



Australian Children's
Education & Care
Quality Authority

NATIONAL QUALITY FRAMEWORK DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS FOR CENTRE- BASED EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE SERVICES IN MULTI-STOREY BUILDINGS



Improved safety outcomes, and streamlined approvals are achieved when National Quality Framework (NQF) regulatory requirements are taken into account at the beginning of the design process.

The emergency evacuation of very young children from multi-storey buildings has unique risks.

Building practitioners such as developers, architects and planning professionals in state and local government will be able to use this information to improve their NQF awareness and understanding.

For children's education and care services in multi-storey buildings the risks of evacuating young children are increased. Babies, young children and non-ambulant children are especially vulnerable as they are unable to respond independently and rely on early childhood professionals' preparedness and abilities.

These risks are heightened in multi-storey buildings due to physical and environmental factors such as longer distances of travel to a safe evacuation area and the negotiation of fire stairs, particularly when they are shared with other building occupants.

The robust risk management of the safety of young children in multi-storey buildings requires effective interaction, between the NQF and applicable planning and development, and building and construction processes.

This information targets **Class 9b early childhood centres** on upper levels of multi-storey buildings and outlines key design considerations to mitigate safety risks, enable streamlined service approval processes and achieve best practice and quality outcomes for children. Key terms are explained at the end of this document.

SERVICE APPROVALS UNDER THE NATIONAL QUALITY FRAMEWORK

Approved providers who wish to operate an education and care service must obtain a 'service approval' from the regulatory authority within the jurisdiction that the proposed service will be located. A service approval is decided once building and construction work has been completed and the service premises is ready to be occupied.

The regulatory authority requires documentation from, and may also liaise with, the local government/council or other third parties regarding aspects of the building certification or other matters. While this information informs their decision making, an application for service approval is an independent decision to those made under local, state and territory planning and development frameworks.

Under the NQF, the regulatory authority must consider a range of matters such as:

- the guiding principles and objectives of the NQF
- the suitability of the service premises and their site/location for operating a service
- the adequacy of the proposed service's policies and procedures, including emergency and evacuation
- potential access to non-authorized persons
- any other relevant matter.

For education and care services in multi-storey buildings, specific considerations that will typically be considered as a 'relevant matter' will also include:

- the level/floor of the building on which the service is located
- the distance of travel to a safe evacuation area, and ability of the service to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of children during an evacuation
- whether the design of the service, including thoroughfares, enables adequate supervision and efficient evacuation or egress in the case of an emergency
- whether the service has a suitable outdoor area which allows children to explore and experience the natural environment.

A service approval may be granted with conditions of operation, such as additional educators required to support effective evacuation. In certain cases, the regulatory authority may also reduce the requested number of approved places, or refuse to grant a service approval, if they are not satisfied that the risks have been sufficiently mitigated.

PHYSICAL AND BUILDING FEATURES ENABLING SAFETY

In addition to existing building and facility requirements under the National Construction Code (NCC), the following features require careful consideration to adequately address risks:

- Additional fire safety systems to support long distances of travel from upper levels to an exit, by allowing additional time for safe evacuation – such as an automatic sprinkler system throughout (AS 2118.1), building occupant warning system (AS 1670.1), emergency warning and intercom system (AS 1670.4) or firewalls and compartmentation of areas.
- Design/fit out of egress and evacuation stairs and size of staircases.
- Egress of other building tenancies with adult occupants.
- Requirements for child height handrails on egress and evacuation stairs (550 – 650 mm), including secondary child height handrails if it is a shared fire-isolated exit.
- Requirements for fall barriers on evacuation only stairs (minimum 1.5m height) and general egress stairs (minimum 1.8m height).
- Design and fit out of high fire risk areas within the service, such as kitchens, offices, food preparation areas and laundry – including smoke compartmentation of kitchen/laundry areas that directly adjoin children's indoor/outdoor spaces.
- Location and distribution of designated exits to minimise any objects that may obstruct or hinder evacuation.
- Location of equipment used for evacuation or fire safety.
- Suitability of alternative means of evacuation (such as the use of lifts where the early childhood service is located several floors above ground).
- Design and fit out of outside areas above ground level, with perimeter fencing heights (minimum non-climbable 1.8m height).
- Safe and designated assembly points.

In regard to the development of Emergency Management Plans, these should be developed in accordance with AS 3745-2010. Some buildings have multiple leaseholders and ownership arrangements, such as a mixed use building which includes both residential and commercial tenants. The construction of the building and the subsequent ownership arrangement should consider the service's capacity to comply with AS 3745-2010 which will require an appropriate level of co-ordinated planning and training for emergencies.

EARLY CONSIDERATION OF FIRE SAFETY DESIGN AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS BENEFITS ALL PARTIES

There are clear benefits for consideration of the above information at the earliest stages in the planning and development of these services, including avoiding:

- delays in gaining – or inability to gain – a service approval and opening a service
- reductions in approved places due to building features or additional conditions being imposed based on the design of the service
- remedial building works and the time and money involved to enable a service approval – noting that remedial actions may not always represent the best child-safe solutions when retro-fitted after construction.

Some regulatory authorities may provide ‘design guidance’. Consultation with the relevant [regulatory authority](#) will assist in the early identification of design issues relating to the emergency evacuation and egress. However, it is not the regulatory authority’s responsibility to provide the solutions – the approved provider should engage a fire safety expert with knowledge of the jurisdiction’s legal requirements and best practice.

NATIONAL QUALITY FRAMEWORK OPERATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

Once the service is approved, a condition of operation is that approved services must continue to comply with the operational requirements of the NQF. An overarching objective of the NQF is to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of all children attending the service.

Approved providers have obligations to protect children from harm and hazards likely to cause injury – for example, such as fire and falls during emergency or evacuation responses or rehearsals.

The NQF imposes minimum requirements for emergency and evacuation. Education and care services must have in place emergency and evacuation policies and procedures, for rehearsal every three months. They must set out instructions for what must be done in an emergency, informed by a risk assessment, and include an emergency and evacuation plan diagram, displayed in a prominent position near each exit which is used for evacuation purposes.

For services in multi-storey buildings, potential emergencies to be addressed within their emergency and evacuation policies and procedures would include evacuations from upper levels, due to actual fire, evacuation rehearsal or false alarm. Services are also expected to ensure their procedures align with:

- local fire safety regulation
- whole-building emergency and evacuation procedures designed and maintained by their Buildings Emergency Planning Committee
- work, health and safety requirements.

The NQF guiding principles expect that best practice is provided in the provision of education and care services. To achieve this the approved provider should also consider the requirements of AS 3745-2010 in developing their emergency plans.



For more information:

- Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) at info@acecqa.gov.au or call 1300 422 327.
- The education and care [regulatory authority](#) in your state or territory.

KEY TERMS

Approved provider refers to a person or entity authorised to apply to the regulatory authority for a ‘service approval’ to operate one or more education and care service/s that includes management responsibility for staff at the service/s. The approved provider is the key duty holder for the services they operate under the Education and Care Services National Law.

Centre-based service is an education and care service other than a family day care service (operated from a residence or other approved family day care venue).

Education and care service is a service providing or intending to provide education and care on a regular basis to children under 13 years of age (other than a service expressly excluded under national legislation). It includes long day care services, family day care services, outside school hours care services and some preschool programs.

Early childhood centre is defined under the NCC as a centre-based education and care service, not including outside school hours care services.

Multi-storey buildings in the context of the NQF refers to building premises that contain three or more storeys – with an education and care service physically located on any floor, including ground level. The term is used in the NCC but not further defined – buildings are classified by the purpose for which they are designed, constructed or adapted to be used. A Class 9b building includes an early childhood centre.

National Quality Framework refers to the national system for the regulation and quality assessment of approved education and care services.

Regulatory authority refers to a body in each state and territory that administers the NQF, usually as part of that state or territory’s education department or agency.

REFERENCES

Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government. (June 2014) *Guidelines for the Planning and Development of Child Care Facilities*, University of Technology, Sydney.

NSW Department of Planning and Environment. (August 2017) *Child Care Planning Guideline: Delivering quality child care for NSW*, NSW Government, Sydney.

NSW Department of Planning and Environment. (August 2018) *Planning Circular PS 18-005: New guidance for centre-based child care facilities*, NSW Government, Sydney.

Queensland Department of Education. (2018) *Queensland Regulatory Authority and local council interaction – early childhood education and care services: National Quality Framework Fact sheet for local councils*, Queensland Government, Brisbane.

Queensland Department of Education. (2018) *Guidance for approved providers – early childhood education and care services operating in multi-storey buildings: National Quality Framework Fact sheet for approved providers*, Queensland Government, Brisbane.

