

THE NATIONAL QUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE: INFORMATION FOR SERVICES

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.

The framework will put in place a new National Quality Standard to ensure high quality and consistent early childhood education and care across Australia. For more information on the new National Quality Standard, see the full standard online at deewr.gov.au/earlychildhood.

These changes will help providers to improve their services in the areas that impact on a child's development and empower families to make informed choices about which service is best for their child.

Why do we need a National Quality Framework?

The National Quality Framework will put in place compulsory, national standards to ensure high quality and consistent early childhood education and care across Australia.

This important reform will deliver a higher standard of care for children in the critical areas of education, health and safety and will provide clearer and comprehensive information for families so they can choose the best services for their child.

We know that the first five years of a child's life shapes their future—their health, learning and social development—and we want to make sure that their future is bright.

Early childhood experts and professionals maintain that quality is critical when it comes to early childhood education and care.

At the moment quality standards across early childhood education and care services vary across Australia and there is often limited information available to help families choose the best service for their children.

The National Quality Framework will require all providers to improve services in the areas that impact on a child's development and safety and to provide families with quality information to help them make informed choices about services.

Changes will be made in key areas

The National Quality Framework will set a new National Quality Standard for early childhood education and care providers in Australia.

The National Quality Standard will improve quality through:

- improved staff-to-child ratios to ensure each child gets more individual care and attention
- new staff qualification requirements to ensure staff have the skills to help children learn and develop
- a new quality rating system to ensure Australian families have access to transparent information relating to the quality of early childhood education and care services

- the establishment of a new National Body to ensure early childhood education and care is of a high quality.

The new National Quality Framework will cover long day care, family day care, outside school hours care and preschools.

National Quality Standard

The new National Quality Standard will help services to provide the best possible level of early childhood education and care by being clear about the factors that best support a child's development.

It will also give services and families confidence in understanding what distinguishes high quality or excellent services.

The new National Quality Standard is divided into seven areas that contribute to the quality of early childhood education and care. These areas have been identified by research and are:

1. Educational program and practice
2. Children's health and safety
3. Physical environment
4. Staffing arrangements (including the number of staff looking after children)
5. Relationships with children
6. Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
7. Leadership and service management

Under each of these areas more detail is provided about what a service can do to provide the highest quality early childhood education and care for a child.

More staff to look after children

One of the key changes under the new National Quality Standard is that each staff member will have fewer children to look after.

This means that each child will get more individual care and attention, and when children have more time to learn from adults they develop more quickly.

The staff-to-child ratios, listed below, will be put in place across Australia.

	Age group	Staff-to-child ratio	Timeframe for compliance
Long Day Care and Preschool	Birth to 24 months	1 staff member to 4 children	1 January 2012
	25 to 35 months	1 staff member to 5 children ¹	1 January 2016
	36 months to school age	1 staff member to 11 children ²	1 January 2016
	Mixed age groups	A proportional formula will be applied based on the above ratios	1 January 2012

¹ A staff-to-child ratio of 1:4 for children 25 to 35 months will be retained in Victoria where this ratio currently applies, instead of 1:5 under the National Quality Standard.

² A staff-to-child ratio of 1:10 for children 36 months to school age will be retained in New South Wales, Western Australia and Tasmania where this ratio currently applies, instead of 1:11 under the National Quality Standard.

Family Day Care	Mixed age groups of children	1 staff member to 7 children with a maximum of four children not yet attending school	1 January 2014
Outside School Hours Care	The National Quality Standard and ratings system will also apply to Outside School Hours Care but at this stage no changes to staff to child ratios or staff qualifications are proposed.		

The new National Quality 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.

More highly qualified staff

Another key change under the National Quality Standard is the introduction of new requirements for early childhood education and care services to have more highly qualified staff.

The following qualification requirements for staff will apply.

By 1 January 2014:

- An early childhood teacher will need to be in attendance all of the time when long day care and preschool services are being provided to 25 children or more.
- An early childhood teacher will need to be in attendance some of the time when long day care and preschool services are being provided to less than 25 children.
- Within each long day care centre or preschool, half of all staff will need to have (or to be actively working towards) a diploma-level early childhood education and care qualification or above, and the remaining staff will all be required to have (or be actively working towards) a Certificate III level early childhood education and care qualification, or equivalent.
- All family day care coordinators will need to have a diploma-level early childhood education and care qualification or above.
- All family day carers will be required to have (or be actively working towards) a Certificate III level early childhood education and care qualification, or equivalent.

By 1 January 2020:

- A second early childhood teacher, or another suitably qualified leader, will need to be in attendance all of the time when long day care and preschool services are being provided to more than 80 children.
- A second early childhood teacher, or another suitably qualified leader, will need to be in attendance at least half of the time when long day care and preschool services are being provided to 60 children or more.

Improving staff qualifications is important as the research shows that staff with higher qualifications are usually better able to get improved outcomes for children. More highly qualified staff means greater understanding of health and safety issues and that staff are more able to lead activities that inspire youngsters and help them learn and develop.

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 National 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.

A new national body

There will be a new national body to oversee the National Quality Standard. It will oversee how the standard is being applied across the country to ensure that services are meeting the new requirements.

There will be one organisation within each state and territory that will assess services, with oversight from the national body. This replaces the current situation where many services have to deal with multiple regulators. This will mean less regulatory burden for services, so they have more time to spend providing high quality early childhood education and care.

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 National Quality Standard. From 1 January 2012, all services will be assessed against the new National Quality Standard.

The new National Quality 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.

Which regulator/s will my service need to deal with between now and 2012?

Services will continue to operate to the existing licensing and accreditation standards or quality assurance processes. Further guidance will be given to services over the coming months.

What does this mean to providers of long day care?

The main change for long day care is new staff-to-child ratios and qualification requirements.

The new staff-to-child ratios required under the standard for long day care will be:

Age Group	Staff to child ratio	Timeframe for compliance
Birth to 24 Months	1 staff member to 4 children	1 January 2012
25 to 35 Months	1 staff member to 5 children ³	1 January 2016
36 months to school age	1 staff member to 11 children ⁴	1 January 2016
Mixed age groups	A proportional formula will be applied based on the above ratios	1 January 2012

There are also new qualification requirements.

By 1 January 2014:

- An early childhood teacher will need to be in attendance all of the time when long day care services are being provided to 25 children or more.
- An early childhood teacher will need to be in attendance some of the time when long day care services are being provided to less than 25 children.
- Within each long day care centre, half of all staff will need to have (or to be actively working towards) a diploma-level early childhood education and care qualification or above, and the remaining staff will all be required to have (or be actively working towards) a Certificate III level early childhood education and care qualification, or equivalent.

By 1 January 2020:

- A second early childhood teacher, or another suitably qualified leader, will need to be in attendance all of the time when long day care and preschool services are being provided to more than 80 children.
- A second early childhood teacher, or another suitably qualified leader, will need to be in attendance at least half of the time when long day care and preschool services are being provided to 60 children or more.

All long day care services will be assessed against the National Quality Standard by one organisation within each state and territory, with oversight from the new national body. This replaces the current situation where many services have to deal with multiple regulators. This will mean less regulatory burden for services, so they have more time to spend providing high quality education and care.

3 A staff-to-child ratio of 1:4 for children 25 to 35 months will be retained in Victoria where this ratio currently applies, instead of 1:5 under the National Quality Standard.

4 A staff-to-child ratio of 1:10 for children 36 months to school age will be retained in New South Wales, Western Australia and Tasmania where this ratio currently applies, instead of 1:11 under the National Quality Standard.

What do these changes mean for the delivery of preschool programs in long day care?

The National Quality Standard defines preschool programs in the year before full-time schooling as play-based learning programs, planned and delivered by an early childhood qualified teacher for a minimum of 10 hours a week (15 hours a week from 1 January 2013) for 40 weeks per year. For children other than those in the year before full-time schooling, preschool programs are play-based learning programs, planned and delivered by an early childhood qualified teacher.

Services that comply with this definition will be able to describe themselves as having a certified preschool program under the new National Quality Standard.

Several states and territories will continue to require higher teacher-to-child ratios in their preschool programs than those proposed under the new National Quality Standard.

To achieve a rating of High Quality in the Educational Program and Practice quality area of the standard, a service will be required to provide access to a preschool program, either directly or through a nearby provider that can offer satisfactory arrangements to manage the transfer of children.

Requirements with a preschool program are consistent with requirements for a preschool program under the *National Partnership on Early Childhood Education* between the Australian Government and the states and territories, which aims to achieve universal access to early childhood education in the year before formal schooling by 2013.

What do these changes mean for family day care providers?

Family day care schemes, rather than individual carers, will be approved and rated under the National Quality Standard, with new staff-to-child ratio requirements and new qualification requirements to apply.

The new staff-to-child ratios required under the standard for family day care will be:

Age Group	Staff-to-child ratio	Timeframe for compliance
Mixed age groups	1 staff member to 7 children with a maximum of four children under school age.	1 January 2014

There are also new educational qualification requirements.

By 1 January 2014, all carers will be required to have a Certificate III level qualification (or be enrolled and studying for one) and all family day care coordinators will require a diploma level early childhood education and care qualification.

This means that from 1 January 2012 when the framework comes into place, legislation will include the new requirements for family day care staff-to-child ratios and workforce qualifications for implementation from 1 January 2014.

Until 1 January 2014 standards in state and territory legislation around staff-to-child ratios and qualifications will apply.

Family day care schemes, rather than individual carers, will be approved and the rating system 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.

What do these changes mean for providers of outside school hours care?

Outside School Hours Care services will come under the new framework.

The Australian Government and state and territory governments have agreed that further work needs to be undertaken to consider the best national approach for outside school hours care.

In the meantime, the existing staff-to-child ratios and qualifications requirements for outside school hours care in states and territories will continue to apply.

What do these changes mean to preschools⁵?

The new National Quality Standard will apply in full to all preschools, whether they are provided by the government or non-government sector. Assessment against the quality National Quality Standard, through the ratings system, will also be undertaken for all preschools.

Most services will be required to have an early childhood teacher in attendance whenever a service is being provided. Smaller services will be required to have a teacher in attendance for some of the time.

In a small number of instances where the current state and territory standards for ratios and qualifications are already stronger than the new changes, the existing arrangements will continue. For example, already existing ratios of 1:10 for preschools services in New South Wales and Western Australia would continue.

Consistent qualification requirements will apply across preschool services.

By 1 January 2014, at least 50 per cent of staff in preschools will have (or be working towards) a diploma level early childhood education and care qualification or above. Other staff will be required to have (or be working towards) a Certificate III level early childhood education and care qualification or equivalent.

In relation to the assessment of preschools, in those states and territories where preschool is currently delivered by government or through non-government schools, there will be an option of administering the new National Quality Framework through existing government quality assurance processes with respect to preschools. This will only occur where these quality assurance processes have not been delegated to other entities to self-regulate.

What do these changes mean for the delivery of preschool programs?

The National Quality Standard defines preschool programs in the year before full-time schooling as play-based learning programs, planned and delivered by an early childhood qualified teacher for a minimum of 10 hours a week (15 hours a week from 1 January 2013) for 40 weeks per year. For children other than those in the year before full-time schooling, preschool programs are play-based learning programs, planned and delivered by an early childhood qualified teacher.

Services that comply with this definition will be able to describe themselves as having a certified preschool program under the National Quality Standard.

Several states and territories will continue to require higher staff-to-child ratios in their preschool programs than those proposed under the National Quality Standard.

⁵ There are currently alternative terms used for preschool in some states and territories, including kindergarten, pre-preparatory and reception.

To achieve a rating of High Quality in the Educational Program and Practice quality area of the National Quality Standard, a service will be required to provide access to a preschool program, either directly or through a nearby provider that can offer satisfactory arrangements to manage the transfer of children.

Preschools that are part of the education system will be assessed against the new National Quality Standard by their existing education accreditation and monitoring bodies, with oversight from the national body. All other preschools will be assessed by one organisation within each state and territory.

What do these changes mean for the introduction of universal access to a preschool program?

Universal access to preschool is a complementary initiative aimed at increasing the hours of preschool provided to children and is to be implemented from 2013.

The relevant staff-to-child ratios and qualification requirements will also apply to universal access preschool programs according to the implementation timeframes outlined in the standard.

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**