

# NQF Annual Performance Report Summary 2020



## The National Quality Framework

The National Quality Framework (NQF) represents a nationwide commitment to quality education and care for our youngest citizens.

Ensuring their health, safety and wellbeing is the first and foremost objective of the NQF. Other important objectives include improving their educational and developmental outcomes, and promoting continuous improvement in the quality of services.

## Overview of the children's education and care sector

As at 30 June 2020:

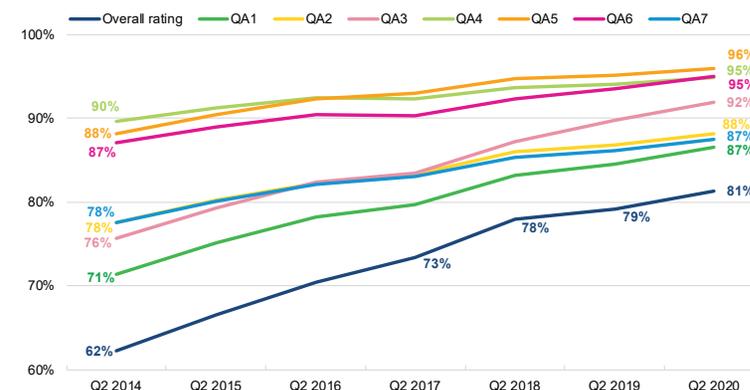
- more than 16,100 children's education and care services are approved to operate under the NQF, including:
  - 8035 long day care services (50% of approved services)
  - 4504 outside school hours care services (28%)
  - 3058 preschools/kindergartens (19%)
  - 507 family day care services (3%).

## Continuous quality improvement

The proportion of children's education and care services rated Meeting National Quality Standard (NQS) or above by state and territory regulatory authorities has increased every year since the NQF was introduced, both at the overall quality rating level and for each of the seven quality areas.

In addition, almost two-thirds (65%) of services rated Working Towards NQS improve their quality rating to Meeting NQS (51%)

Figure 1: Proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above by overall rating and quality area\*



\* 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 - Governance and leadership.

## Report Snapshot



### Chapter 1

#### Impact of COVID-19 and natural disasters

Service providers and staff have demonstrated considerable and prolonged resilience, commitment and innovation



### Chapter 2

#### Children's health and safety

Ensuring the health and safety of children attending services is the first and most important objective of the NQF



### Chapter 3

#### Educational program and practice

The most challenging elements of quality continue to relate to the assessment and planning cycle, and critical reflection



### Chapter 4

#### Children from vulnerable and disadvantaged backgrounds

There is a growing gap between the quality of services in the most disadvantaged and most advantaged areas



### Chapter 5

#### Workforce

A new ten-year national workforce strategy is being developed in 2020/21



### Chapter 1

#### Impact of COVID-19 and natural disasters

Children’s education and care service providers and staff have demonstrated considerable and prolonged resilience, commitment and innovation in response to the significant challenges they have faced throughout 2019-20, including catastrophic bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic.

They have also demonstrated the vital role they play in supporting children to continue their early development and education in the face of these challenges, and in enabling parents and carers to continue to work where possible.

As Australia recovers from COVID-19, access to high quality education and care will be very important, particularly for vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

Sector wide issues, such as workforce sustainability, educator wellbeing, provider and service viability, and skilled migration, will also require ongoing monitoring and attention by all stakeholders.



### Chapter 2

#### Children’s health and safety

Ensuring the health and safety of children attending education and care services is the first and most important objective of the NQF. Almost nine out of ten (88%) services are rated Meeting NQS or above for Quality Area 2 (Children’s health and safety).

The most challenging elements of quality continue to relate to health practices and procedures, supervision, and incident and emergency management.

The rate of serious incidents and confirmed breaches increased in 2019/20. While the rate of serious incidents was slightly higher than in 2018/19, it has remained steady over the last four years.

The continued year on year increase in confirmed breaches reflects an ongoing focus by state and territory regulatory authorities on compliance with the requirements of the National Law and Regulations.



### Chapter 3

#### Educational program and practice

The second objective of the NQF is to improve the educational and developmental outcomes of children attending education and care services.

Since the introduction of the NQF, Quality Area 1 (Educational program and practice) has consistently been the most challenging of the seven quality areas for services to meet. Approaching nine out of ten (87%) services are rated Meeting NQS or above.

The most challenging elements of quality continue to relate to the assessment and planning cycle, and critical reflection.

Research commissioned by ACECQA in 2019 found that genuine and sustained quality improvement is a shared responsibility, with approved providers, service and educational leaders, teachers and educators all playing a vital role. The findings emphasise the need for strong and effective leadership at all levels of service delivery to improve educational program and practice.



### Chapter 4

#### Children from vulnerable and disadvantaged backgrounds

Children from more disadvantaged back-grounds are more likely to be developmentally vulnerable, and receive the greatest benefits from attending high quality education and care.

There is likely to be a significant increase of potentially vulnerable children in Australia as a result of the immediate and continued impact of COVID-19.

The proportion of children’s education and care services in the most disadvantaged areas of Australia rated Meeting NQS or above increased in 2020.

However, there is a growing gap between the quality of services in the most disadvantaged and most advantaged areas. In particular, there is a marked difference in the proportion of high quality services, with services in the most advantaged areas notably more likely to achieve the Exceeding NQS rating.



### Chapter 5

#### Workforce

Improved educator to child ratios and educator qualifications, stipulated under the National Law and Regulations, contribute to higher quality education and care.

Updated versions of the vocational education and care qualifications, including the Certificate III and Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care, are expected to be available for registered training organisations to implement from 2021.

One in ten long day care services hold a staffing waiver, with most waivers relating to the early childhood teacher requirements of the National Regulations.

In December 2019, Education Ministers endorsed the development of a new national workforce strategy to support the recruitment, retention, sustainability and quality of the children’s education and care workforce. The new strategy is anticipated to be finalised and published in the second half of 2021.