing) within 14 days after you receive the notice of your rating (there will be a form to do this on). A service does not have to pay for a review by DEC. Your request must set out why you believe your rating should be reviewed. Following a review, DEC may either confirm the specific rating levels and/or the overall rating, or amend them. The review will not be conducted by anyone involved in the initial assessment. A review will not necessarily require a new assessment visit. DEC must do a review within 30 days and provide you with the outcome within the next 30 days after this.

By a Ratings Review Panel

If you are still unhappy with your rating you can apply to ACECQA for a further review, but only if you believe DEC didn't appropriately conduct the assessment or failed to take into account or give sufficient weight to special circumstances or facts existing at the time of the rating assessment. A request for a further review by a Ratings Review Panel must be made within 14 days of receiving the results of the DEC review. A rating by a Ratings Review Panel costs between \$400 and \$800 depending on service size.

→ GOOD TO KNOW

DEC should allow you to make what is known as a 'minor adjustment' so that if there is a minor issue that could affect your rating, you are given time to rectify it. This only applies when the issues: don't provide any risks to children; have a minimal impact on quality; are not numerous; and can be easily rectified. You may have to give DEC evidence that you have dealt with the issue e.g. a photograph or evidence of a revised policy before the report is finalised.

As well as becoming familiar with the *Assessment and rating Instrument* and the *Guides to Assessment and Rating for Regulatory Authorities and for Services*, you should also read:

Part 5 of the Law – Assessments and Ratings;

Chapter 3 of the Regulations – Assessments and Ratings (Regulations 55-72)

Guide to Developing A Quality Improvement Plan, available from www.acecqa.gov.au

[How often will we be assessed?]

How often your service will be assessed is determined by the rating you receive each time – the higher the rating, the longer the timeframe before your next assessment and rating. As a guide only, a service would get a full reassessment if they are rated as:

- ▶ **Excellent** – every three years (rated and reassessed by ACECQA)
- ▶ **Exceeding National Quality Standard** – every three years
- ▶ **Meeting National Quality Standard** – every two years
- ▶ **Working Towards National Quality Standard** – every year

If a service is rated as **Significant Improvement Required** DEC would be taking compliance action and working with the service to immediately address the issues which are posing an unacceptable risk to the safety, health or wellbeing of children at the service.

→ GOOD TO KNOW

DEC has the right to re-assess at any time a service or any aspect or element of a service in accordance with the National Regulations to determine whether and at what rating level it meets the National Quality Standard and the requirements of the National Regulations for the purpose of rating that service.

This is likely to occur if changes occur at your service which might affect quality adversely.

→ GOOD TO KNOW

It is an offence under the Regulations for a service to give a false or misleading statements about your rating. You must not falsely represent the overall rating or a rating for a particular quality area.

