



Australian Children's
Education & Care
Quality Authority

National Quality Framework

EXCELLENT RATING APPLICATION GUIDELINES



These guidelines have been developed to assist services seeking to apply, or reapply, for the Excellent rating.

WHAT IS THE EXCELLENT RATING?

The Excellent rating is the highest rating under the National Quality Framework (NQF). The rating recognises services that provide evidence of exceptional education and care, visionary leadership and a commitment to continuous improvement and comprehensive forward planning.

WHY HAVE AN EXCELLENT RATING?

Achieving an Excellent rating is recognition of a service's position as a leader in the education and care sector.

The purpose of the Excellent rating is to:

- **celebrate** excellence in the delivery of education and care
- **engage and involve** families and the community in the profession's discussion about quality, and what is important in education and care
- **learn from and be inspired by** examples of highly accomplished practice, innovation, resourcefulness and creativity in education and care
- **promote and reinforce the value** of education and care, and of the people who work in this sector
- **recognise** providers and educators who are champions of continuous quality improvement.

WHAT IS THE RELEVANT LAW?

Section 134(2) of the Education and Care Services National Law gives ACECQA responsibility for awarding the highest rating of Excellent to services under the NQF.

Sections 152 to 160 of the National Law set out ACECQA's role in determining a rating of Excellent.

Regulation 71 of the Education and Care Services National Regulations sets out the process for an approved provider to apply.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO APPLY?

The opportunity to be awarded the Excellent rating is only available to providers with a service performing above and beyond the requirements of the National Quality Standard (NQS). Services rated Exceeding NQS in all seven quality areas are eligible to apply for the Excellent rating.

DECIDING WHETHER TO APPLY

Your service should consider applying if:

- your practice is unique, innovative or inspiring and reflects the specific context of your service
- you are achieving outstanding outcomes for children and families
- you can clearly explain the reasons for how and why you do what you do
- your influence extends beyond your service
- you are committed to continuous improvement.

WHEN TO APPLY?

If you have difficulty addressing the criteria, it may not be the right time for you to apply. Remember, you can apply at any time the quality rating issued by your state or territory regulatory authority is Exceeding NQS for all seven quality areas.

However, you can only apply once every three years. If you need some time to develop aspects of your practice, leadership or planning to meet the Excellent rating criteria, you should take that time before applying.

You may find our Excellent rating resources helpful in identifying exceptional practices, programs or partnerships that apply to the Excellent rating criteria. Excellent rating resources can be found on the [ACECQA website](#).

WHAT IF YOUR SERVICE IS ALREADY RATED EXCELLENT?

If your service is currently rated Excellent and the rating is due to expire, you can reapply within 90 days of the expiry date. We will notify your regulatory authority that your Excellent rating is due to expire. The re-application process and eligibility is the same as for the application process. You may find the resource, [Reapplying for the Excellent rating information sheet](#) helpful.

Your re-application should tell us about any new practices, programs or partnerships you have introduced. If referencing practices included in a previous application, ensure you demonstrate how they have been adapted to improve outcomes relevant to your current children, families and community. We are particularly interested to hear how your practices, programs and partnerships have been further enhanced since you were last awarded the Excellent rating. Tell us why you have decided to do what you do now, and how the service is improving outcomes for the children and families that are currently attending your service.

THE EXCELLENT RATING CRITERIA

To be awarded the Excellent rating, you must show that your service meets three criteria:

Criterion 1 — The service exemplifies and promotes exceptional education and care that improves outcomes for children and families across at least three of the following themes:

- Collaborative partnerships with professional, community or research organisations
- Commitment to children that respects, reflects and celebrates culture and diversity, including place of origin
- Inclusive partnerships with children and families
- Positive workplace culture, organisational values, support of educators and sustained commitment to professional development
- Practice and environments that enhance children's learning and growth.

Criterion 2 — The service demonstrates leadership that contributes to the development of a community, a local area, or the wider education and care sector.

Criterion 3 — The service demonstrates commitment to sustained excellent practice through continuous improvement and comprehensive forward planning.

WHAT DO THE CRITERIA MEAN?

Criterion 1 — requires you to select at least **three** themes. You must demonstrate how your service is exceptional under each chosen theme and how outcomes have been improved for your service's children and families at the highest level.

To be exceptional, a service might implement unique, innovative or inspiring practices, programs and partnerships based on the assessed needs of its children and families. Or, it might be that educators and staff are finely attuned to the particular and contextual circumstances of the children and families who currently attend the service.



Notably, they adapt their practice to support and benefit these children and families.

Excellent rated services are able to clearly describe and explain what shapes and influences their practice. They reflect on their practices to:

- determine effectiveness
- identify areas for improvement
- establish opportunities for sharing, including undertaking research or facilitating professional learning
- seek advice and strengthen them
- achieve more effective outcomes.

We would like to hear specific examples of how outcomes for the children and families who are using your service are significantly improved because of your exceptional practices, advocacy, programs or partnerships. Tell us what you do, why you do it, and what led you to do it. Inform us how your practice has evolved over time, what collaboration occurred and what outcomes for children and families have been achieved. Share with us if you have identified and had your practice influenced by any strengths, opportunities, characteristics, circumstances or needs within your community. Also, tell us if your practice has been influenced in any other ways.

WHAT EACH OF THE THEMES IN CRITERION 1 MEAN:

Collaborative partnerships with professional, community or research organisations

Under this theme, we will be looking for examples of genuine collaborations with other individuals and/or organisations to benefit the children and families who attend your service. Collaborative partnerships go beyond just connections or relationships: both parties should be actively and equally engaged to achieve mutually beneficial quality outcomes.

Partnerships may have occurred to respond to the strengths, needs and priorities of the children and families and they will result in improved outcomes for your service's children and families.

Commitment to children that respects, reflects and celebrates culture and diversity, including place of origin

Under this theme, we will be looking for practices, programs and partnerships that foster genuine inclusivity and understanding of diversity. We are interested in hearing about why you have committed to these practices, programs and partnerships and how they benefit the children and families attending your service.

This may include how the service embeds families' cultures, languages and beliefs holistically into the service's programs and practices. Alternatively, a service may demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the community in which it operates through embedding genuine value, respect for

and understanding of local culture and diversity within its programs and practices. Your examples should show how your service is exceptional in how it respects, reflects and celebrates diversity in the ability, needs and access of all its children and families.

Inclusive partnerships with children and families

Under this theme, we will be looking for examples of how children and families participate in the program and partner with service leaders and educators to plan and make choices and decisions.

Educators will support children to initiate and lead their own learning. Services should also demonstrate how children collaborate with educators and others when making decisions that affect them. Each family's opinions will be sought when planning for their child's learning and when considering strategic and operational changes in practice. Children and family members are actively involved and may introduce or facilitate programs or practices in partnership with service educators and staff.

In promoting inclusive partnerships with children and families, a service will demonstrate that educators gain valuable insights from, and proactively empower, children and families to make meaningful choices and decisions.

Positive workplace culture, organisational values, support of educators and sustained commitment to professional development

Under this theme, we will be looking at whether your examples demonstrate a strong commitment to educators and staff, who are empowered, enabled and encouraged to be genuinely and actively involved in decision making within the service. We will be looking for examples of how all staff are aware of, and contribute to, unifying organisational values. Also, you should be able to demonstrate how educators and service leaders may be actively engaged in actions related to planning enhancements or initiating and implementing innovative practices. Further, for example, they may be invited to participate in processes for recruiting new team members, negotiating employment conditions and shaping the service's organisational values. The service's positive workplace culture and organisational values will result in an exceptional learning environment for children and families.

Under this theme, services should also demonstrate how they have reflected upon their children and families, their circumstances and the unique context of the service and community. Professional development strategies should be tailored to build and extend the insights, knowledge and skill of educators, staff and service leaders. The strategies should empower staff to be informed, creative and innovative in responding to the children's emerging interests and changing circumstances and support the improvement of outcomes for children and families at the highest level.

Professional development refers to the processes used to develop knowledge and skills in identified areas. This assists educators in keeping up to date with emerging research and best practice, and empowers them to draw on this evidence to inform enhancements to programs and practices. Staff within a service can engage in professional development through informal or formal methods.

Practice and environments that enhance children's learning and growth

Under this theme, we will be looking for examples of the service's practice, planning and learning environments that are exceptional and improve outcomes for children and families at the highest level. There may be examples of how the service has researched, trialled, introduced or extended upon programs and practices to specifically target the interests, strengths, capabilities, needs or circumstances of the children and families. We will be seeking to identify how you demonstrate that practice and environments are intentionally used in planned and spontaneous ways to extend on children's capabilities and interests to enhance their learning and growth. We will look for examples of how your service monitors and reflects on the impact its practices are having for its children and families, and how your service makes adjustments to ensure outcomes are improved at the highest level.

Criterion 2 — is looking for examples of how your service has demonstrated leadership that has led to the development of a community, local area or the wider education and care sector. This is a different concept of leadership than under the NQS, which focuses on leadership within the service. It is important to demonstrate how your service's leadership extends influence outside of your service and how the community, local area or sector has been developed or enhanced as a result. Remember, leading is more than just be involved or participating. We would like to hear how

you are sharing your practice to inspire others, how you are otherwise driving change and any changes that are the direct result of your influence and input.

To meet this criterion, you might consider analysing your service's practices and partnerships, and look for opportunities where you have shared high quality examples more broadly, or otherwise made a difference in the community, local area or sector. Leadership occurs in many ways and takes different paths: it is about guiding, influencing and inspiring change. It can be bold and far reaching, or subtle and local, and still be influential.

Criterion 3 — A service aspiring to an Excellent rating is not only exceptional across several practice themes; it embraces the responsibility of maintaining excellence and pursuing opportunities for further improvement. Your service's application must show how your service will sustain exceptional practice and leadership, and commitment to a future vision which will continue to improve outcomes for children and families, over the three year Excellent rating period.

Excellent rated services are champions of continuous improvement. We would like to hear how your service will sustain and advance its exceptional practice through ongoing improvement and comprehensive forward planning. You might outline the introduction of new practices or programs, or service plans to extend on current practices and/or environments. Consider sharing professional development, partnership or funding opportunities you may aim to seek or have commenced. Providing your Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) or strategic planning documents in addition to the statement is one way of addressing this criterion.

Please note, your service must meet criterion one and criterion two in order to meet criterion three.



WRITING YOUR EXCELLENT RATED APPLICATION

How to write an application for the Excellent rating

You will need to write a statement for each criterion and chosen themes and explain how your service meets the Excellent rating criteria. Your statements help us learn about your service and to understand what you do, why you do it, and who it benefits. Your statements should give current and relevant examples of your service's best practices, programs and partnerships. They should also briefly explain why you have implemented these and what positive outcomes have been achieved.

Applying for the Excellent rating does not require you to create large amounts of documentation. Please provide clear examples with evidence of how you meet the criteria within your written statements. If you have documents, photographs or footage that showcase what you do and why, please feel free to submit them. This information should not include medical or sensitive information that identifies individual children, family, educators, staff or community members by full name.

Being rated as Exceeding NQS by your state or territory regulatory authority tells us that your service has already gone above and beyond what is necessary to meet the NQS. For this reason, there is no need to demonstrate how you achieved your Exceeding NQS rating. Rather, focus on providing examples of how your service is exceptional. Please also provide examples of how your service is a leader outside of the service, and show how the service team will continue to improve and plan for the future.

Remember, it is the responsibility of your service to provide all necessary evidence for its assessment under the Excellent rating criteria. We will support your service to fill in knowledge gaps and provide further information through conducting a teleconference and/or requesting additional evidence.

Choosing aspects of your service to write about

Take time to think about your service's practices, programs and partnerships; consider current practice across the education and care sector, and consider any exceptional outcomes for children and families you have achieved. Also consider feedback you may have received about your service from families, children, organisations, community members and other education and care professionals.

Review your last assessment and rating report and consider which aspects of your service would be considered unique, inspiring, well above practice found in most services, or which assist you to achieve outstanding outcomes for children and families.

Once you have identified these practices, programs and partnerships, think about:

1. *How and why these practices, programs or partnerships were developed*

Who initiated them? Tell us the reason why your service chose to implement its specific practices, programs or

partnerships? How long has the service been engaged in these practices, programs or partnerships? Who do they benefit? How do they improve outcomes for the children and families who use your service? Do they develop the community, local area or sector?

2. *Who and what these practices, programs or partnerships involve*

Do these practices involve specific educators or staff? Do they involve children and families? Do they involve the wider community? What are these practices? How often do these practices occur?

3. *How you reflect upon and improve these practices*

Do you reflect on these practices? How do you reflect? How often? Who provides input on improving these practices? How do you know your practices, programs or partnerships are meeting their intended purpose? What changes have you made to your practices as a result of reflection?

THE EXCELLENT RATING APPLICATION PROCESS

What happens to my application?

While the Excellent rating is a very high benchmark, we try to make the application process as simple as possible. You need to apply in writing, but your written application is just one way for us to gather information. We will email you to confirm that your application has been received. We will then contact you to give you information about the next steps in the application process and answer any questions you may have.

In most cases, we will organise a dedicated time to speak on the phone with you (and any key people you would like involved) about what you do and why you do what you do. We want this to be a friendly conversation to make sure we have a good understanding of the education and care practices your service delivers. We will let you know the topics we wish to discuss with you beforehand so that you will feel prepared.

What information might ACECQA consider?

We must ask for, and take into account, advice from the relevant state or territory regulatory authority in making a decision about whether to award the Excellent rating.

We may make other inquiries for the purposes of assessing the service, seek advice from people with expertise in the education and care sector, or take steps to verify the information provided in the application.

We may also look for information about your service online or, if needed, visit the service to undertake further inquiries.

How long does the Excellent rating process take?

We must make a decision within 60 days after the application was received. This period may be extended by up to 30 days if we request further information from the approved provider, make any inquiries, or if the approved provider agrees to an extension.

It is important that you ensure a key contact is available during the process to provide further information if we have any questions about your application. If your service will be closed for any period of time after you submit your application, please provide us with an 'out of hours' contact number or consider delaying your application until the key contact is available.

Withdrawal of application

You may withdraw your application at any time before we make a decision. If your service is assessed and rated after you have submitted an application for the Excellent rating, and your service has not been rated Exceeding NQS in all seven quality areas, your application for the Excellent rating will be withdrawn.

NOTIFICATION OF DECISION

Receiving information about the decision practices

We will provide a written decision notice to the approved provider and your state or territory regulatory authority within 14 days of the decision being made. Applicants will receive written feedback which details the reasons for the decision.

Within your decision notice, your practice examples will be identified as either exceptional practice at the highest level or reflective practices of services operating at the Exceeding NQS level. Only practices, programs and partnerships listed as exceptional can be used to demonstrate meeting the Excellent rating criteria.

What will your service's final rating be?

If we award a rating of Excellent, it becomes the overall rating for the service.

Services must retain their rating of Exceeding NQS in all seven quality areas throughout the three year award period to maintain their Excellent rating. After this time, eligible services have the option to reapply.

What happens if your service is rated Excellent?

Services awarded the Excellent rating will receive a certificate showing their Excellent rating. They will also receive branding to promote their status as an Excellent rated service.

Services receiving an Excellent rating may be promoted in our newsletters, media releases and website, and may be invited to be involved in other events to help promote exceptional practices in education and care services.

Will the application remain confidential?

Information provided by a service will be handled in line with [ACECQA's Privacy Policy](#). We may need to disclose personal information to some third parties, including regulatory authorities, to verify the information provided in the application. We will list, map and share select practice examples of services awarded the Excellent rating on our website, through social media and in training materials.

Can the decision be appealed?

There is no legislative review process for an Excellent rating application decision.



If you believe you have been unfairly treated, you may make a complaint to the Education and Care Services Ombudsman. For more information, please visit: necsopic.edu.au/

Application time frames

A service is able to apply for the Excellent rating once every three years unless we make a decision otherwise. Providers wishing to make a second application within the three year time frame should contact us.

Can the Excellent rating be revoked?

We must revoke the Excellent rating if the service no longer meets the criteria or if the state or territory regulatory authority advises us that the rating level of the service is lower than Exceeding NQS in all seven quality areas.

Where to get further information?

We are happy to discuss your application and the application process with you. If you have questions, please contact us on 1300 422 327 or enquiries@acecqa.gov.au.

HOW TO SUBMIT AN APPLICATION

To make an application, you must:

- complete and sign the [application form](#)
- attach your written statement with evidence showing how you meet each of the three criteria.

We prefer to receive applications electronically. If possible, please submit your application by email to excellent@acecqa.gov.au.

Please note: if the file size of your application is too large for email, please contact us to organise access to the ACECQA Filecloud. Alternatively, if emailing or cloud access of your application is not possible, a hardcopy or a USB with an electronic version of the application can be posted to:

Excellent rating

ACECQA

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