



Australian Children's
Education & Care
Quality Authority

NATIONAL CONSISTENCY STRATEGY AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN 2015-16

October 2015

Glossary

ACECQA	Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority, the national authority established as part of the National Quality Framework
Authorised officer	An individual authorised by a state and territory regulatory authority to fulfil functions under the National Law. Job titles can vary by state and territory, but authorised officers typically monitor and enforce compliance, assess applications for approval, rate services for quality, investigate incidents and complaints, and provide advice and guidance
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
National Law	Education and Care Services National Law Act
National Regulations	Education and Care Services National Regulations
NQA ITS	National Quality Agenda Information Technology System
NQF	National Quality Framework
NQS	National Quality Standard, comprising standards against which education and care services are assessed and rated
OPM	Operational Policy Manual, produced by ACECQA primarily for state and territory regulatory authority authorised officers
QaCC	Quality and Consistency Committee, comprising senior representatives from ACECQA, all state and territory regulatory authorities and the Australian Government. QaCC is a platform for collaborative efforts to monitor and promote consistency under the NQF across Australia, with a focus on consistency of outcomes
Regulatory authorities	The administrative unit or body in each state and territory responsible for the administration of the National Law and National Regulations.

Introduction

1. Purpose

This document sets out the Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority’s (ACECQA’s) approach to monitoring and promoting consistency under the National Quality Framework (NQF). It provides a summary of progress to date, as well as current and future priorities.

2. ACECQA’s role in relation to consistency

ACECQA was established on 1 January 2012 as the national authority responsible for overseeing the implementation and administration of the NQF. Section 225 of the *Education and Care Services National Law* (the National Law) lists ACECQA’s key functions. Two of these functions explicitly mention consistency:

- Guiding the implementation and administration of the NQF, and monitoring and promoting *consistency*
- Establishing *consistent*, effective and efficient procedures for the operation of the NQF.

Several of ACECQA’s other functions relate to consistency:

- Reporting to the regulatory authorities and Australian Government about evaluating the NQF
- Determining the arrangements for national auditing
- Publishing, monitoring and reviewing ratings of approved education and care services
- Publishing guides and resources to support parents, the community and the sector
- Publishing information about the implementation and administration of the NQF
- Publishing practice notes and guidelines for the application of the National Law
- Determining the qualifications required to be held by educators
- Managing, developing and providing support and training for the National Quality Agenda IT System
- Providing a nationally available customer services function.

3. Definition of consistency under the National Quality Framework

The NQF aims to raise quality and drive continuous improvement in early childhood education and care, and school age care. It operates under an applied law system, comprising the Education and Care Services National Law, and the Education and Care Services National Regulations.

The NQF, introduced from 1 January 2012, acknowledges that states, territories and the Australian Government previously operated nine different regulatory systems, with diverse standards and requirements. Recognising these different histories and starting points, the NQF progressively puts in place nationally consistent standards and requirements.

In the context of the NQF, consistency is most importantly about the outcomes that result from the way the NQF is administered by governments and ACECQA. For example, when governments and ACECQA administer the NQF, one of the goals is to achieve consistent results that promote positive outcomes for children, families and carers, and providers of education and care services.

Children, families and carers

Children, families and carers expect that the education and care services they use will meet their different needs. The diversity of providers and services in the education and care sector reflects this expectation.

Underlying this diversity are the NQF's legislated foundations of children's safety, health, wellbeing and development. So while diversity of practice and approach flourishes between services, families and carers expect that interventions by regulators have the *consistent purpose* of ensuring children realise the benefits of attending education and care services, and are protected from potential harm.

This consistency of purpose and intended outcome across regulatory authorities gives families and carers confidence in the system of education and care, and the NQF. Families and carers should be confident that children stand an equal chance of both benefiting and being protected in education and care, no matter what type of service they use or where they live.

Approved providers

Providers of education and care services in similar circumstances should experience similar regulatory supports and interventions.

It should be clear to providers that the focus of these interventions is consistency of outcome. For example, when regulatory authorities assess and rate services, providers should be confident that assessments undertaken by different assessors, or in different jurisdictions or regions, are designed and conducted to deliver comparable outcomes.

4. Approach to consistency under the National Quality Framework

Consistency is not an end in itself. Consistently poor, inappropriate or unfair regulation is undesirable.

Regulation that is applied with a consistent approach to the intended outcome builds confidence, enables constructive relationships between regulator and regulated, and makes it more likely that providers will focus on quality outcomes for children and families.

Perceptions of inconsistency can be as powerful as actual inconsistency. Not only does the latter require vigilance and attention, the former should also be addressed and effectively responded to. Such perceptions can be mitigated by documenting and publicising activities that monitor and promote consistency.

ACECQA's approach to national consistency under the NQF is governed by principles akin to the general principles for best practice regulation. These are summarised below.

- **Outcomes focussed**

National consistency is not an end in itself. It is pursued to:

- promote improved quality outcomes for children, families and carers
- further children's safety, health, wellbeing and development
- increase efficiency and reduce unnecessary burden for providers of education and care services
- complement the objectives of the National Law.

- **Proportionality and efficiency**

The design and application of national consistency strategies are proportionate to the problem or issue they are seeking to address. Actions should be targeted at areas where the largest gains can be made. Effort and resources are efficiently prioritised to areas where, based on the available evidence, the potential benefits and risks are more significant.

- **Responsiveness and flexibility**

National consistency allows for regulatory interventions to be tailored to account for individual circumstances. Consistent regulatory interventions should be based on the available evidence, remain relevant and appropriate by responding to changes in the sector, and sufficiently flexible so as to not constrain appropriate and desirable innovation and diversity.

- **Transparency and accountability**

Efforts to enhance national consistency should be open, transparent and accountable to encourage confidence and provide assurance. Public and sector scrutiny is welcomed, including through the regular reporting of performance information about national consistency.

- **Communication and engagement**

Engaging appropriately with stakeholder groups (e.g. government agencies, the regulated sector, service users) about national consistency will make related activities more transparent, efficient and effective.

- **Mutual responsibility and cooperation**

ACECQA, regulatory authorities and the Australian Government all have roles and responsibilities in relation to consistency. These should be acknowledged and understood, and help direct mutually productive and beneficial working relationships. Cooperation and coordination is critical to improve the efficiency, consistency and predictability of regulatory systems. It can also mean that public resources are employed effectively, reducing duplication of regulatory effort.

5. Sector feedback that has informed ACECQA's consistency strategy

Members of the education and care sector have expressed concerns about consistency through the 2014 NP NQA Review consultation processes¹ and the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Childcare and Early Childhood Learning².

A common concern expressed by members of the education and care sector relates to inconsistencies in the assessment and rating process, both within and between jurisdictions.

A lack of consistency between the assessments of different authorised officers is most frequently cited, followed by challenges associated with the more subjective aspects of the National Quality Standard (NQS).

The state and territory regulatory authorities are responsible for undertaking the assessment and rating of education and care services against the NQS. This process is supported by ACECQA through a number of mechanisms, notably training, support and guidance for authorised officers.

Striving for national consistency in this area is a collaborative effort between the eight state and territory regulatory authorities, the Australian Government and ACECQA.

In addition to expressing concerns, members of the education and care sector have also suggested ways to improve consistency.

¹ <http://www.woolcott.com.au/NQFReview/>

² <http://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/childcare/report>

These suggestions, which are addressed as part of ACECQA's implementation plan, include:

- clearer guidelines and information about the National Quality Standard and the assessment and rating process
- improved communication and collaboration between the state and territory regulatory authorities
- additional clarity about the roles of ACECQA and the state and territory regulatory authorities
- improved training for authorised officers responsible for undertaking the assessment and rating of education and care services, including stronger knowledge and understanding of the sector and specific service types
- implementation of a feedback mechanism to allow approved providers of education and care services to express concerns about consistency, as well as provide information about regulations that are not working as intended.

6. ACECQA's consistency implementation plan

ACECQA is committed to being open, transparent and responsive. The remainder of this document outlines:

- ACECQA's consistency priorities
- activities that support those priorities
- progress made to date (as at October 2015).

In combination, these form part of an overarching strategy to monitor and promote consistency under the NQF.

In addition to regular engagement with the sector, notably with a number of national peak bodies and multi-jurisdictional large providers, and with all jurisdictions through ACECQA's Quality and Consistency Committee, ACECQA will report to Ministers on this consistency strategy through its progress reports against its forward work plan.

Priority	Consistency related activities	Progress made to date (as at October 2015)
<p>1. Training and support for authorised officers</p>	<p>a) eLearning website</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ACECQA’s eLearning website for regulatory authorities is updated and expanded to include a comprehensive set of training and support resources for authorised officers. Currently available resources include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ eLearning modules that cover part one of the national authorised officer training program, assessment and rating report writing, an introduction to cultural competence, familiarisation with Montessori services, and assessing quality education and care for under three year olds ○ more than 20 guidance notes that cover high profile and/or challenging aspects of the NQS ○ a national training calendar ○ updates, newsletters and sector articles ● Priorities for future eLearning modules and guidance notes include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ familiarisation with OSHC, family day care and Steiner services ○ assessing cultural competence, and being culturally competent ○ evidence gathering and interview techniques ○ use of technology in education and care services 	<p>In the second half of 2013, ACECQA launched an eLearning website for regulatory authorities. The website hosts training and support resources, primarily for authorised officers.</p> <p>An expanding library of guidance notes is available via the eLearning website. The guidance notes cover a range of topics, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Adequate supervision in outside school hours care ● Challenge vs risk ● Child protection ● Children’s agency ● Critical reflection ● Expectations around documentation about each child in outside school hours care ● Intentional teaching / Intentionality ● Meeting vs Exceeding NQS. <p>The guidance notes address aspects of the NQS that authorised officers and providers of education and care services have identified as challenging and/or complex. ACECQA works with regulatory authorities and relevant sector organisations in drafting the guidance notes, which are intended to provide nationally consistent guidance and support to authorised officers across Australia.</p> <p>ACECQA conducts regular surveys of authorised officers to canvass their views and feedback about the guidance notes, including asking them to identify priorities for future guidance notes.</p> <p>ACECQA also produces regular regulatory authority updates, which provide information on national issues and developments for authorised officers.</p>

Priority	Consistency related activities	Progress made to date (as at October 2015)
	<p>b) National authorised officer training program</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACECQA delivers nationally consistent training to new authorised officers on a regular basis, and in response to high demand • ACECQA reviews and updates the content of the national authorised officer training program 	<p>In the first half of 2014, part one of the authorised officer national training program was converted into eLearning modules, allowing authorised officers to access them remotely and work through them at their own pace. The information contained within the part one training is available to all authorised officers, including experienced authorised officers, as refresher modules.</p> <p>ACECQA monitors feedback received regarding the part one modules to ensure that they are fit for purpose.</p> <p>ACECQA delivers part two of the authorised officer national training program on an ongoing quarterly basis, convening face to face training sessions in Sydney, typically with attendance from multiple jurisdictions. This approach to the part two training has the added benefit of facilitating networking and information sharing between authorised officers from different regulatory authorities.</p> <p>ACECQA also regularly delivers the part two training across Australia, in response to high demand from individual jurisdictions. Such training sessions are triggered by the needs of an individual jurisdiction (e.g. a period of increased training and recruitment), however can often include authorised officers from other jurisdictions as well.</p> <p>The intended benefit of ACECQA providing face to face training both in Sydney and around the country is to promote nationally consistent approaches. A small number of experienced trainers deliver the training, which includes several opportunities for attendees to work together and discuss in small groups, as well as reflect individually on the NQS and other key aspects of the NQF. More than 200 authorised officers have been trained by ACECQA.</p>

Priority	Consistency related activities	Progress made to date (as at October 2015)
		<p>In 2015-16, ACECQA is undertaking a wholesale review and evaluation of the national authorised officer training program, including implementing any relevant changes agreed as part of the 2014 NQF review.</p> <p>In late 2011, ACECQA’s Board set the qualification requirements for authorised officers as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • successful completion of the national authorised officer training program • skills, experience and qualifications consistent with the functions undertaken by authorised officers. <p>In 2014, the ACECQA Board deferred any changes to the requirements until after the outcomes of the 2014 NQF review.</p>
	<p>c) National assessment and rating report template</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACECQA has developed and published a streamlined, nationally consistent assessment and rating report template 	<p>In the first half of 2014, a new nationally consistent assessment and rating report template was developed for use by regulatory authorities as required. Its launch was accompanied by a revised version of the assessment and rating report writing guide, as well as an eLearning module that steps authorised officers through the use and completion of the template.</p>
	<p>d) Inter-rater reliability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACECQA uses existing and bespoke data and methods in an attempt to gauge the level of inter-rater reliability between authorised officers, both within individual jurisdictions, and across the country 	<p>As part of the national authorised officer training program, authorised officers must successfully pass reliability testing before they can assess and rate education and care services.</p> <p>Authorised officers must then also successfully pass annual ‘drift’ testing to ensure that they have not ‘drifted’ from the common lens of the NQS.</p> <p>Reliability and drift testing of authorised officers is conducted through the eLearning website.</p> <p>More than 400 authorised officers have completed online reliability and drift testing, with ACECQA monitoring and analysing completion and success rates by jurisdiction and standard.</p>

Priority	Consistency related activities	Progress made to date (as at October 2015)
		<p>As part of the wholesale review and evaluation of the national authorised officer training program, ACECQA is also reviewing the current reliability and drift testing process and materials. This will form part of ACECQA's overarching approach to gauging inter-rater reliability. Other aspects of ACECQA's work that help inform the approach and priorities for inter-rater reliability include ongoing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • analysis of national and jurisdiction specific assessment and rating data, to identify specific aspects of the NQS where there would appear to be the greatest degree of variation between jurisdictions, regions and individual authorised officers • surveys of authorised officers to gather feedback about which standards they find most challenging to assess and rate • analysis of drift testing data, to identify those standards where there is the greatest degree of disagreement between the rating levels proposed by authorised officers • trial initiatives, such as shadowing assessment and rating visits • consideration of assessment and rating moderation and review processes that individual jurisdictions have in place, including the role that lead assessors play in monitoring and promoting consistency and reliability.
	<p>e) Lead assessor workshops</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACECQA hosts national workshops for all state and territory regulatory authority lead assessors 	<p>Each state and territory regulatory authority has a number of lead assessors, who have undergone additional training and are tasked with supporting and advising authorised officers within their jurisdiction.</p> <p>The two day workshops held by ACECQA twice yearly provide a valuable opportunity for lead assessors from across the country to come together to discuss and prioritise the training and support needs of authorised officers, as well as consider emerging trends and issues, and analyse assessment and rating data.</p>

Priority	Consistency related activities	Progress made to date (as at October 2015)
2. National audits	<p>Completed and scheduled national audits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conditions on approvals • Waivers • Compliance and monitoring resources • First tier reviews • Determining NQS rating levels • Drift testing reliability • Use and value of the Operational Policy Manual (OPM) • Serious incidents (child missing or unaccounted for) • Significant improvement required rating 	<p>As part of its legislated function to undertake national audits of the NQF, ACECQA has completed eight audits.</p> <p>Audit topics are identified, prioritised and agreed in collaboration with regulatory authorities and the Australian Government.</p> <p>The audits themselves typically involve ACECQA interrogating relevant data held within the NQA ITS and following up with each jurisdiction to gather additional information and context.</p> <p>The final reports are shared with each jurisdiction, with Ministers being briefed regarding the high level findings.</p> <p>Each audit report includes a list of agreed actions. These typically focus on opportunities to enhance consistency and/or efficiency.</p> <p>Tangible outcomes from the audits include improved national data quality and consistency, additional guidance for providers of education and care services, and additional content for the OPM to help guide state and territory regulatory authority authorised officers in their day to day work.</p> <p>ACECQA has a forward audit plan, which is considered and agreed by all state and territory regulatory authorities, and the Australian Government.</p>
3. Application and assessment functions	<p>a) Qualification assessments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACECQA processes applications from individuals and organisations efficiently, consistently and transparently 	<p>ACECQA determines the qualifications that need to be held by educators working in education and care services.</p> <p>The types of qualifications and training approved by ACECQA are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • early childhood teaching qualifications • diploma and certificate III level education and care qualifications • first aid training • asthma and anaphylaxis management training.

Priority	Consistency related activities	Progress made to date (as at October 2015)
		<p>ACECQA maintains lists of approved and formerly approved qualifications on its website, as well as a list of qualifications for working with children over preschool age for states and territories with those requirements.</p> <p>ACECQA also assesses individual educators' qualifications for equivalence against the qualifications required under the National Law and Regulations.</p> <p>ACECQA publishes resources for applicants to help them with the application process, including guidelines, an online application form and a 'qualifications checker', which guides prospective applicants through a series of questions to help clarify if they hold, or are taken to hold, an approved qualification.</p> <p>ACECQA has assessed and approved more than 80 applications from organisations. These comprise around 70 early childhood teaching qualifications, two diploma level qualifications, and more than 10 asthma and anaphylaxis training courses.</p> <p>ACECQA has also assessed and approved more than 3,000 applications from individuals. These include more than:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1,200 early childhood teachers • 1,000 diploma level educators • 600 certificate III level educators • 200 outside school hours care educators. <p>Through working closely with applicants and providing support and guidance, ACECQA has approved more than 80% of the applications that it has assessed from individuals, taking on average around 40 days to assess a complete application.</p> <p>Roughly a quarter of all applicants have qualifications from the UK, followed by New Zealand, Ireland and Australia.</p>

Priority	Consistency related activities	Progress made to date (as at October 2015)
		<p>ACECQA’s published guidelines outline the four main areas considered as part of a qualification assessment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualification level • Age focus of qualification • Professional experience during qualification • Curriculum content of qualification. <p>ACECQA continually refines its internal processes for handling qualification assessment applications, including its operational procedures and assessment tools.</p> <p>ACECQA periodically holds information sessions for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to aid their understanding of ACECQA’s assessment requirements prior to them submitting applications for approval.</p> <p>In June 2015, ACECQA held its latest series of information sessions. This formed part of a proactive strategy to manage the volume of applications expected to be received from HEIs in 2015-16. Because all qualifications published by ACECQA on 1 January 2012 were approved for a period of five years, organisations wishing to have their qualifications recognised beyond the end of 2016 will need to reapply to ACECQA.</p> <p>ACECQA will send out regular correspondence to HEIs over the coming months reminding them of the five year approval period, and providing them with advice and proposed timeframes for reapplying to enable a smoother reapplication process for all parties.</p> <p>ACECQA monitors and evaluates performance against its application and assessment functions on an ongoing basis – primarily through the use of weekly operational statistics, and a satisfaction survey for individual qualification assessment applicants.</p>

Priority	Consistency related activities	Progress made to date (as at October 2015)
	<p>b) Excellent rating assessments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACECQA processes applications for the Excellent rating efficiently, consistently and transparently 	<p>ACECQA has received over 100 applications for the Excellent rating, and has awarded the Excellent rating to around 40 services.</p> <p>There are Excellent rated services in every state and territory, apart from Tasmania.</p> <p>There are also multiple Excellent rated services of every type (i.e. long day care; preschool / kindergarten; outside school hours care; family day care).</p> <p>ACECQA continually refines its internal processes for handling Excellent rating applications, including its operational procedures and assessment tools. Additional advice material to assist applicants to address the Excellent rating criteria was published in early 2014. ACECQA plans to convert this content into a publicly available eLearning module.</p>
	<p>c) Second tier review assessments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACECQA processes applications for second tier review efficiently, consistently and transparently 	<p>The opportunity to have an assessment and rating outcome reviewed by a ‘second tier’ review panel is available to providers of education and care services in instances where local agreement has not been reached and the provider has sought a ‘first tier’ review from their local regulatory authority.</p> <p>With more than 10,000 services assessed and rated, there have been less than 250 first tier reviews, and less than 20 second tier reviews.</p> <p>ACECQA and its panel of experts administer the second tier review process. The outcome decisions are published on ACECQA’s website, and provide helpful guidance to all jurisdictions when making ratings decisions.</p> <p>ACECQA also publishes resources for applicants to help them with the application process, including guidelines and an information sheet.</p> <p>Aspects of ACECQA’s process for second tier review have been adopted by a number of regulatory authorities for their first tier review processes.</p>

Priority	Consistency related activities	Progress made to date (as at October 2015)
<p>4. Sector and family communications</p>	<p>a) ACECQA’s website and newsletter</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NQF resource kit, which incorporates four separate guides (i.e. guide to the NQF; guide to the National Law and Regulations; guide to the NQS; guide to developing a Quality Improvement Plan), is reviewed, streamlined as appropriate and kept up-to-date • ACECQA’s newsletter, which includes any key announcements, developments and changes, targeted and in-depth articles about the NQS and NQF, as well as links to useful resources and ACECQA’s blog and social media accounts (i.e. Facebook and Twitter), is published and evaluated • Range of information sheets, posters and videos about key aspects of the NQF are developed 	<p>ACECQA’s website is broadly divided into four streams of content:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Quality Framework – introductory and high level information about the NQF, including information sheets, FAQs, ACECQA’s quarterly snapshot, and video resources • Educators and providers – detailed information about the NQF and its requirements, including the NQA ITS, ACECQA’s published national registers, and ACECQA’s application and assessment functions • Families – practical information about the importance of early childhood education and care, and the quality of services assessed and rated • Regulatory authorities – information and resources to support authorised officers and other regulatory authority staff, including the OPM and the eLearning website. <p>ACECQA has more than 200 resources in its NQF library on its website. The NQF resource kit in particular is an important resource for services to help them understand their obligations.</p> <p>A video featuring Dr Jennifer Cartmel and Professor Jennifer Sumsion discussing the development of the ‘My Time, Our Place’ and ‘Belonging, Being and Becoming’ learning frameworks is also available on ACECQA’s website.</p> <p>Around 20,000 people subscribe to ACECQA’s monthly newsletter, which typically includes in-depth articles and resources for the early childhood education and care sector. The newsletter also includes regular articles by ACECQA’s National Education Leader on a diverse range of topics, such as literacy and numeracy, health and safety, nutrition and relationships with children.</p>

Priority	Consistency related activities	Progress made to date (as at October 2015)
	<p>b) NQF quarterly snapshot</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NQF quarterly snapshot, which provides an overview of the latest information from the assessment and rating process is released quarterly • The snapshot is reviewed to ensure that it efficiently conveys appropriate information 	<p>ACECQA continues to publish the NQF snapshot each quarter. The snapshot primarily reports on the assessment and rating of services.</p>
	<p>c) Social media</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media is used to convey information and generate discussion among Facebook and Twitter users, and answer questions from users 	<p>ACECQA uses a variety of social media channels to promote open consultation and discussion. The ACECQA Blog, 'We Hear You', provides a platform for peak organisations, educators, regulators and providers, with ACECQA's National Education Leader also a regular contributor.</p>
	<p>d) Customer services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACECQA's customer services team is available to answer enquiries from the public by phone, email and online 	<p>ACECQA's in-house customer services team handles thousands of enquiries each month, split roughly evenly between phone and email enquiries. As part of ACECQA's customer services charter, enquiries are typically responded to within five working days.</p> <p>ACECQA analyses the enquiries it receives, identifying any trends or issues, and uses it to inform newsletter articles, information sheets, blogs, social media posts and website content. Twice a year, customers are surveyed about their experience and this feedback is used to improve team performance.</p>
	<p>e) National workshops</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACECQA's National Education Leader conducts workshops around the country. The hands-on, practical workshops are delivered in partnership with Professional Support Coordinators and regulatory authorities 	<p>In collaboration with regulatory authorities and Professional Support Coordinators, ACECQA has completed the first series of national workshops in each state and territory to support services in meeting Quality Area 1 (Educational program and practice) of the NQS.</p> <p>Workshops have been held in multiple locations in all states and territories, with around 4,000 educators attending the workshops.</p>

Priority	Consistency related activities	Progress made to date (as at October 2015)
	<p>f) Family communications strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACECQA, in consultation with peak body representatives and jurisdictions, has developed a communications strategy focussed on prospective and new parents about the benefits of quality early childhood education and care 	<p>A major component of the strategy is the ‘Starting Blocks’ website, launched in April 2015. The website offers information and links about the importance and benefits of quality early childhood education and care.</p>
	<p>g) Targeted engagement with national peak bodies and large providers of education and care services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACECQA meets quarterly with a number of national peak bodies and large providers to gather feedback, provide information and discuss issues and trends 	<p>ACECQA meets regularly with a number of peak bodies and large providers of education and care services. This offers an ongoing feedback opportunity, as well as a chance for ACECQA to discuss emerging trends and issues, and national developments. The meetings also provide the opportunity for ACECQA to gather information and feedback on behalf of the regulatory authorities, and the Australian Government.</p> <p>Relevant information is appropriately shared, either individually or collectively, with state and territory regulatory authorities, and the Australian Government.</p>
	<p>h) ACECQA forum</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACECQA consults with sector and government stakeholders and discusses key aspects of the implementation and administration of the NQF 	<p>The ACECQA Forum is an important means of engaging with representatives from the children’s education and care sector.</p> <p>Members of the forum include the state and territory regulatory authorities, Australian Government, national peak bodies, large providers of family day care, outside school hours care, preschool / kindergarten, and long day care services, local and state government agencies, and family, professional and employee associations. The forum also includes organisations with a focus on skills and training, research and inclusion.</p> <p>The forum has considered such issues as the Productivity Commission Inquiry, the 2014 NQF Review, national consistency, the National Quality Standard, administrative burden, and ACECQA’s program of national audits.</p>

Priority	Consistency related activities	Progress made to date (as at October 2015)
5. Analysis of assessment and rating data	a) Assessment and rating progress reports <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACECQA provides monthly assessment and rating progress reports to Ministers 	Since June 2014, monthly assessment and rating progress reports have been provided to the Education Council. These reports provide a high level summary of progress and performance against the NQS.
	b) Assessment and rating analysis reports <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACECQA provides detailed assessment and rating analysis reports to each state and territory regulatory authority. Follow up discussions are held where the data suggests that there may be inconsistent practice • ACECQA also provides detailed assessment and rating analysis reports to state and territory Professional Support Coordinators, and a number of large providers of education and care services 	With more than 10,000 services assessed and rated, ACECQA has an increasingly rich source of data for analysis. In addition to the published quarterly snapshot, ACECQA monitors trends at standard and element level, by quarter, jurisdiction and service type. For the larger jurisdictions, ACECQA also monitors trends at regional level, alerting the relevant jurisdiction if the data suggests that there may be potential inconsistent practice (e.g. comparatively high or low proportions of services rated at exceeding NQS). ACECQA shares assessment and rating data analysis with each regulatory authority to assist them with monitoring consistency. ACECQA also shares element level data with the state and territory Professional Support Coordinators, to help guide their efforts in providing training and support to education and care services.
6. Collaboration with state and territory regulatory authorities, and other partner organisations	a) Develop, update and evaluate the Operational Policy Manual for regulatory authorities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content added and updated following agreement between ACECQA, state and territory regulatory authorities, and the Australian Government • Usage of the OPM evaluated as part of ACECQA's national audit on the OPM 	ACECQA developed the Operational Policy Manual (OPM) for regulatory authorities in close collaboration with state and territory regulatory authorities and the Australian Government. The online manual, first published in early 2013, provides guidance to help authorised officers and other regulatory staff to consistently and effectively apply the National Law and Regulations. ACECQA continues to maintain and add to the OPM, with a new chapter on the assessment and rating process published in June 2015. The OPM has also been the topic of one of ACECQA's national audits. The audit examined the use, usability and value of the OPM, with the findings used as part of the ongoing schedule of updating and enhancing the manual.

Priority	Consistency related activities	Progress made to date (as at October 2015)
	<p>b) Quality and Consistency Committee (QaCC)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACECQA facilitates the work of QaCC and its working groups 	<p>The Quality and Consistency Committee comprises senior representatives from state and territory regulatory authorities, the Australian Government and ACECQA.</p> <p>The role of QaCC is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assist ACECQA to meet its statutory responsibilities for monitoring and reporting on national consistency • assist regulatory authorities to meet their statutory responsibilities for implementing the NQF consistently across the nation • provide a forum to share information about the implementation of the NQF and discuss any issues or concerns. <p>Priority areas of work for QaCC have included collaborating on operational changes to streamline NQF processes, amendments to the National Regulations, and ACECQA's program of national audits.</p> <p>A comprehensive review of QaCC and its working groups was undertaken in late 2013.</p> <p>The overall finding from the review was that representatives valued the existence of a national forum to discuss and resolve issues and concerns.</p>
	<p>c) Qualifications related joint working</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACECQA works with a range of partner bodies (AITSL; ATRA; ASQA) to streamline and improve processes and procedures, and promote the status and importance of the early childhood sector, its educators, and its qualifications 	<p>ACECQA has worked collaboratively with the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) • Australasian Teacher Regulatory Authorities (ATRA) • Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) • Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council (CS&HISC). <p>ACECQA was part of CS&HISC's Industry Reference Group and Subject Matter Experts Group that developed the certificate III (CHC30113) and diploma (CHC50113) in early childhood education and care, released on 1 July 2013.</p>

Priority	Consistency related activities	Progress made to date (as at October 2015)
		<p>ACECQA has a memorandum of understanding with ASQA and has worked collaboratively with them regarding the quality of vocational education and training, including being part of ASQA’s strategic management committee for its 2014-15 review of training for the child care and early learning sector.</p> <p>ACECQA has worked closely with both AITSL and ATRA regarding the organisations’ respective qualification assessment processes, seeking to align where possible the related requirements for skilled migration, teacher registration, and approval to work as an early childhood teacher in an NQF service.</p> <p>Regular meetings are held between ACECQA’s qualifications assessment team and AITSL’s skilled migration team.</p> <p>ACECQA has also worked closely with both AITSL and ATRA to progress work on making the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers inclusive of early childhood teachers and early childhood settings. This has involved ACECQA establishing a tri-party working group to consider and progress the relevant issues.</p> <p>ACECQA was part of the Victorian Institute of Teaching’s stakeholder reference group, established in preparation for the registration of early childhood teachers being introduced in Victoria from the end of September 2015.</p> <p>ACECQA is also part of the Early Childhood Teacher Accreditation Working Party, established by the New South Wales Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards in preparation for accreditation of early childhood teachers being introduced in New South Wales from January 2016.</p>

Priority	Consistency related activities	Progress made to date (as at October 2015)
7. National Quality Agenda Information Technology System (NQA ITS)	a) System enhancements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NQA ITS forward work plan collaboratively agreed between ACECQA and the state and territory regulatory authorities • Regular, rolling program of system updates 	<p>ACECQA has added significantly more data validation and business rules to the NQA ITS, which help ensure that jurisdictions enter valid and consistent data.</p> <p>Priorities for 2015-16 include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increasing sector use of online application and notification forms • streamlining processes for jurisdictions • increasing data reporting capability.
	b) Data dictionary and help cards <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide guidance for each section of the system • Assist in improving data quality and completeness, and efficiency 	<p>ACECQA has developed additional documentation to assist jurisdictions in their use and knowledge of the NQA ITS.</p>
	c) Information and training sessions for regulatory authorities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sessions designed to promote and increase the effective use of the NQA ITS 	<p>ACECQA will continue to offer information and training sessions to regulatory authority NQA ITS users. These sessions also provide a mechanism for gathering feedback from users to help inform future enhancements.</p>