

CHANGES TO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND SCHOOL AGE CARE FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and School Age Care

- What was the outcome for early childhood education and school age care of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting in December 2009?
- What is the National Quality Framework?
- In what areas will changes be made?
- When will the changes come into effect?
- What is the new National Body?
- What is the National Quality Standard?
- What are the benefits of introducing an integrated, National Quality Standard?
- What is the new national rating system?
- How are families being supported?
- Which regulator/s will my service need to deal with between now and 2012?

A component of the National Quality Framework: The Early Years Learning Framework

- Why has Australia developed the Early Years Learning Framework?
- What age group does it cover?
- Will it be mandatory?
- What will the assessment element mean in practice?
- How will the Early Years Learning Framework fit with state and territory frameworks?
- What support is available for implementation?
- What is the Educators' Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework?
- Does it assist early childhood educators working with Indigenous children?

Further information

- Where can I find further information about the changes?
- How can I participate between now and 2012?
- How can I get a copy of the Educators' Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework?

National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and School Age Care

■ What was the outcome for early childhood education and school age care of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting in December 2009?

Late last year all Australian governments agreed to a new National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Child Care. This means that all Australian children, regardless of their location, will get the best possible start in life through high quality early childhood education and school age care services.

The National Quality Framework will put in place a new National Quality Standard to ensure high quality and consistent early childhood education and school age care across Australia.

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.

■ What is the National Quality Framework?

The National Quality Framework has three parts:

- a National Quality Standard, that gives families clear information about the quality of early childhood education and school age care services they can expect their children to receive;
- a national quality rating system with five levels, and including a quality rating for seven key areas of childhood development; and
- an Early Years Learning Framework that guides educators and carers in developing play based learning and development activities for children in early childhood education and school age care settings.

The new system will be jointly managed by the Australian Government and state and territory governments, with the states and territories taking responsibility for regulating services against the new framework and a new, national body responsible providing oversight of the new system and ensuring consistency of approach.

■ In what areas will changes be made?

The National Quality Framework will set a new National Quality Standard for early childhood education and school age care providers in Australia. The Standard will communicate a national view about the quality of early childhood education and care and school age care all families should expect to find in the diverse types of education and care settings available across Australia. It supports a better integration of education and care, incorporating broader outcomes for children attending early childhood education and care and school age care services.

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 school age care services; and
- the establishment of a new National Body to ensure early childhood education and school age 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.

■ **When will the changes come into effect?**

The framework is being introduced in stages over a number of years, with formal implementation commencing from 1 January 2012. This will give early childhood education and school age care providers across Australia time to get ready and adjust to the new requirements, particularly those relating to staff-to-child ratios and qualifications. Long day care, family day care and outside school hours care services and preschools will be covered by the framework.

The first changes start in July 2010 during a transition phase where a small number of services who volunteer will begin to undergo assessment against the new National Quality Standard.

The national body and the new national legislation will come into effect by January 2012, with gradual implementation of improved ratios and staff qualifications over subsequent years.

■ **What is the 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.

Services will only need to deal with one organisation within each state and territory, with oversight of the assessment process 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 school age care.

■ **What is the National Quality Standard?**

The new National Quality Standard will help services to provide the best possible level of early childhood education and school age 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 National Quality Standard includes seven quality areas important in providing quality early childhood education and school age care services. These are:

1. educational program and practice
2. children's health and safety
3. physical environment
4. staffing arrangements, including improved staff-to-child ratios and qualifications
5. relationships with children
6. collaborative partnerships with families and communities
7. leadership and service management.

■ **What are the benefits of introducing an integrated, National Quality Standard?**

At the moment quality standards across early childhood education and school age care services vary across Australia.

A legal framework will support the introduction of the National Quality Framework from 1 January 2012. It will replace current licensing and regulation processes in each state and territory.

The new national body will 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.

Major changes as a result of the Standard are improved staff-to-child ratios and staff qualifications. Research suggests that staff-to-child ratios and higher staff qualifications are important to positive outcomes for children. The framework will assist child care professionals to have more time for quality interactions with children.

■ **What is the new national rating system?**

The National Quality Standard will be complemented by a national rating system. The rating system will provide clear and accurate information for families and services.

The rating system combines the seven quality areas with a five level rating system. The rating system has the following five levels:

- unsatisfactory
- operating level
- National Quality Standard
- high quality
- excellent.

Each child care service will receive an overall rating following an assessment by a qualified assessor and services will be required to display their approval and rating information.

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.

■ **How are families being supported?**

The Australian Government understands the effect of early childhood education and care expenses on the family budget. That is why it provides Child Care Benefit and a Child Care Rebate to help families with the cost of these services. Over the next four years the Australian Government is providing \$14.4 billion to help 800 000 Australian families annually with the cost of child care.

The Government delivered on its election commitment to increase the Child Care Rebate from 30 to 50 per cent of parents' out-of-pocket expenses, and increased the maximum amount to \$7500 per year per child.

Services will determine their own responses to the requirements of the new NQF and will continue to make their own business decisions. However, as the changes will be put in place over a number of years, services will have time to adjust, and there should be no sudden increase in costs to families.

■ **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.

A Component of the National Quality Framework: The Early Years Learning Framework

■ What is the Early Years Learning Framework?

Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework, is Australia's first national curriculum framework for early childhood education. It will ensure delivery of nationally consistent and quality early childhood education. The aim of the Early Years Learning Framework is to extend and enrich children's learning. It will guide early childhood educators in developing quality early childhood programs in order to ensure that children in all early childhood education and care settings experience quality teaching and learning. The Framework describes the broad principles, practice and outcomes required to support young children's learning. It has a specific emphasis on play-based learning and supports early childhood educators to work in partnership with families.

■ What age group does it cover?

The Early Years Learning Framework covers from birth to five years and transition to school.

■ Will it be mandatory?

The Early Years Learning Framework will be incorporated in the new National Quality Standard. Once this is in place, early childhood education and care settings will be expected to provide evidence of their use of the Early Years Learning Framework in the design and delivery of their early learning programs.

■ What will the assessment element mean in practice?

The Early Years Learning Framework and the Educators' Guide acknowledge the important role of assessment in gathering, documenting and analysing evidence to assess learning in early childhood settings.

The Framework and Guide identifies that documentation and assessment should be varied and not focus exclusively on the end points of children's learning and educators' teaching. Assessment should be based on observation of, and engagement with, each child and their family to understand what children know and can do, and how they can be helped to extend their understanding and develop new skills, and not be based on developmental checklists or solely on outcomes. The educators' guide contains more detail and examples of assessment in practice.

■ How can I access the Early Years Learning Framework?

The Early Years Learning Framework was sent to early childhood education and care centres in Australia, together with a Families' Guide. Additional copies of the Framework and the Families Guide, which has been translated into 20 Centrelink recommended languages, is available at www.deewr.gov.au/EarlyChildhood/Policy_Agenda/Quality/Pages/EarlyYearsLearningFramework.aspx. Copies of the Early Years Learning Framework are also available by emailing: eylf@deewr.gov.au.

■ How will the Early Years Learning Framework fit with state and territory frameworks?

Through the decision of the Council of Australian Governments on 2 July 2009, all states and territories agreed to use the Early Years Learning Framework. States and territories may still use their own state based early childhood curriculum framework documents to complement or supplement the Early Years Learning Framework.

■ What support is available for implementation?

There are several elements to the Early Years Learning Framework implementation strategy:

- An Educators' Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework, which will assist educators to implement the Framework, has been developed with an expected release in 2010.

- Support is being provided by the Australian Government-funded Professional Support Coordinators program and the Indigenous Professional Support Units which provide training and mentoring for child care services.
- The Australian Government is operating an online forum which was reopened on 11 September 2009 for approximately six months to enable services to provide feedback on the draft Educators' Guide, to network with other early childhood educators and to assist in implementing the Early Years Learning Framework.
- A web-based training package and professional development for remote Indigenous settings are under development.

- **What is the Educators' Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework?**

Educators Belonging, Being & Becoming: Educators' Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework, has been developed to support early childhood educators use of the Early Years Learning Framework.

The Educators' Guide is in two parts; the first part focuses on curriculum decision-making, promotes reflective practice and inquiry, and provides best practice examples and case studies. The second part contains educators' stories and models of their plans for the outcomes of children's learning, with questions to provoke thinking and generate discussion in relation to the principles, practices and outcomes of the Early Years Learning Framework. This will be accompanied by a CD of reference materials.

- **Does it assist early childhood educators working with Indigenous children?**

While the Indigenous context is embedded throughout the Guide, it also includes chapters on cultural competence and working with Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. The Department will also be providing professional development for remote Indigenous settings. States and territories may also develop supporting material with a focus on assisting early childhood educators working with Indigenous children and with Indigenous communities.

Further Information on The National Quality Framework

- **Where can I find further information about the changes?**

This website will contain regular updates on progress.

You can also call the National Quality Framework hotline on **1800 181 088** or email ECECquality@deewr.gov.au to lodge a question.

- **How can I participate between now and 2012?**

From now until 2012, there will be a range of opportunities to participate in the process of transitioning to the new system. This website will provide information about these opportunities as the details are confirmed.

Requests for information can be lodged at ECECquality@deewr.gov.au.

Early childhood education and school age care services will be informed through an Australian Government alert system when updated information is available.

- **How can I get a copy of the Early Years Learning Framework Educators' Guide?**

The Educators' Guide will be mailed to early childhood education and care services in Australia in 2010. The Guide and background information will also be available at www.deewr.gov.au/EarlyChildhood/Policy_Agenda/Quality/Pages/EarlyYearsLearningFramework.aspx.