



Australian Children's
Education & Care
Quality Authority

Research and Evaluation Strategy 2021-24

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Purpose

We are committed to providing contemporary, evidence based and practical research and guidance as part of furthering the objectives of the National Quality Framework (NQF).

The purpose of this strategy is to guide the systematic collection, analysis and reporting of data and information to:

- contribute to the NQF evidence base around the impact of early childhood education and care, and outside school hours care
- measure progress and evaluate the extent to which the NQF is meeting its objectives
- support judgments about effective and efficient practice, as well as identify issues, risks, challenges, opportunities, and unintended consequences
- provide an evidence base for decision making on current and future regulatory developments
- generate insights and research outputs that are targeted and appropriate for the intended audience(s), and that can be translated into practical outcomes, guidance and recommendations for service providers and leaders, as well as educators and teachers, to consider and implement.



National Law functions and powers

Under sections 225, 227 and 229 of the Education and Care Services National Law, we are required to undertake a range of research and evaluation activities, specifically to:

report to and advise Education Ministers on the NQF

report to governments in relation to the evaluation of the NQF

undertake national audits to evaluate trends in the administration of the NQF, and promote and foster continuous quality improvement

publish guides and resources to support parents, the community and service providers to understand quality and the NQF, as well as information about the implementation and administration of the NQF, and its effect on developmental and educational outcomes for children.

Strategies	Success indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage and generate data to support reporting on NQF outcomes: <p>Initiate and contribute to research projects that deliver insight on the performance of the NQF</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce, commission and leverage research and analysis that draws attention to important issues and emerging trends within the NQF • Contribute to national policy initiatives and positively influence major inquiries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As data custodians, we lead and facilitate improvements in NQF data capture • Our collaboration with other data custodians and research organisations brings greater transparency and knowledge about NQF performance • Our policy development, resources and advice are evidence based and influential
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance the NQF by working with regulatory authorities and governments: • Report and provide expert advice to governments on the impacts of NQF policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governments and regulators seek our programs, services and advice • We identify emerging issues and trends, and broker national solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the benefits of the NQF and high quality early childhood education and care: • Inform policy and public debate by drawing on our national perspective and research capability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families increasingly know about the NQF and the importance of quality early childhood education and care • We are a reliable source of quality information, and teachers, educators and service leaders and families know about and access the information / resources we provide to our sector

NQF Evaluation Framework

In addition to our National Law functions and powers, and our Strategic Plan, another crucial component of our research and evaluation authorising environment is the [NQF Evaluation Framework](#).

The framework, informed and agreed by all governments, has been developed as a guide for determining how and to what extent the NQF is meeting its objectives. It lays the foundation and parameters for sector and government research and evaluation projects and activities by:

- building a shared understanding of what needs to be evaluated and why
- providing a common reference point when considering existing and future research and evaluation activities
- presenting a logical method for measuring progress against the desired outcomes of the NQF
- linking NQF objectives with key research questions, such as:
 - To what extent are the NQF and regulatory authority actions improving these outcomes?
 - Is achievement in this area equitable?
 - How can we support service types and population groups that are not getting as much benefit?
 - What can we learn from services that are exceeding expectations and standards in this area?

- How can services that are working towards expectations and standards in this area be supported?
- What are the barriers to improvement?

Principles

We have a significant role in the national system to identify, promote and monitor research and evaluation that informs high quality programs, practices and policies.

The following principles underpin our research and evaluation activities and approaches so that they align with our Strategic Plan's success indicators:

- We prioritise research that will lead to quality improvement for children
- We undertake and contribute to research that measures the extent to which the NQF is achieving its objectives, in line with the NQF Evaluation Framework
- We act as responsible data custodians and seek to continually improve data quality and completeness



- We value both international research as well as research undertaken in the Australian context.

Approach

Our three main approaches to research and evaluation under the NQF are summarised below. The need to appropriately identify and protect our intellectual property will be a key consideration within each of these approaches.

Internal production

We have a small research team that, in addition to responding to data and information requests from governments and the sector, produces a broad range of regular and ad hoc reports, including:

- [quarterly NQF Snapshots](#) – these have been produced, published and refined since Q1 2013. The online version provides an increasingly in-depth range of analysis and the full dataset is published to allow any additional analysis and interrogation by interested parties
- [NQF Annual Performance Reports](#) – to date, these have followed a similar structure, with our first report being produced and published in 2017. The main report is supplemented by an introductory video, summary report, interactive charts and slide pack
- [occasional papers](#) – these initially focussed on the areas of the National Quality Standard that service providers and staff find

more challenging, and have subsequently analysed trends in quality rating reassessments, as well as quality ratings by socio-economic status of the area in which services are located

- national audit reports – these are scoped and agreed in partnership with governments, with the high level summaries being reported as part of our corporate [annual reports](#). The findings from audit reports also contribute to targeted sector guidance and formation
- [regulatory burden](#) and families research – to date, we have undertaken five surveys measuring perceptions of regulatory burden experienced by service providers under the NQF. Since 2017, we have also undertake a biennial survey of families to monitor the level of awareness of the quality ratings system, and the value that current and prospective users of children’s education and care services place upon it.

Our research team also works in partnership with governments to provide key information for the annual [Report on Government Services](#), as well as with all stakeholders to identify and share high quality research, information and guidance. Our [research and reports page](#) provides a repository of NQF related research and evidence, including our publications and reports, as well as [education and care sector research](#), such as international benchmarking research, economic analyses, international and local data linkages, literature reviews, longitudinal research and meta-analyses.

Commissioning

From time to time, particularly when a specific opportunity or priority has arisen, we commission research from a third party. Two such examples are below:

- [Quality improvement research](#) – in 2019, we commissioned research on the drivers of quality improvement, conducted by Macquarie University, Queensland University of Technology and Edith Cowan University. The research focused on long day care services that had improved their overall quality rating, and identified practices that support quality improvement in educational program and practice, and governance and leadership
- [Families research](#) – in 2014 and 2018, we commissioned research exploring themes that influence parents and carers in their decision-making process when choosing a children’s education and care service, conducted by Hall & Partners.

Collaboration and partnerships

As an organisation, we are committed to being open, responsive and transparent. Recognising that the NQF is a jointly agreed and shared framework, we strive to find new and innovative ways to collaborate and partner with governments and sector stakeholders.

With the recent establishment of the [Australian Education Research Organisation](#) (AERO), as well as our ongoing relationship with the [Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership](#) (AITSL), there are increased opportunities to work with these and

other statutory bodies.

We welcome and encourage all high quality research that contributes to the NQF evidence base. Occasionally, we have been approached by researchers from Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and other organisations seeking in-kind support for their research activities.

Below are the guidelines that we refer to when considering such approaches.

Guidelines for participation and support for external research and evaluation

These guidelines outline our approach to considering and responding to third parties seeking our support for, or participation in, external research and evaluation activities.

Such requests need to demonstrate how the:

- proposed research aligns with the NQF Evaluation Framework, as well as this strategy document
- research outcomes will add to the evidence base around the impact of children's education and care, and be made available in a practical way for sector stakeholders.

The types of in-kind support we may provide include:

- access to internal staff expertise, including participation in consultation meetings or feedback on research findings
- communication about, and dissemination of, relevant research findings and resources
- access to data, in accordance with our published [terms of use](#) and the agreed [Protocol for sharing, using and disclosing National Quality Agenda IT System data](#).

In general, we will not:

- cost in-kind support – any commitment will be delivered in a form consistent with our

organisational priorities at any given time

- be party to any formal agreement for a research grant application or enter into any agreement (including memoranda of understanding) or binding contract
- provide financial support.

We will be guided by the following principles when considering supporting, or participating in, external research and evaluation activities:

- *Maintaining independence and neutrality* – we will not enter into any arrangement where it gives rise to an actual or perceived conflict of interest or compromises our independence and neutrality
- *Creating value* – the proposed project or activity needs to benefit sector stakeholders and improve outcomes for children.

Please note that in addition to the information requested at **Appendix A**, all requests for research and evaluation support will be assessed with regard to our capacity to participate, taking into account our research and other work priorities at any given time.

APPENDIX A

External Research and Evaluation Support – Application Request Form

Project Description	
Requesting Stakeholder	
Project or Activity Timeframe	
Nature of In-Kind Support Requested	
Contact Person / Details	

Summary

OBJECTIVES/OUTCOMES/OUTPUTS (as applicable)
Objectives: Concise statement(s) about what the research project or activity is aiming to achieve.
Outcomes: The desired results, consequences, benefits, impacts of the project or activity.
Outputs: The goods, services and products delivered by the project or activity.

Benefits to the NQF

KEY QUESTION		CONSIDERATION
1	How will this research and evaluation activity or project further the objectives of the NQF, including improved outcomes for children?	
2	What is the alignment to the NQF Evaluation Framework, and ACECQA's Research and Evaluation Strategy 2021-24?	
3	What are the benefits for sector stakeholders?	
4	Will the research outcomes add to the evidence base around the impact of children's education and care, and be made available in a practical way for sector stakeholders?	

Research ethics

Where relevant, please include a statement of assurance that all necessary research ethics approvals have or will be obtained by the third party for this research.

Submission of requests

Please submit all requests for research and evaluation support to research@acecqa.gov.au



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