Assessment and Ratings of a NSW Long Day Care Centre or Preschool

April 2017

CELA IS BROUGHT TO YOU BY COMMUNITY CHILD CARE CO-OPERATIVE
This simple guide is designed to increase understanding of the Assessment and Ratings process under the National Quality Framework for NSW long day care services and preschools.

Services are assessed to determine whether, and at what rating level, they meet the National Quality Standard and the requirements of the National Regulations.

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

Glossary

Throughout this guide, we refer to DoE and ACECQA.

DoE is the NSW Department of Education. It is the ‘state regulatory authority’ in NSW - in other words, it assesses services under the National Quality Framework and is responsible for ensuring compliance with the Law and Regulations.

ACECQA is the Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority. This is the national organisation which oversees the NQF.
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, the NSW Department of Education (DoE) must determine the rating level:

(a) for each quality area stated in the National Quality Standard; and

(b) for the overall rating of the service.

TO DO

- Submit your Quality Improvement Plan when asked by DoE;
- Ensure the Approved Provider or Nominated Supervisor is available on the visit date; and
- Allow DoE Assessment and Compliance Officers in to the service to complete an Assessment.
Services Are Rated Against the National Quality Standard

The National Quality Standard contains quality areas, standards and elements. There are seven quality areas.

There are 18 standards with two or three standards in each quality area.

There are 58 elements. Each standard contains a number of elements that describe the outcomes that contribute to the standard being achieved.

The seven quality areas in the National Quality Standard are:

- QA1 Educational program and practice
- QA2 Children's health and safety
- QA3 Physical environment
- QA4 Staffing arrangements
- QA5 Relationships with children
- QA6 Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
- QA7 Leadership and service management

A revised NQS will be introduced from 1st February, 2018. The number of standards has been reduced from 18 to 15, and the elements from 58 to 40.

KNOW THIS

All services' ratings are published on ACECQA's National Register of Education and Care Services. Each service's rating is published for each Quality Area as well as their overall service rating. See www.acecqa.gov.au/national-registers
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 receives 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 is determined by ACECQA (this rating cannot be given by DoE - a separate application needs to be made to ACECQA for rating at this level).

**KNOW THIS**

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.

**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.

Who Does the Rating?

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

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

What Can DoE Take Into Account When Rating Us?

- Your current Quality Improvement Plan;
- The service’s rating assessment history, including records of previous ratings;
- The service’s history of compliance;
- Information gathered during an assessment and rating visit;
- Any relevant information that DoE receives from any government department, public or local authority or other state or territory Regulatory Authority;
- Any information available to it about any steps you have taken 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.

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.
What Is the Process?

- You are requested to submit your QIP;
- DoE reviews your QIP and other information it may have about your service;
- A DoE 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 DoE officer prepares the assessment and rating report after leaving 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.

READ MORE

Ratings Process FAQ

What happens during an assessment visit?

A DoE 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 a three-day visit if a service has more than four rooms. DoE could decide to exceed these minimum timeframes.

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’, determines your rating for each standard and determines your overall rating.
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If this happens</th>
<th>This is the rating you will receive for this Standard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not met an element or regulation</td>
<td>Working Towards National Quality Standard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Met all elements and regulations</td>
<td>Meeting National Quality Standard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Met or Exceeded all elements and regulations</td>
<td>Exceeding National Quality Standard</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Quality Areas Rating

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

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

Overall Service Rating

Fourth, the assessor determines the service’s overall rating.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If this happens</th>
<th>This is the rating you will receive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One or more Quality Areas have been rated as Working Towards NQS</td>
<td>Working Towards National Quality Standard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Quality Areas are rated as Meeting or Exceeding but requirements for receiving an Exceeding NQS rating are not met</td>
<td>Meeting National Quality Standard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>Exceeding National Quality Standard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Quality Area or a relevant regulation for that Quality Area is rated as Significant Improvement Required</td>
<td>Significant Improvement Required</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Can We Get a Review?

By DoE

If you are not happy with your overall service rating or the rating for any quality area, you can request a review by DoE. 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 DoE. Your request must set out why you believe your rating should be reviewed. Following a review, DoE 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. DoE must do a review within 30 days and provide you with the outcome within the next 30 days after this.

KNOW THIS

DoE should allow you to make what is known as a ‘minor adjustment’ so 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 DoE evidence that you have dealt with the issue e.g. a photograph or evidence of a revised policy before the report is finalised.
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 DoE 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 DoE review.

A rating by a Ratings Review Panel costs between $400 and $800 depending on the size of the service.

Timing of Ratings Visits

▸ Week 1
  You are notified that you are to be assessed.

▸ Week 3
  You have to submit your QIP within 3 weeks of your notice of assessment.

▸ Weeks 5-8
  You will be given 5 days notice of when your visit will be (usually 5-8 weeks after you were notified of assessment).

▸ 3-5 weeks after assessment
  You will be given your draft assessment and ratings report. You have 10 days to comment on it.

▸ 8 weeks after start of process
  You should receive your final report.

KNOW THIS

DoE 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 requirement 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.
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.

READ MORE

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)
Notes