



Australian Children's
Education & Care
Quality Authority



NQF Snapshot

Q3 2023

November 2023

A quarterly report from
the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority

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Overview

NQF Snapshot Q3 2023 is ACECQA's 43rd national report on children's education and care services operating under the National Quality Framework (NQF).

It provides analysis and information on the profile of the sector and the quality ratings of services against the National Quality Standard (NQS).

A revised version of the NQS commenced on 1 February 2018. The number of quality standards has reduced from 18 to 15, and the number of quality elements has reduced from 58 to 40.

The changes streamlined the NQS and reduced overlap between elements and standards. Analysis at the standard and element level uses quality ratings against the 2018 NQS only, while analysis at the overall and quality area level uses all current quality ratings against both the 2012 and 2018 NQS.

An [interactive online version of the Snapshot](#), which includes additional analysis, is available on the ACECQA website.

The data presented in this Snapshot was taken from the National Quality Agenda IT System (NQA ITS) at 00.30 on 1 October 2023.

Due to rounding, individual percentages in the tables and figures may not add up to 100%.



Snapshot highlights

- 17,424
children's education and care services approved to operate under the NQF

- 15,845 (91%)
services with a quality rating

- 14,183 (90%)
services with a quality rating are Meeting NQS or above

- 7213
providers approved to operate

- 5717 (79%)
providers approved to operate only one service

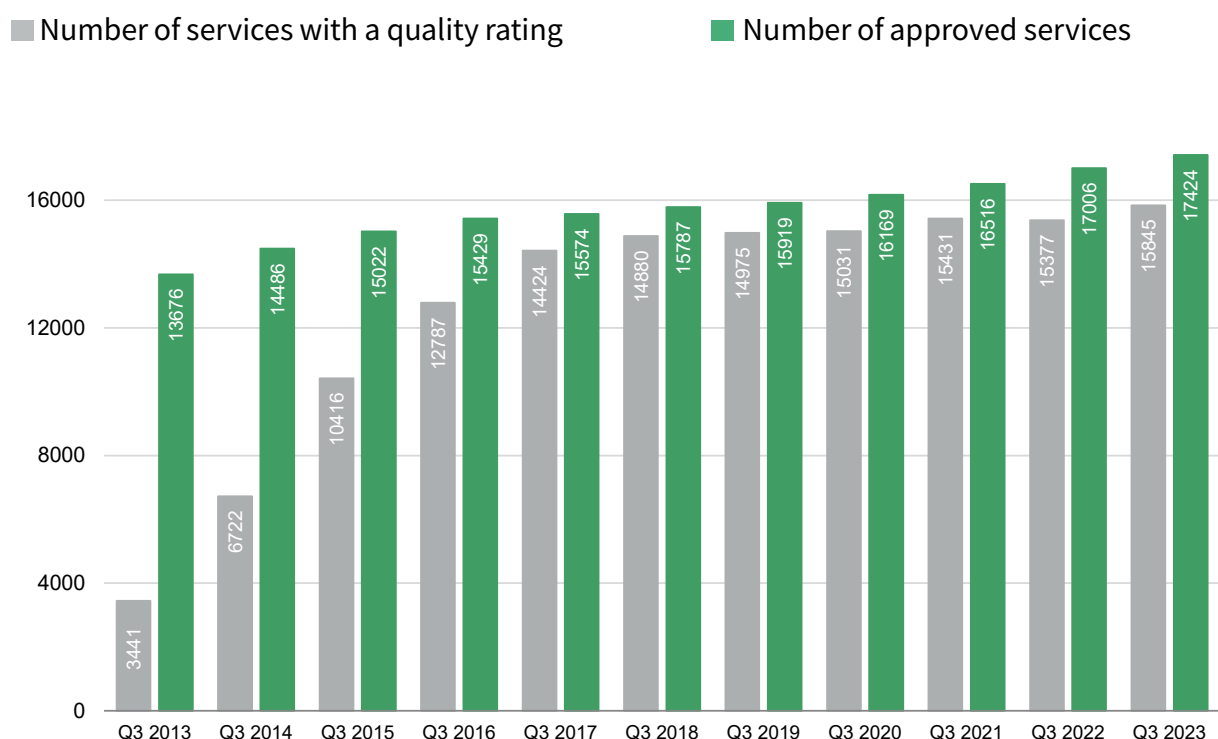
- 32
services rated Excellent by ACECQA¹

- 18,567
quality rating reassessments completed

- 68%
of services rated Working Towards NQS improved their overall quality rating at reassessment

- 14,342 (82%)
services with a quality rating against the 2018 NQS

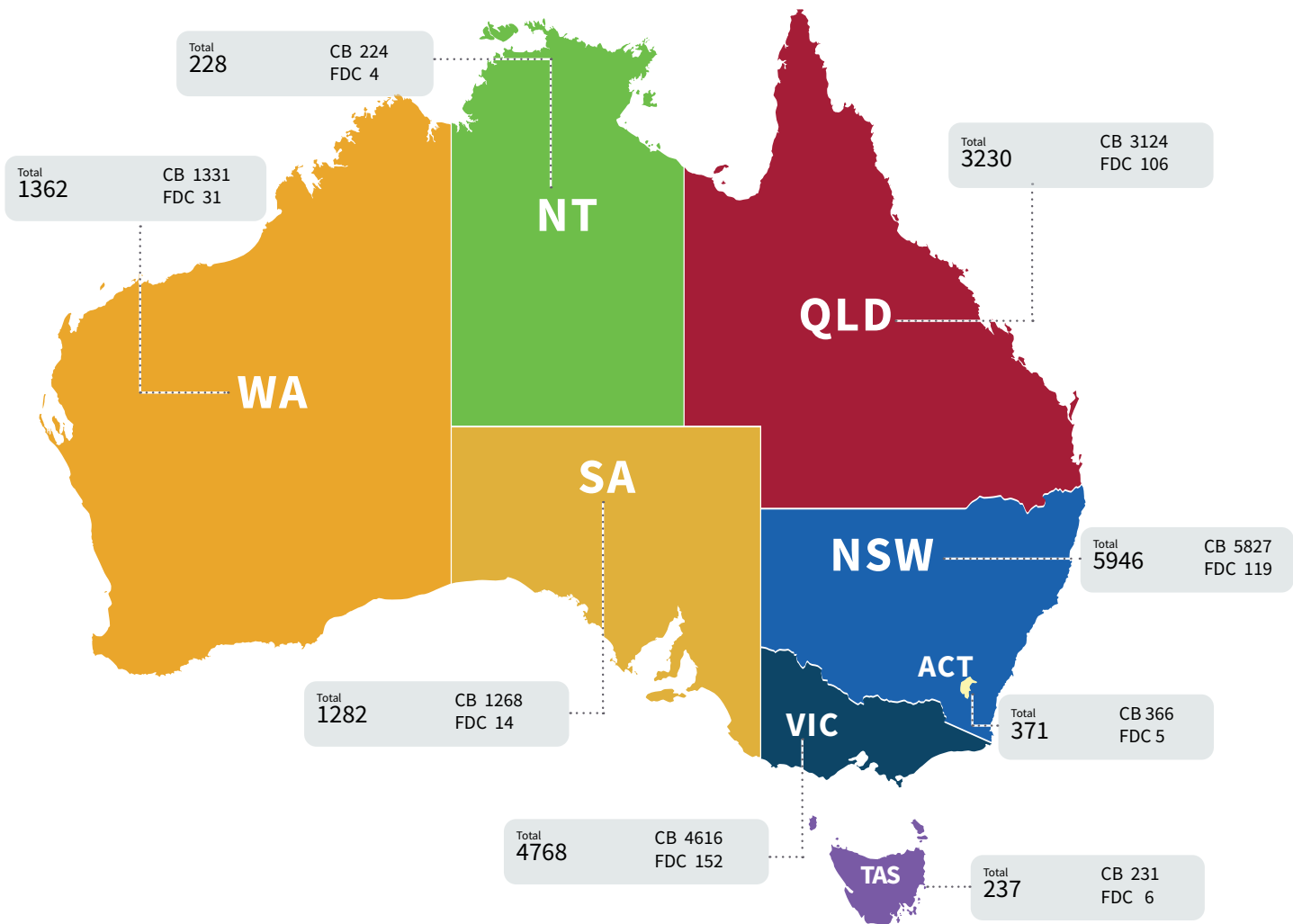
Figure 1: Number of approved services and number of services with a quality rating by quarter



¹ The Excellent rating is awarded for a period of three years. Unless a reapplication for the Excellent rating is received, a service's rating will revert back to Exceeding NQS after this three year period. The Snapshot includes the current number of Excellent rated services.

Profile of the sector

Figure 2: Number of approved services by jurisdiction and service type



<p>Total Centre-based (CB) ¹</p> <p>16,987 (97%)</p> <p>3% Increase on Q3 2022</p>	<p>Total Family day care (FDC) ²</p> <p>437(3%)</p> <p>-6% Decrease on Q3 2022</p>	<p>Total</p> <p>17,424</p> <p>2% Increase on Q3 2022</p>
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¹ A centre-based service is an education and care service other than a family day care service. This includes most long day care, preschool and outside school hours care services that are delivered at a centre. It does not include Tasmanian preschools/ kindergartens and most preschools/ kindergartens in Western Australia that are outside the scope of the NQF, as well as other services that aren't regulated under the National Law.

² A family day care service is an education and care service delivered through a network of educators operating from residences and other approved venues. They are sometimes known as family day care schemes and they are administered and supported by central coordination units.

Figure 3: Proportion of services rated Meeting NQS or above by overall rating and quality area

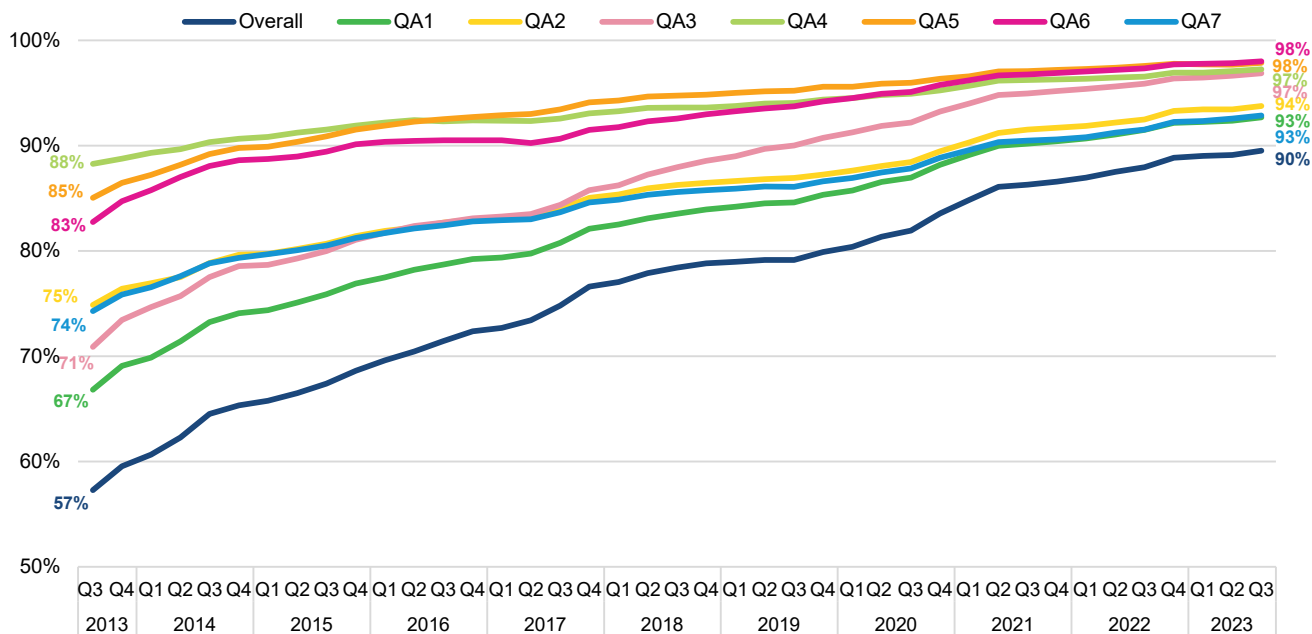


Figure 4: Proportion of services rated Exceeding NQS or above by overall rating and quality area

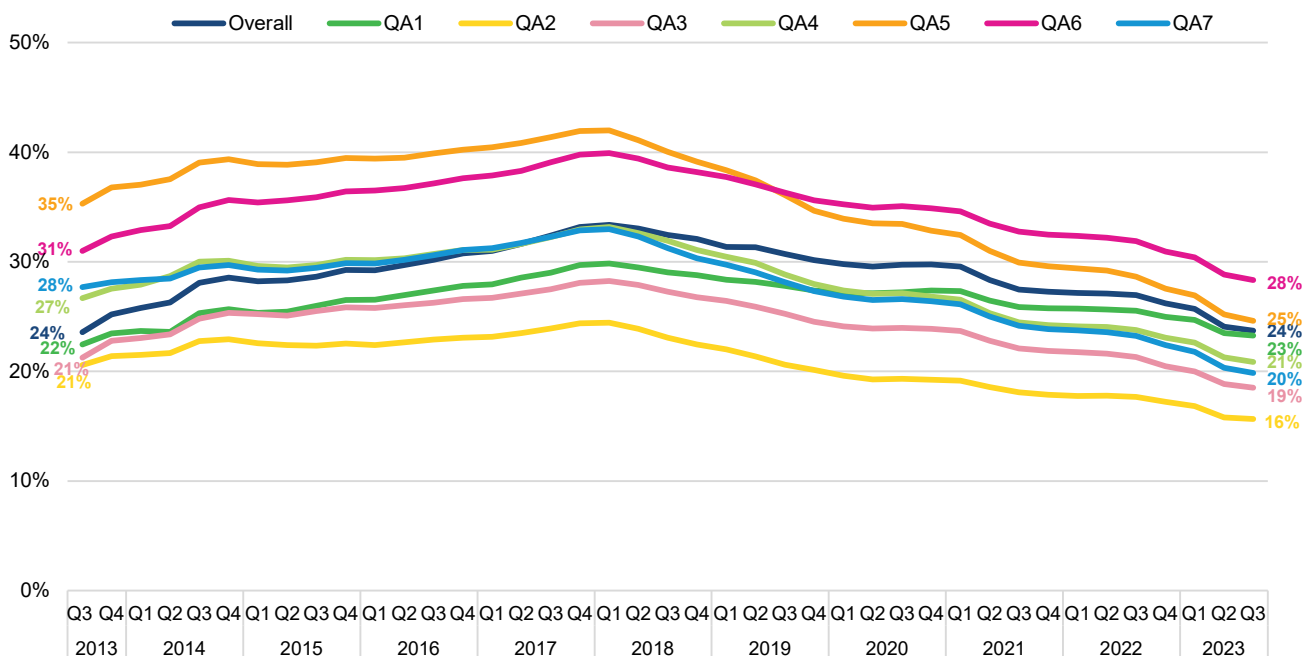


Figure 5: Proportion of services by service type and jurisdiction ^{1,2,3,4,5}

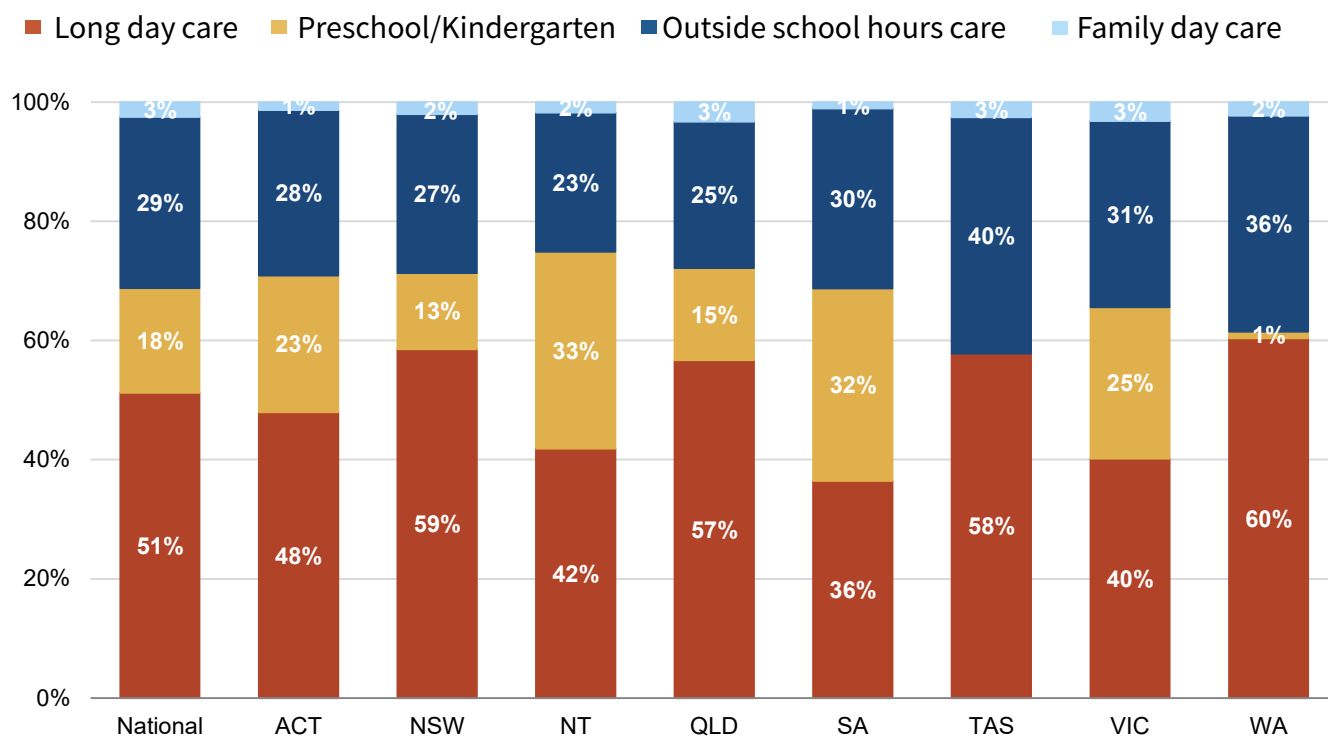


Table 1: Number of services by service type and jurisdiction

	Family day care	Long day care	Preschool/Kindergarten	Outside school hours care	Other	Total
ACT	5	178	85	103	0	371
NSW	119	3480	762	1585	0	5946
NT	4	95	75	53	1	228
QLD	106	1831	499	794	0	3230
SA	14	467	414	387	0	1282
TAS	6	137	0	94	0	237
VIC	152	1915	1212	1489	0	4768
WA	31	821	15	493	2	1362
TOTAL	437	8924	3062	4998	3	17,424

1 NQA ITS data collected on service type is self-reported by providers when applying for service approval, and providers may choose multiple service types. For example, a service providing both long day care and outside school hours care, or one providing both long day care and preschool/kindergarten.

2 Providers are not required to notify changes to this information, and therefore this NQA ITS information may not be current.

3 Centre-based services offering more than one type of service are classified as follows: services which provide long day care in addition to any other service type are classified as long day care services; services which provide preschool/kindergarten as well as outside school hours care are classified as preschool/kindergarten services; services which provide outside school hours care only are classified as outside school hours care services.

4 Excludes Tasmanian preschools/kindergartens and most preschools/kindergartens in Western Australia that are outside the scope of the NQF, as well as other services that aren't regulated under the National Law.

5 Three services categorised as 'Other' excluded for graphical purposes.

Figure 6: Proportion of services by provider management type ^{1,2,3}

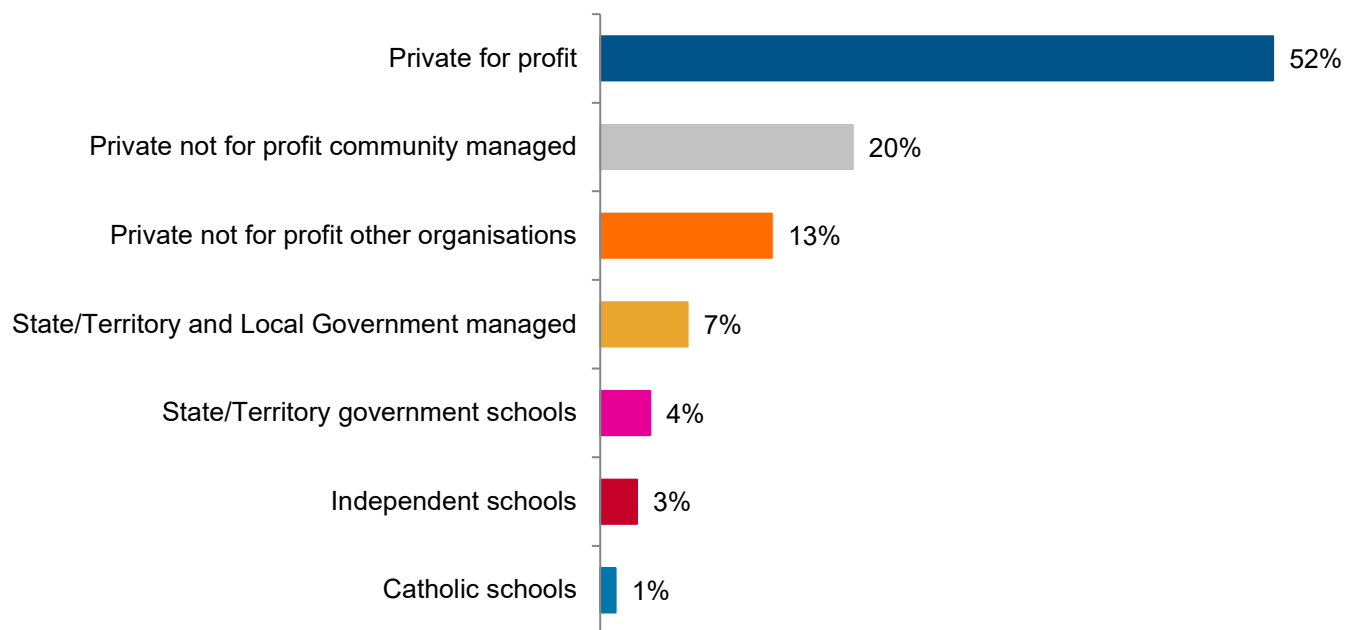


Table 2: Number and proportion of services by provider management type

Provider management type	Number of services	Proportion of services
Private for profit	9101	52%
Private not for profit community managed	3416	20%
Private not for profit other organisations	2323	13%
State/Territory and Local Government managed	1183	7%
State/Territory government schools	678	4%
Independent schools	498	3%
Catholic schools	210	1%
Not stated/Other	15	0%
Total	17,424	100%

¹ NQA ITS data collected on provider management type is self-reported by providers when applying for provider approval. Providers are not required to notify changes to this information, and therefore this NQA ITS information may not be current.

² Provider management type classifications are available at Australian Bureau of Statistics (2013) [National Early Childhood Education and Care Collection: Data Collection Guide, 2013](#) (Cat. No. 4240.0.55.002).

³ 15 services categorised as 'Not stated/Other' excluded for graphical purposes.

Figure 7 shows that 79% of approved providers operate a single service while 1% of approved providers operate 25 or more services.

Figure 7: Proportion of approved providers by size

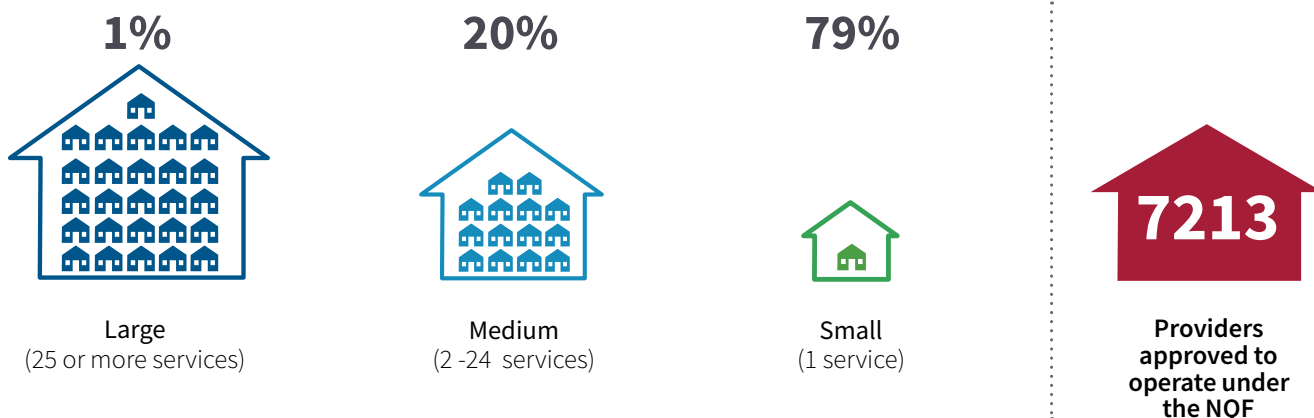
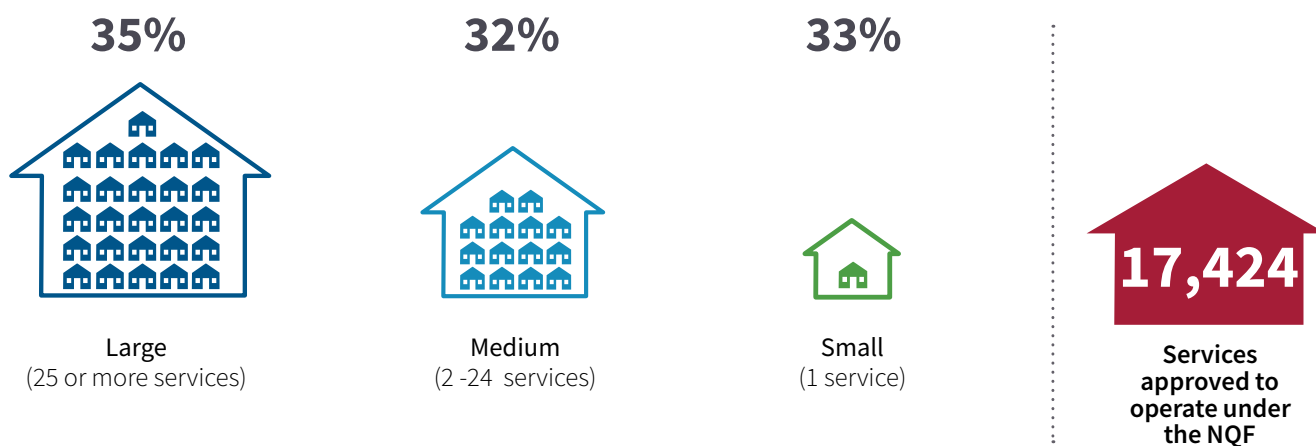


Figure 8 shows that 33% of approved services are operated by small approved providers while 35% of approved services are operated by large approved providers.

Figure 8: Proportion of approved services by provider size



Progress of assessment and rating

Table 3 includes all approved services. The proportion of services with a quality rating will not reach 100% at any one time because a small proportion of services will only recently have been approved and may not have started operating or may have only been operating for a short period of time. In general, state and territory regulatory authorities will not assess and rate newly approved services which have been operating for less than 9-12 months.

Table 3: Quality ratings by jurisdiction

	Number of services	Proportion of all services	Number of services with a quality rating	Proportion of services with a quality rating
ACT	371	2%	347	94%
NSW	5946	34%	5566	94%
NT	228	1%	213	93%
QLD	3230	19%	3020	93%
SA	1282	7%	1229	96%
TAS	237	1%	213	90%
VIC	4768	27%	4125	87%
WA	1362	8%	1132	83%
TOTAL	17,424	100%	15,845	91%

Table 4: Number of services with a quality rating by service type and jurisdiction

	Family day care	Long day care	Preschool/ Kindergarten	Outside school hours care	Other	Total
ACT	5	167	81	94	0	347
NSW	117	3316	748	1385	0	5566
NT	3	87	73	49	1	213
QLD	88	1718	468	746	0	3020
SA	12	436	408	373	0	1229
TAS	5	129	0	79	0	213
VIC	117	1686	1138	1184	0	4125
WA	30	693	15	393	1	1132
TOTAL	377	8232	2931	4303	2	15,845

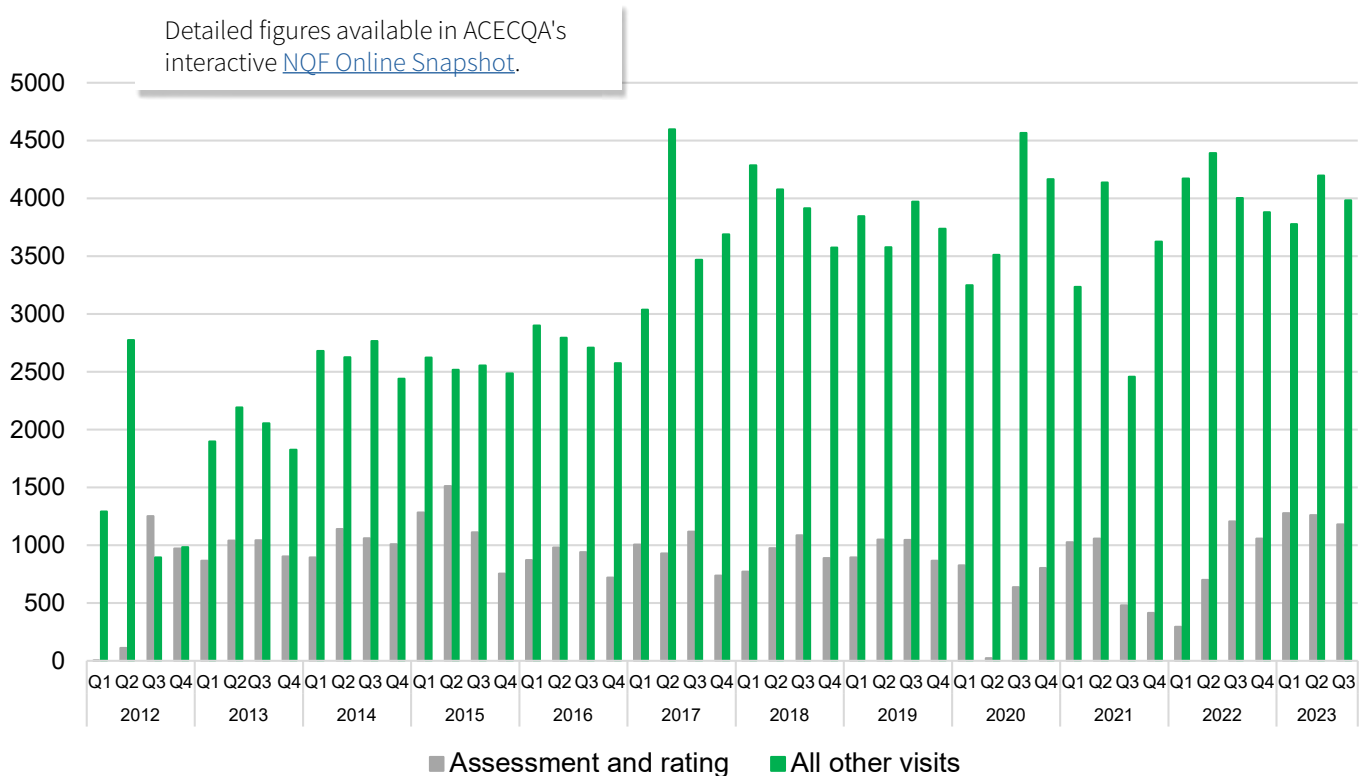
Service visits

Figure 9 shows the total number of quality assessment and rating visits compared to all other visits undertaken by state and territory regulatory authorities each quarter. Other types of visits include checking and monitoring compliance with the requirements of the NQF, investigating complaints and responding to events such as serious incidents or changes of service ownership, as well as visits for educative purposes.

While the ratio of assessment and rating visits to all other visits has fluctuated over time, state and territory regulatory authorities have undertaken more than three times as many other types of visit than assessment and rating visits since 2017, emphasising the significant amount of regulatory work that occurs outside of quality assessment and rating.

On 2 April 2020, in recognition of the COVID-19 global pandemic, Education Ministers announced four critical areas for time-limited regulatory action, including the suspension of assessment and ratings. This resulted in the stark decline in assessment and rating visits in Q2 2020.

Figure 9: Number of service visits (quality assessment and rating visits compared to all other visits)



Draft and final reports, and reviews

Table 5 shows the proportion of overall quality ratings that change between the draft and final assessment and rating report.

As part of the comprehensive assessment and rating process, service providers are issued a draft report by state and territory regulatory authorities, which includes the proposed quality ratings. Service providers are given the opportunity to provide any required feedback or clarification prior to the final report and quality ratings being issued.

More than 93% of all overall quality ratings remain unchanged between the draft and final assessment and rating reports.

Table 5: Proportion of overall quality ratings that change between the draft and final assessment and rating report

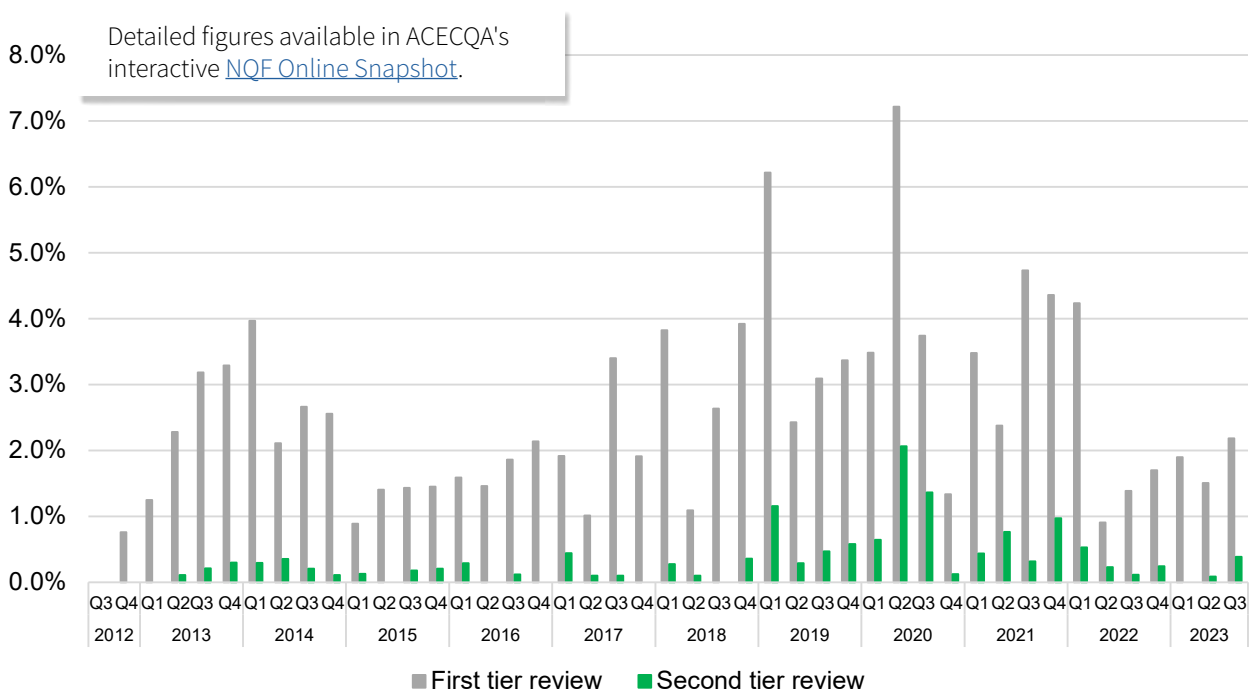
Rating level	Change in rating	%
Higher	942	6.0%
Unchanged	14,869	94.0%
Lower	2	0.0%
Total	15,813	100%

Figure 10 shows the proportion of quality assessment and ratings that result in a first or second tier review.

As part of the comprehensive assessment and rating process, service providers may request a (first tier) review by the relevant state and territory regulatory authority following the final report and quality ratings being issued. They may also subsequently request a (second tier) review by an expert panel convened by ACECQA.

While the proportion of assessment and ratings that result in a first or second tier review is very low, it has increased in recent years. This may reflect a number of factors, including changes introduced with the 2018 NQS which made it more challenging for a service to achieve an overall rating of Exceeding NQS. In addition, most services have now been quality assessed and rated more than once, with a lower subsequent rating more likely to be challenged by a service provider.

Figure 10: Proportion of quality assessment and ratings that result in a first or second tier review



Quality improvement

Table 6 presents a service's previous overall rating alongside its reassessed overall rating. For example, 4120 services previously rated Working Towards NQS improved their rating to Meeting NQS after reassessment. While 2241 services previously rated Working Towards NQS received the same rating again after reassessment.

Table 6: Reassessments by overall quality rating¹

		Rating after reassessment				Total
		Significant Improvement Required	Working Towards NQS	Meeting NQS	Exceeding NQS	
Rating before reassessment	Significant Improvement Required	20	80	17	0	117
	Working Towards NQS	52	2241	4120	796	7209
	Meeting NQS	7	1074	4697	1024	6802
	Exceeding NQS	2	404	1921	2112	4439
	Total	81	3799	10,755	3932	18,567


		Rating after reassessment				Improvement rate
		Significant Improvement Required	Working Towards NQS	Meeting NQS	Exceeding NQS	
Rating before reassessment	Significant Improvement Required	17%	68%	15%	0%	83%
	Working Towards NQS	1%	31%	57%	11%	68%
	Meeting NQS	0%	16%	69%	15%	15%
	Exceeding NQS	0%	9%	43%	48%	-

¹ Reassessments include the following processes described in the National Law: i. Partial reassessment and re-rating requested by provider; ii. Partial reassessment and re-rating instigated by the regulatory authority; iii. Full reassessment and re-rating requested by provider; iv. Full reassessment and re-rating instigated by the regulatory authority.


Overall quality ratings

Authorised officers from state and territory regulatory authorities assess and rate services using the seven quality areas, 15 standards and 40 elements that make up the NQS. Services are given a rating for each of the seven quality areas and an overall rating.


1 Educational program and practice	Significant Improvement Required	Working Towards NQS	Meeting NQS	Exceeding NQS	Excellent
2 Children's health and safety	<p>Service does not meet one of the seven quality areas or a section of the legislation and there is a significant risk to the safety, health and wellbeing of children.</p> <p>The regulatory authority will take immediate action.</p>	<p>Service provides a safe education and care program, but there are one or more areas identified for improvement.</p>	<p>Service provides quality education and care in all seven quality areas.</p>	<p>Service goes beyond the requirements of the National Quality Standard in at least four of the seven quality areas.</p>	<p>Exceeding rated services that promote exceptional education and care, demonstrate sector leadership, and are committed to continually improving.</p> <p>This rating can only be awarded by ACECQA.</p>
3 Physical environment					
4 Staffing arrangements					
5 Relationships with children					
6 Collaborative partnerships with families and communities					
7 Governance and leadership					




RATED
WORKING TOWARDS
NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD



RATED
MEETING
NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD



RATED
EXCEEDING
NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD



RATED
EXCELLENT
by ACECQA

Table 7: Overall quality ratings by jurisdiction

	Significant Improvement Required	Working Towards NQS	Meeting NQS	Exceeding NQS	Excellent	Total
ACT	0	61 18%	133 38%	151 44%	2	347
NSW	1	513 9%	3942 71%	1096 20%	14	5566
NT	0	36 17%	153 72%	24 11%	0	213
QLD	1	302 10%	2033 67%	677 22%	7	3020
SA	0	202 16%	552 45%	473 38%	2	1229
TAS	1	36 17%	129 61%	47 22%	0	213
VIC	0	300 7%	2686 65%	1132 27%	7	4125
WA	0	209 18%	798 70%	125 11%	0	1132
TOTAL	3	1659 10%	10,426 66%	3725 24%	32	15,845

Figure 11: Overall quality ratings by service type

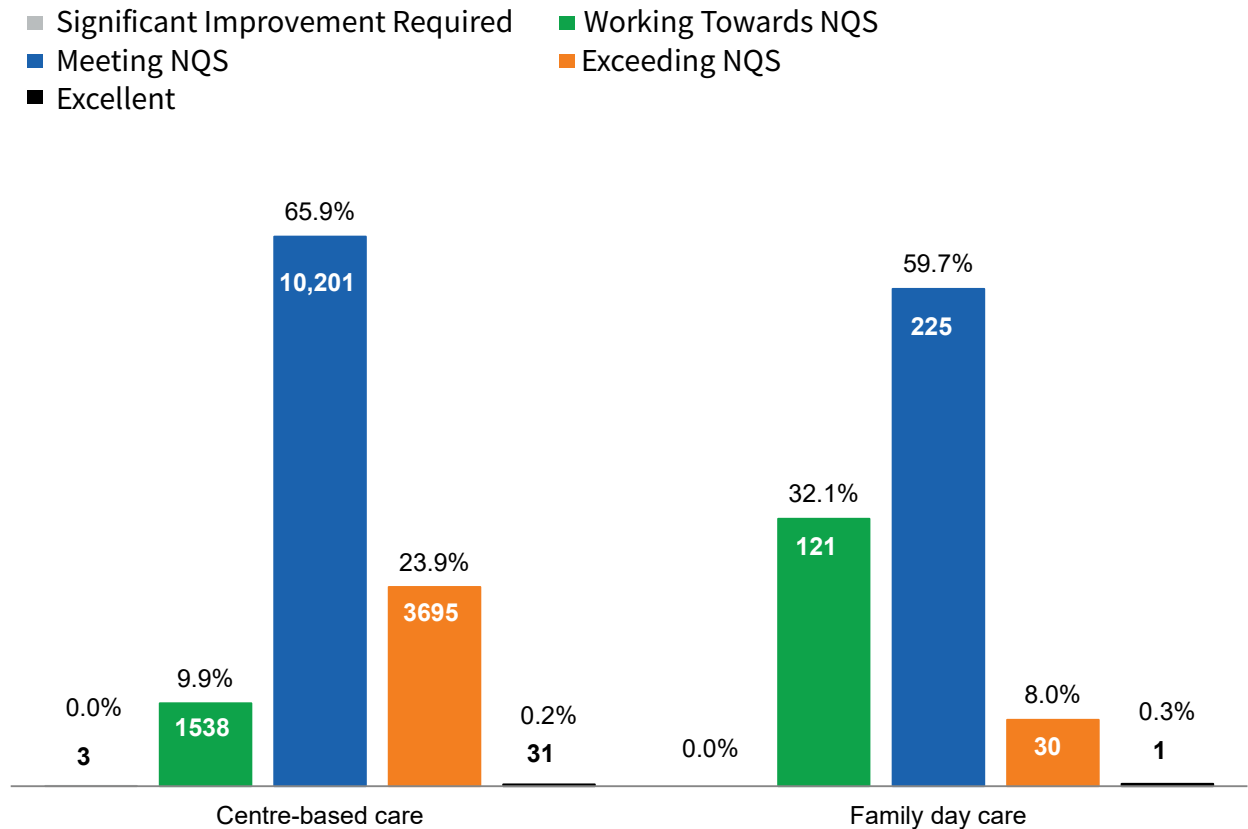


Figure 12: Overall quality ratings by centre-based service type

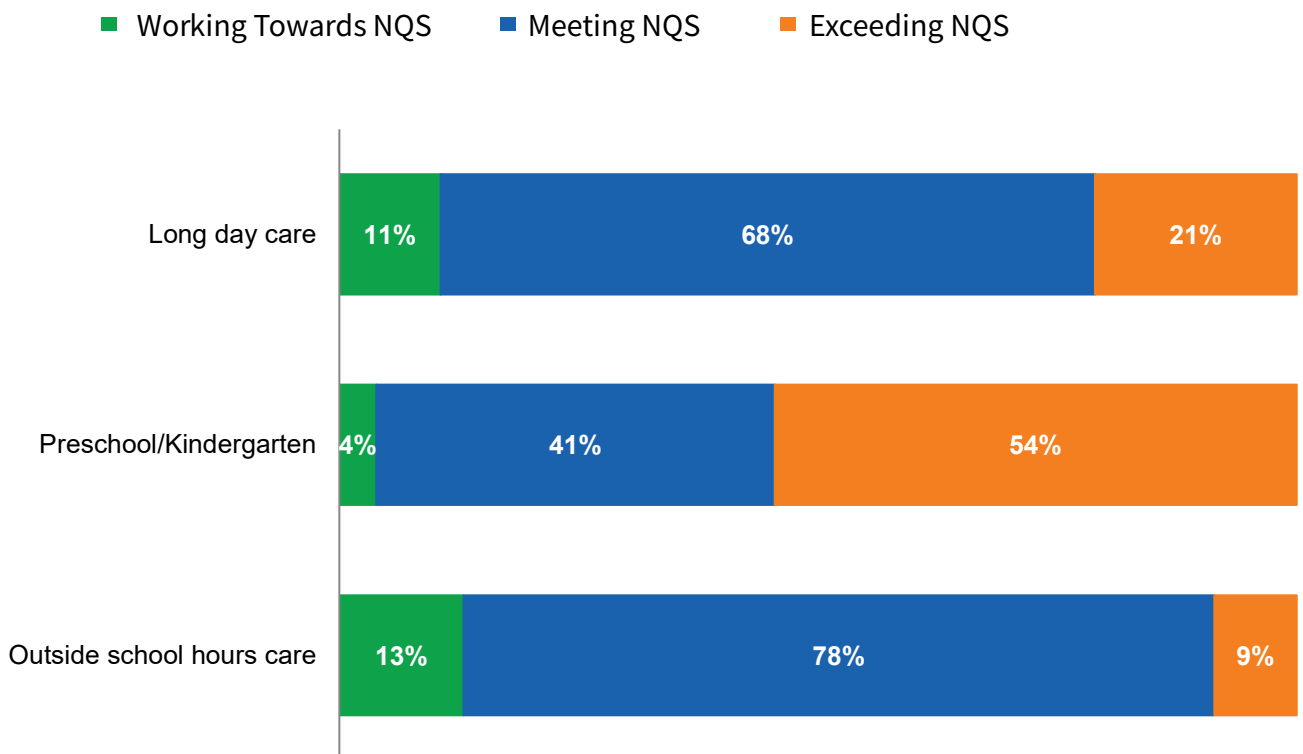
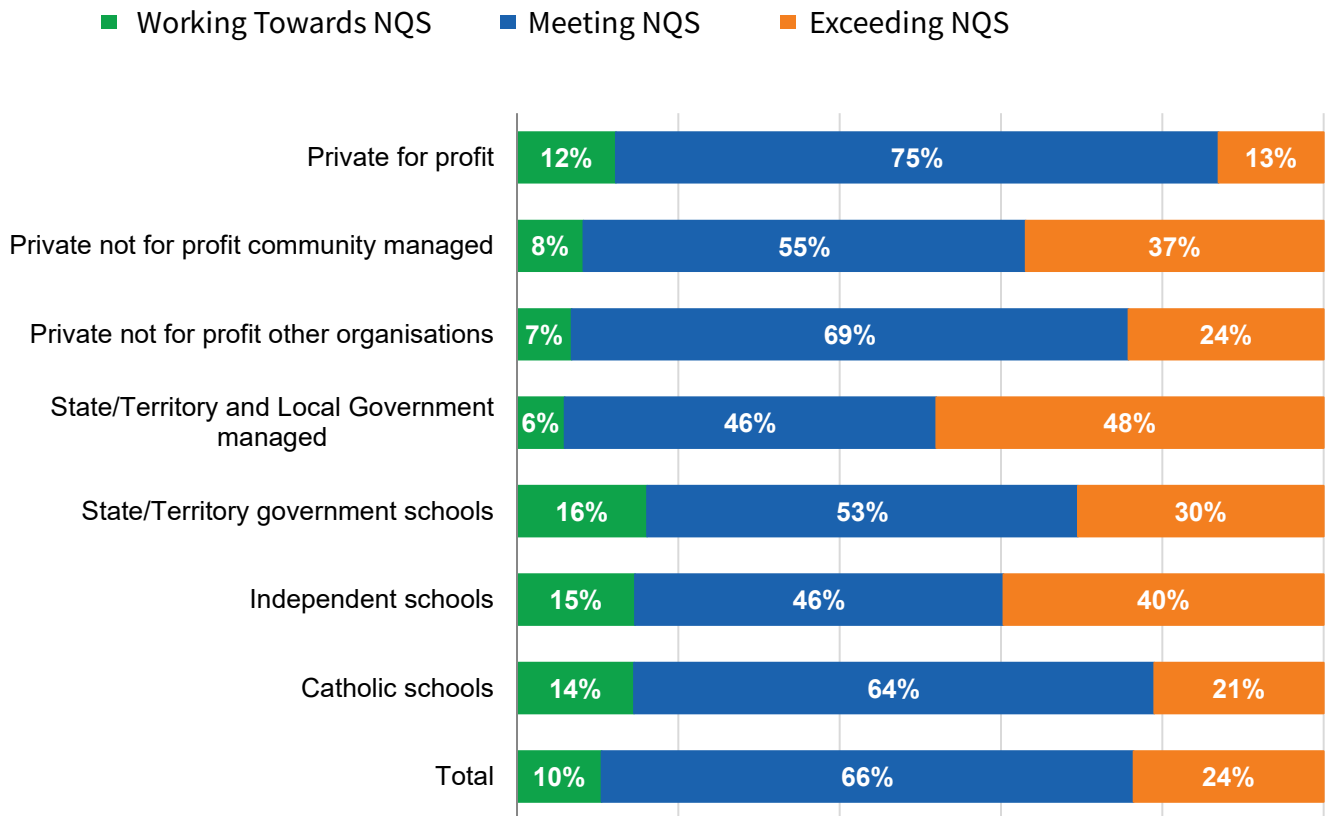


Figure 13 shows the variation in spread of quality ratings between provider management types.

These differences can reflect a range of contextual factors, such as the service profile of these provider types. For example, half of all 'State/Territory and Local Government managed' services are preschools/kindergartens, with preschools/kindergartens performing better against the NQS than other service types (see Figure 12). In contrast, preschools/kindergartens make up only 1% of 'Private for profit' services.

Figure 13: Overall quality ratings by provider management type¹



¹ 15 providers categorised as 'Not stated/Other' excluded for graphical purposes.

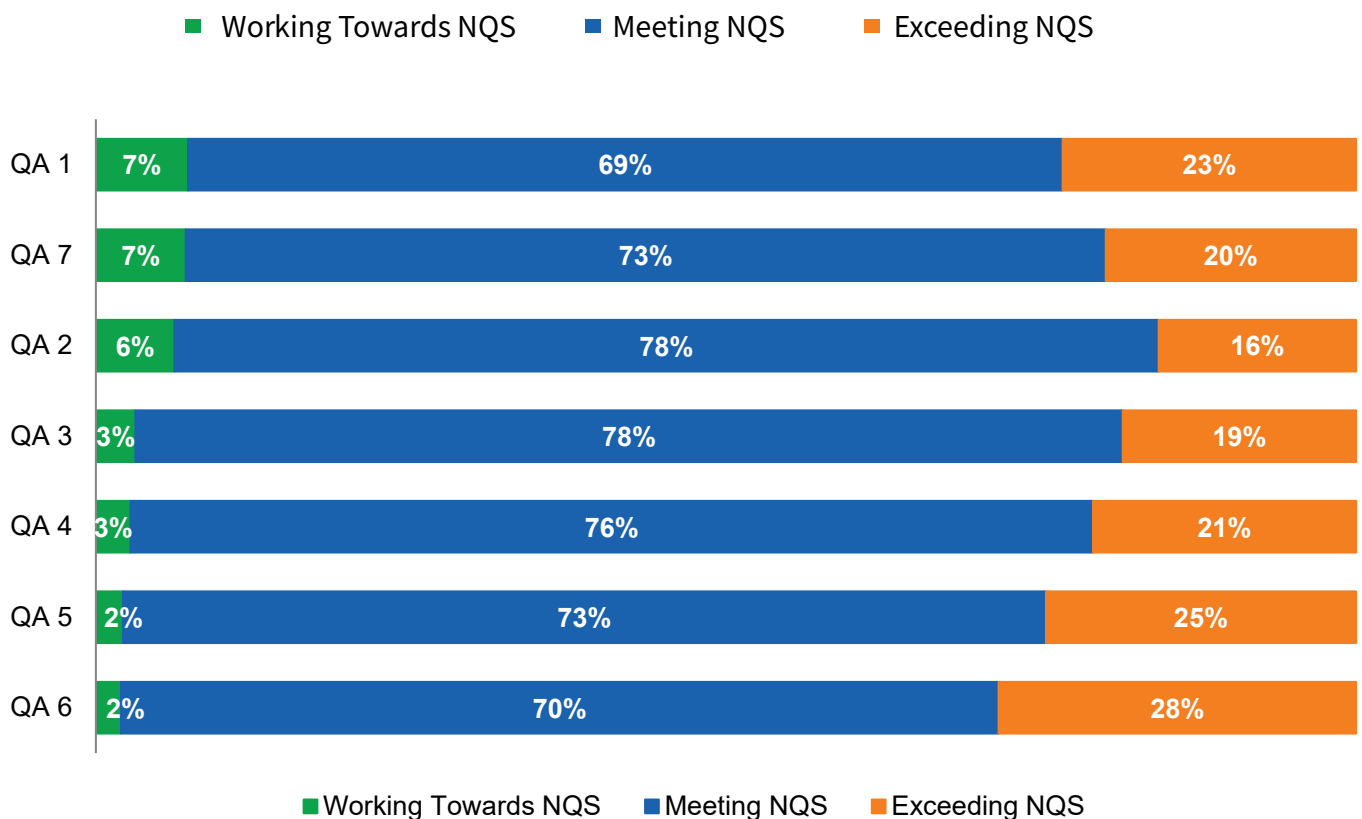
Quality area ratings

Table 8 and Figure 14 rank the seven quality areas of the NQS in descending order based on the number and proportion of services rated Working Towards NQS in each quality area.

Table 8: Quality area ratings

	Significant Improvement Required	Working Towards NQS	Meeting NQS	Exceeding NQS
Quality Area 1 - Educational program and practice	2	1156	10,998	3689
Quality Area 7 - Governance and leadership	2	1128	11,569	3146
Quality Area 2 - Children's health and safety	3	984	12,377	2481
Quality Area 3 - Physical environment	0	496	12,416	2933
Quality Area 4 - Staffing arrangements	1	434	12,103	3307
Quality Area 5 - Relationships with children	0	339	11,607	3899
Quality Area 6 - Collaborative partnerships with families and communities	0	313	11,040	4492

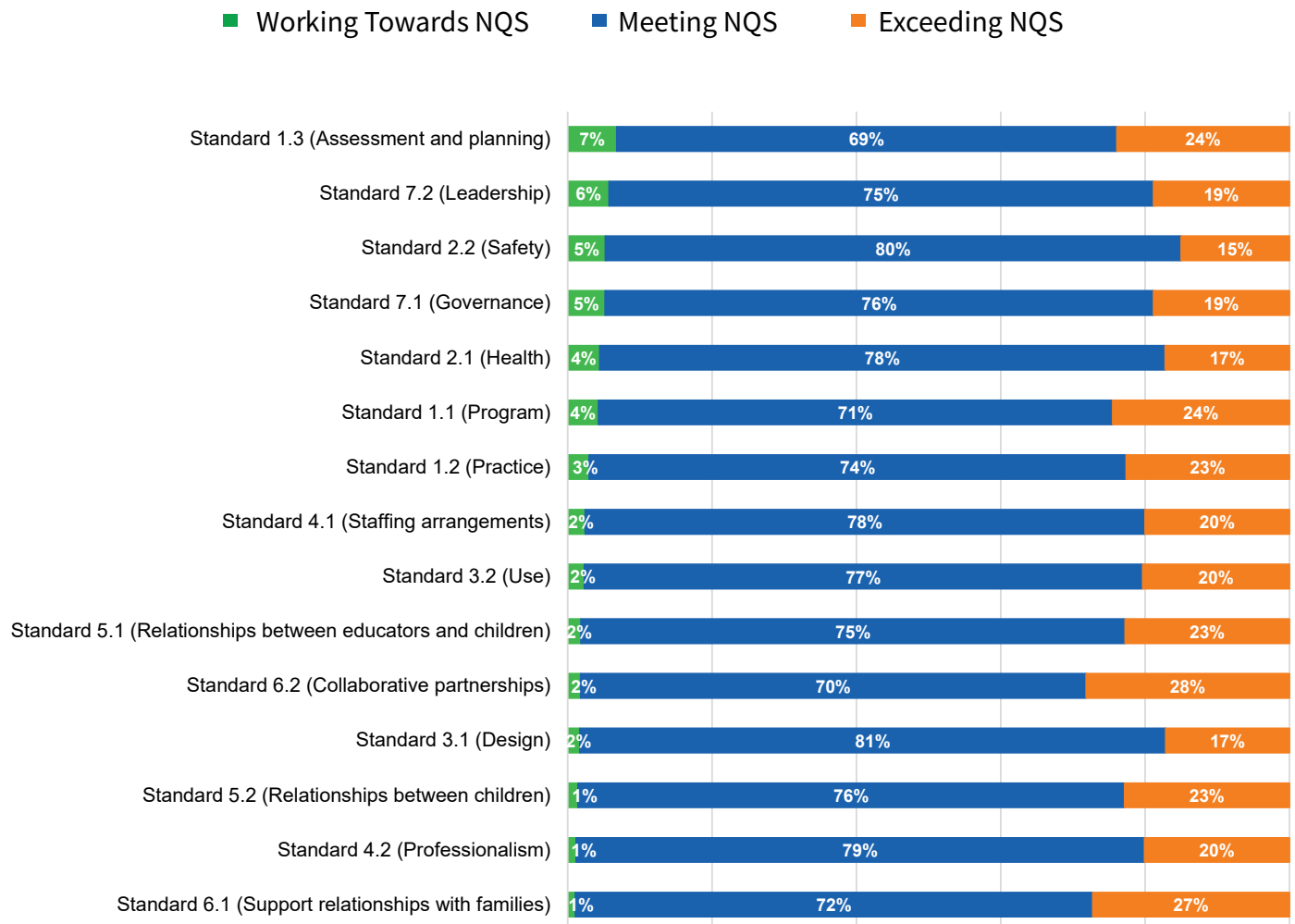
Figure 14: Quality area ratings



Standard level ratings under the 2018 NQS

Figure 15 ranks the 15 standards of the 2018 NQS in descending order based on the proportion of services rated Working Towards NQS in each standard.

Figure 15: Standard level ratings under the 2018 NQS



Element level results under the 2018 NQS

Table 9 ranks the 40 elements of the 2018 NQS in descending order, based on the proportion of services that do not meet each element.

Table 9: Element level results under 2018 NQS

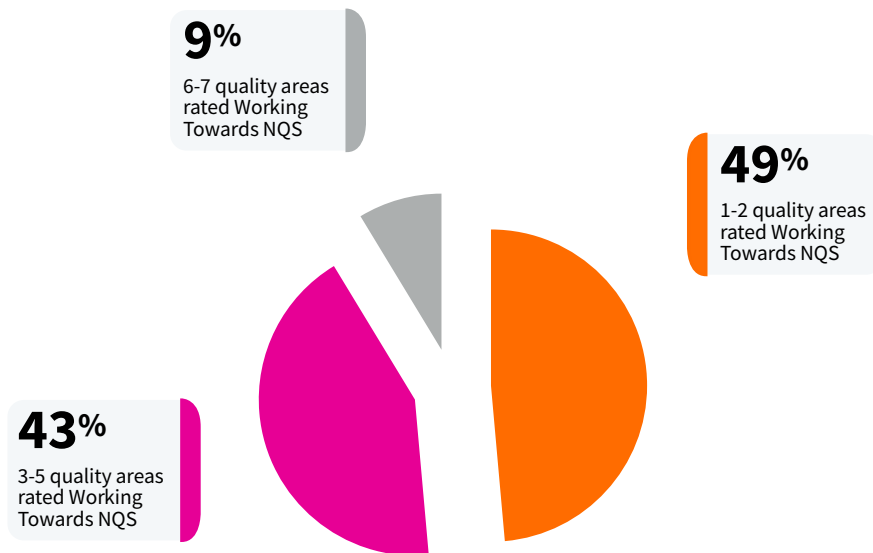
2018 NQS Element	% Not Met
1.3.1 (Assessment and planning cycle)	5.7%
1.3.2 (Critical reflection)	5.6%
7.1.2 (Management systems)	4.6%
7.2.2 (Educational leadership)	4.0%
2.1.2 (Health practices and procedures)	3.9%
2.2.1 (Supervision)	3.8%
7.2.3 (Development of professionals)	3.5%
1.1.3 (Program learning opportunities)	2.9%
2.2.2 (Incident and emergency management)	2.6%
4.1.1 (Organisation of educators)	2.3%
1.1.1 (Approved learning framework)	2.1%
7.2.1 (Continuous improvement)	2.0%
1.2.3 (Child directed learning)	1.8%
1.1.2 (Child-centred)	1.8%
1.3.3 (Information for families)	1.7%
1.2.2 (Responsive teaching and scaffolding)	1.6%
5.1.2 (Dignity and rights of the child)	1.5%
7.1.3 (Roles and responsibilities)	1.4%
1.2.1 (Intentional teaching)	1.4%
7.1.1 (Service philosophy and purpose)	1.4%

2018 NQS Element	% Not Met
3.2.3 (Environmentally responsible)	1.4%
3.1.2 (Upkeep)	1.4%
5.2.2 (Self-regulation)	1.4%
6.2.3 (Community engagement)	1.2%
2.1.3 (Healthy lifestyle)	1.1%
3.2.1 (Inclusive environment)	1.0%
3.2.2 (Resources support play-based learning)	1.0%
5.1.1 (Positive educator to child interactions)	1.0%
2.2.3 (Child protection)	1.0%
4.2.2 (Professional standards)	1.0%
6.2.2 (Access and participation)	0.9%
2.1.1 (Wellbeing and comfort)	0.8%
3.1.1 (Fit for purpose)	0.6%
4.2.1 (Professional collaboration)	0.6%
6.1.3 (Families are supported)	0.6%
6.1.2 (Parent views are respected)	0.5%
6.2.1 (Transitions)	0.4%
6.1.1 (Engagement with the service)	0.4%
4.1.2 (Continuity of staff)	0.4%
5.2.1 (Collaborative learning)	0.3%

Services rated Working Towards NQS

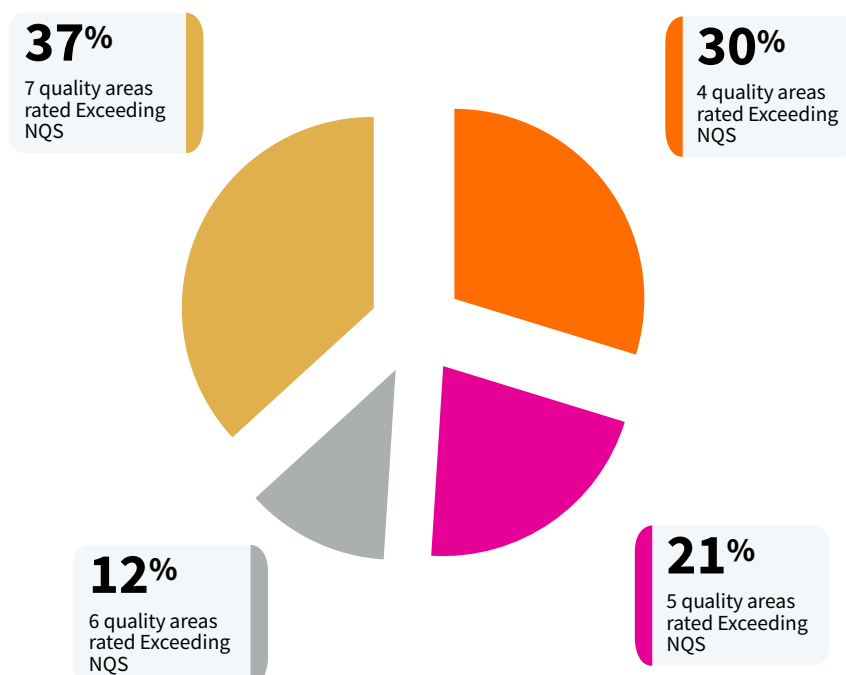
A service receives an overall rating of Working Towards NQS if any of the seven quality areas are rated Working Towards NQS. A quality area is rated Working Towards NQS if any of the standards within that quality area are rated Working Towards NQS.

Figure 16: Proportion of services rated Working Towards NQS by number of quality areas rated Working Towards NQS



Services rated Exceeding NQS

Figure 17: Proportion of services rated Exceeding NQS by number of quality areas rated Exceeding NQS

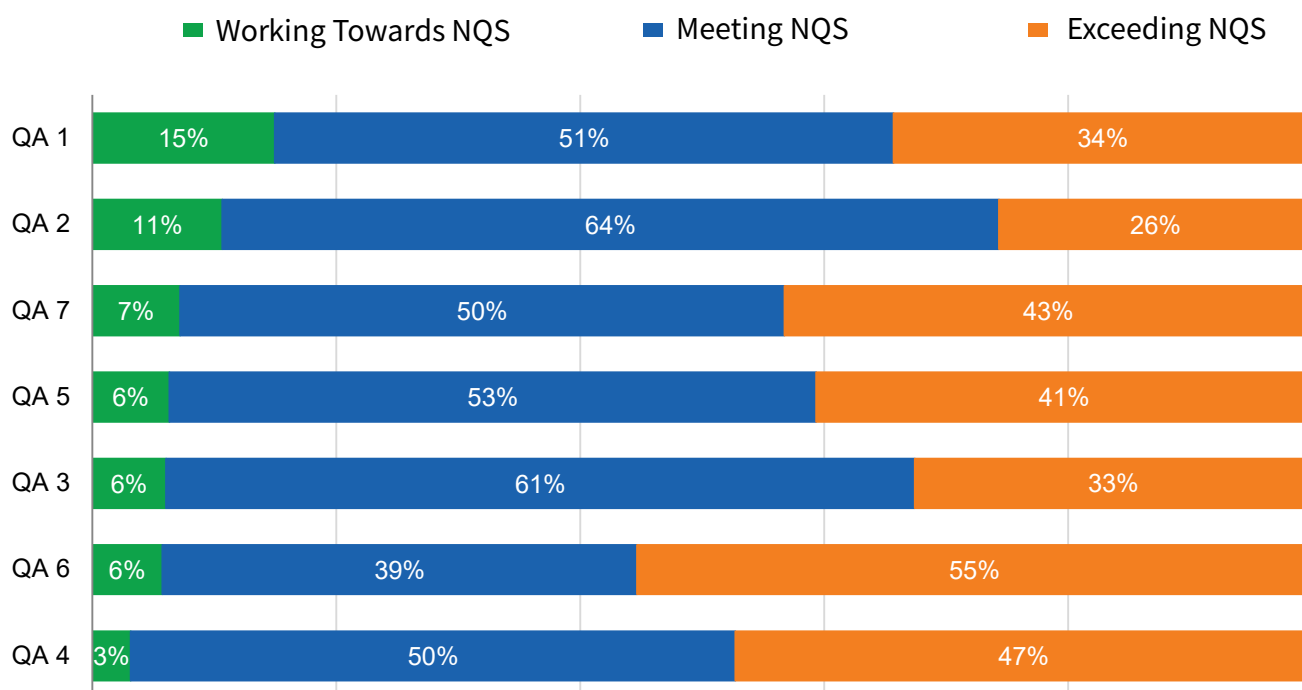


Australian Capital Territory summary



Figure 18 ranks the seven quality areas of the NQS in descending order based on the proportion of services rated Working Towards NQS in each quality area.

Figure 18: Quality area ratings



Contact details

Education Directorate
 Children's Education and Care Assurance
www.education.act.gov.au/early-childhood

New South Wales summary

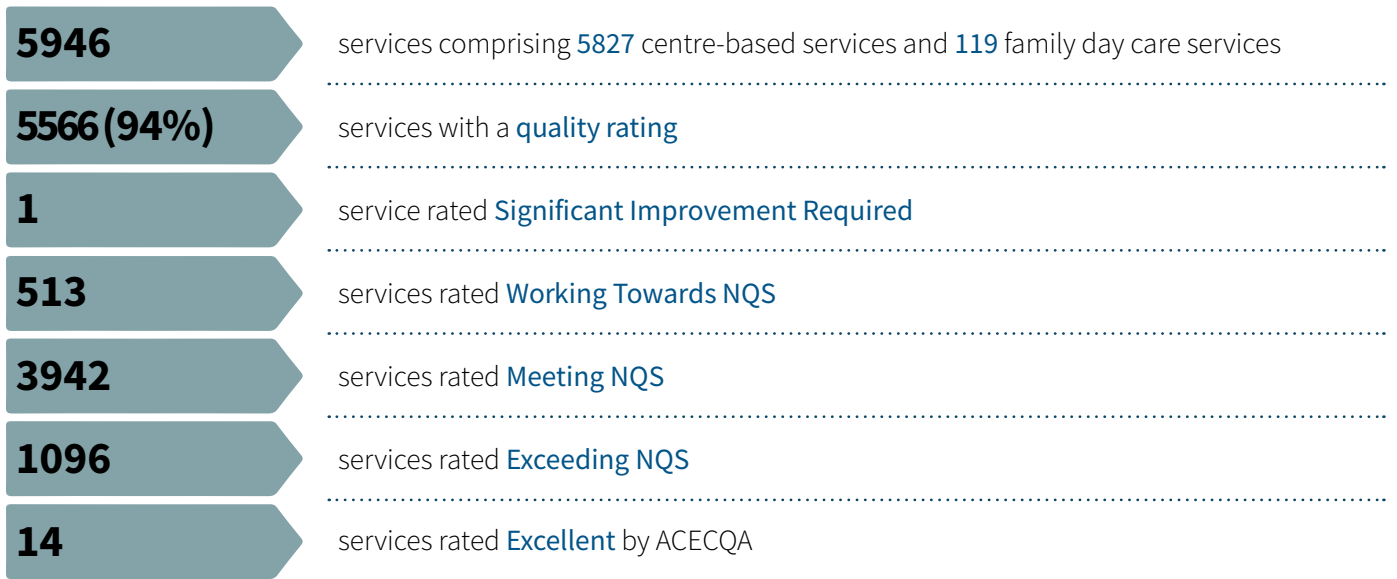
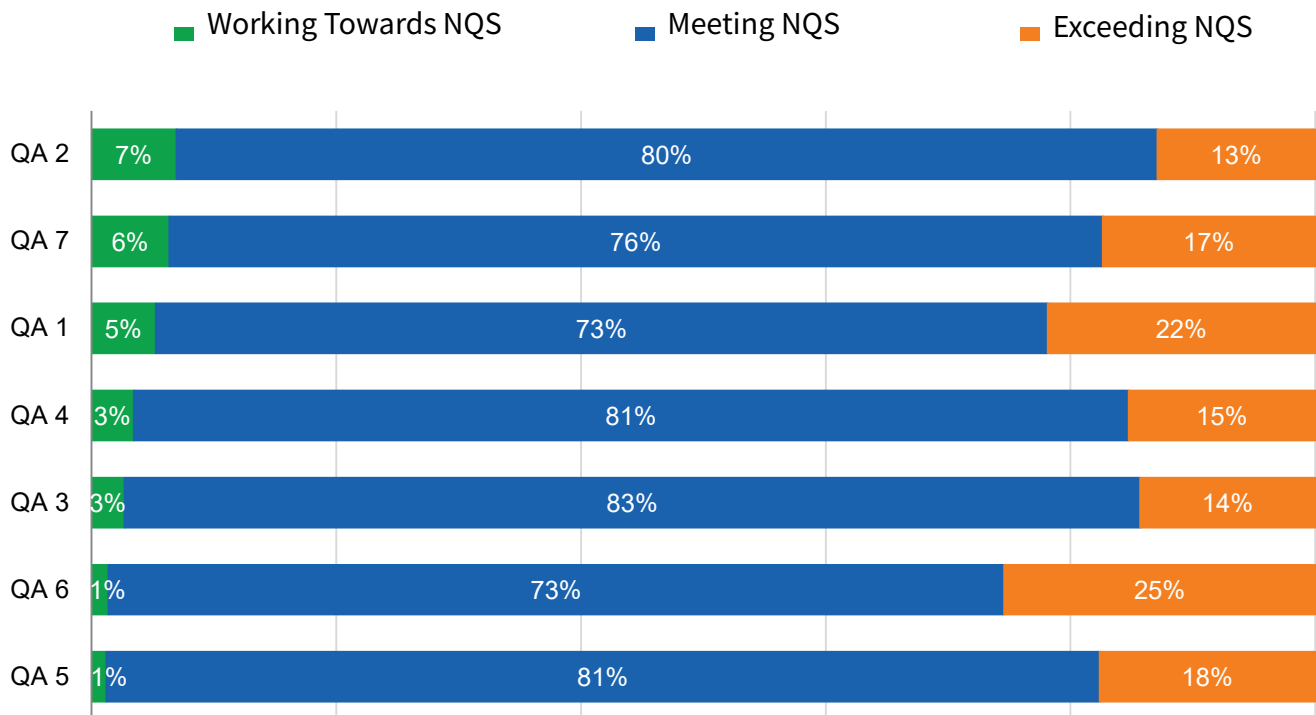


Figure 19 ranks the seven quality areas of the NQS in descending order based on the proportion of services rated Working Towards NQS in each quality area.

Figure 19: Quality area ratings



Contact details

Department of Education
 Early Childhood Education Directorate
www.education.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education

Northern Territory summary

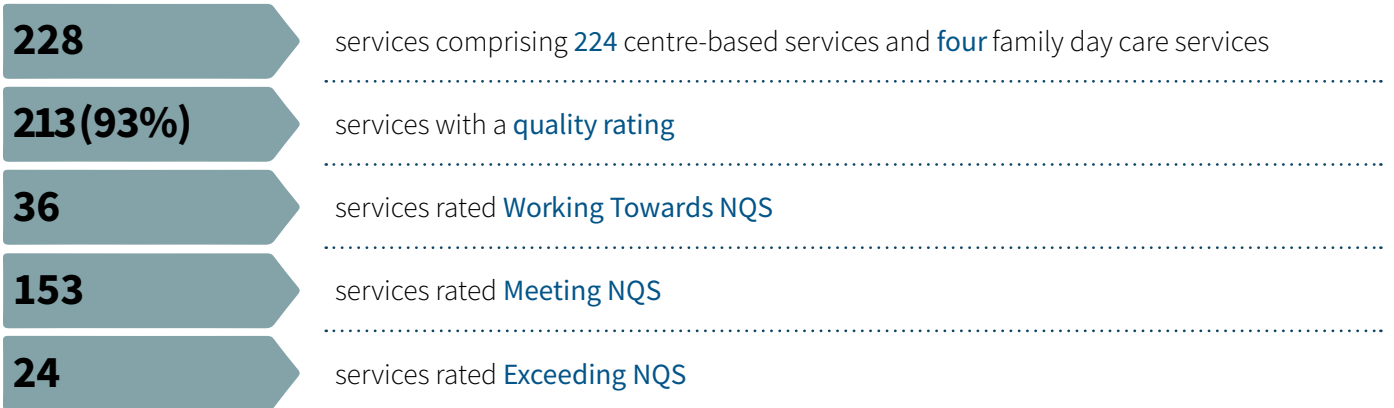
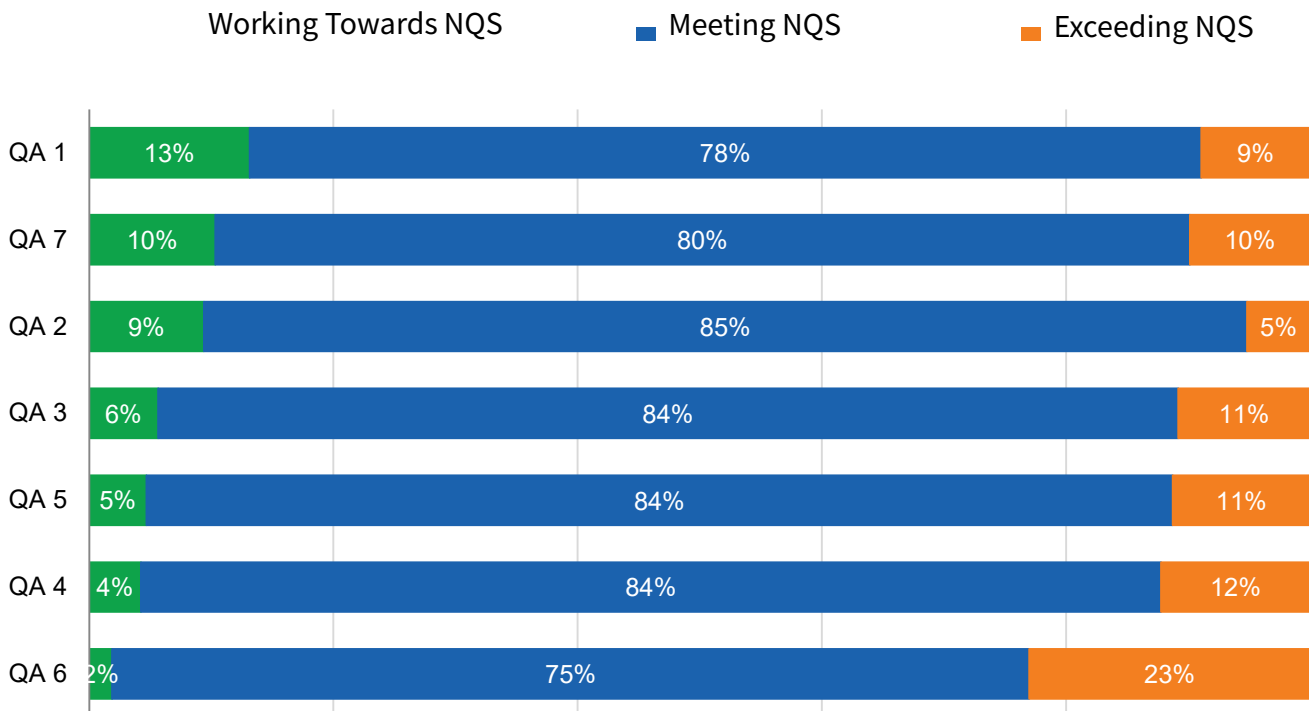


Figure 20 ranks the seven quality areas of the NQS in descending order based on the proportion of services rated Working Towards NQS in each quality area.

Figure 20: Quality area ratings



Contact details

Department of Education
 Quality Education and Care NT
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Queensland summary

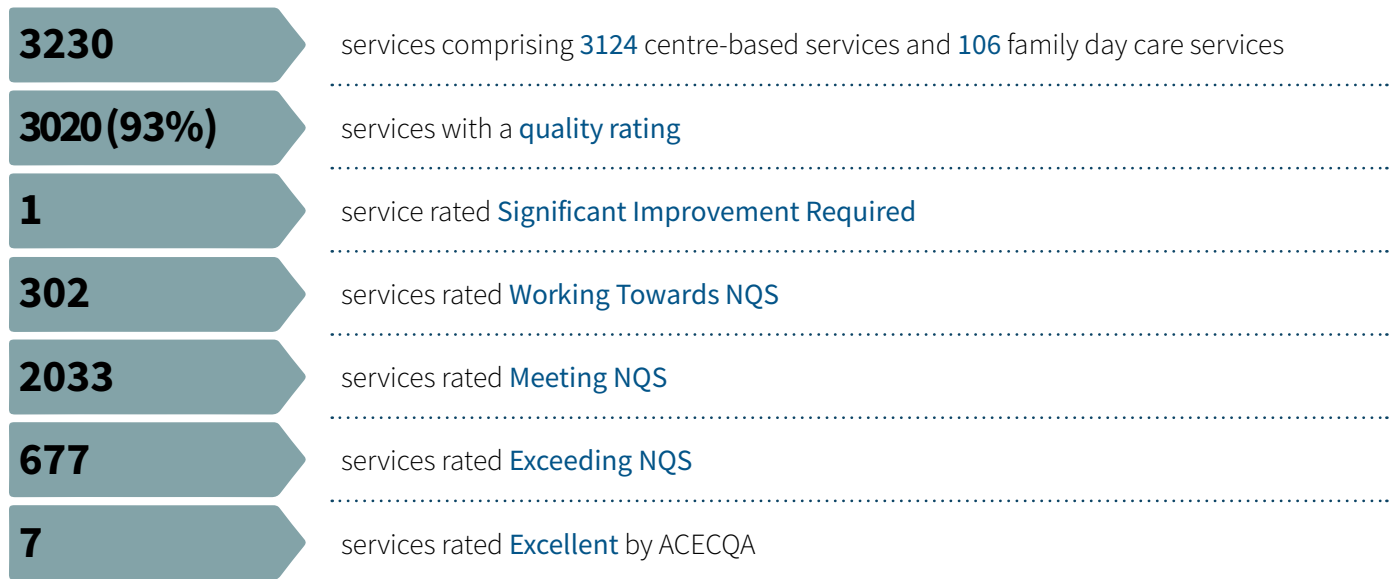
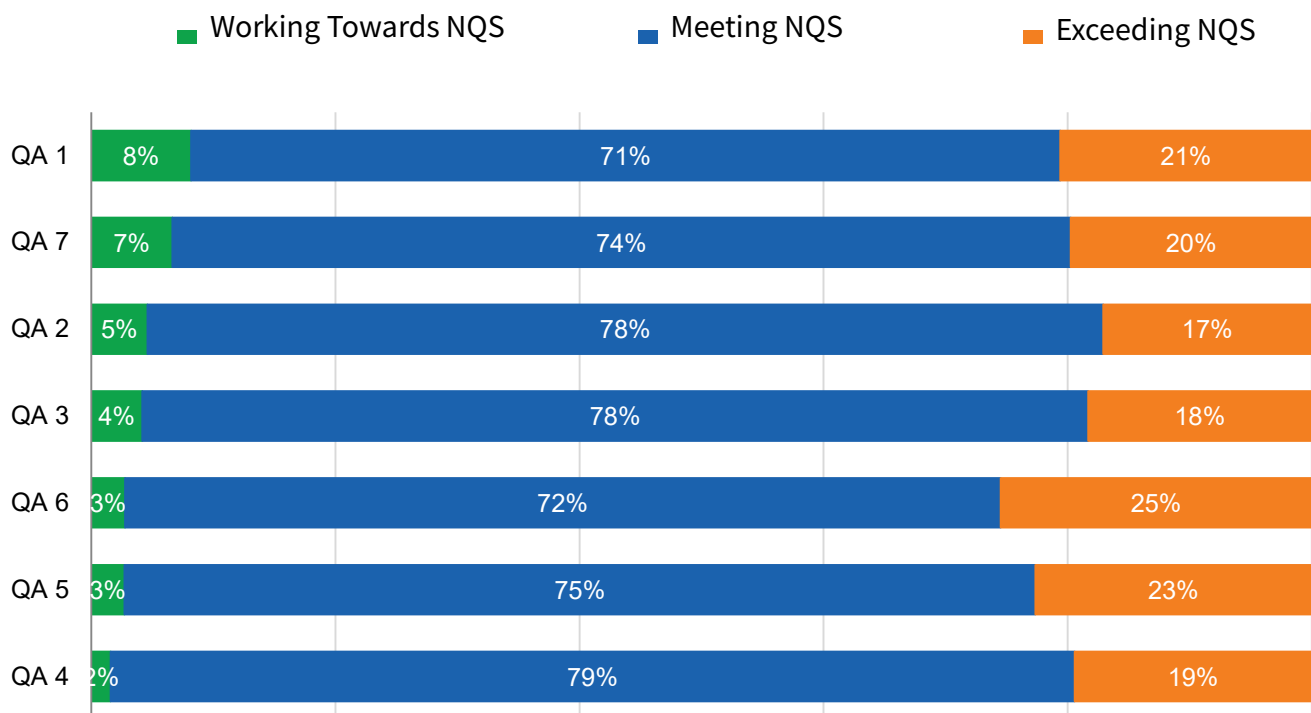


Figure 21 ranks the seven quality areas of the NQS in descending order based on the proportion of services rated Working Towards NQS in each quality area.

Figure 21: Quality area ratings



Contact details

Department of Education
 Early Childhood Regulatory Authority
www.earlychildhood.qld.gov.au

South Australia summary

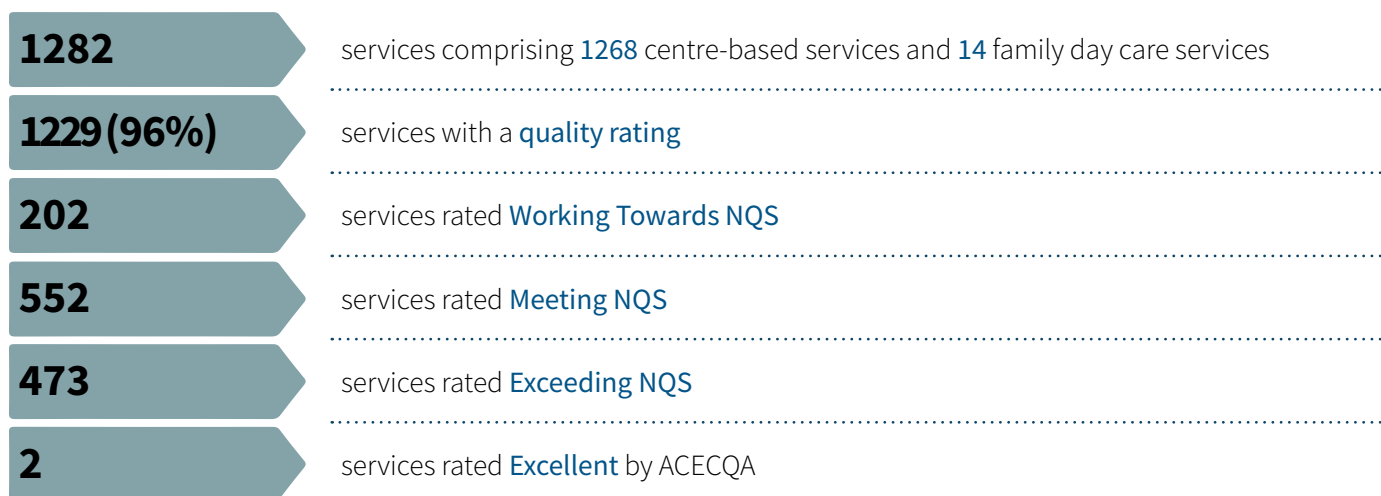
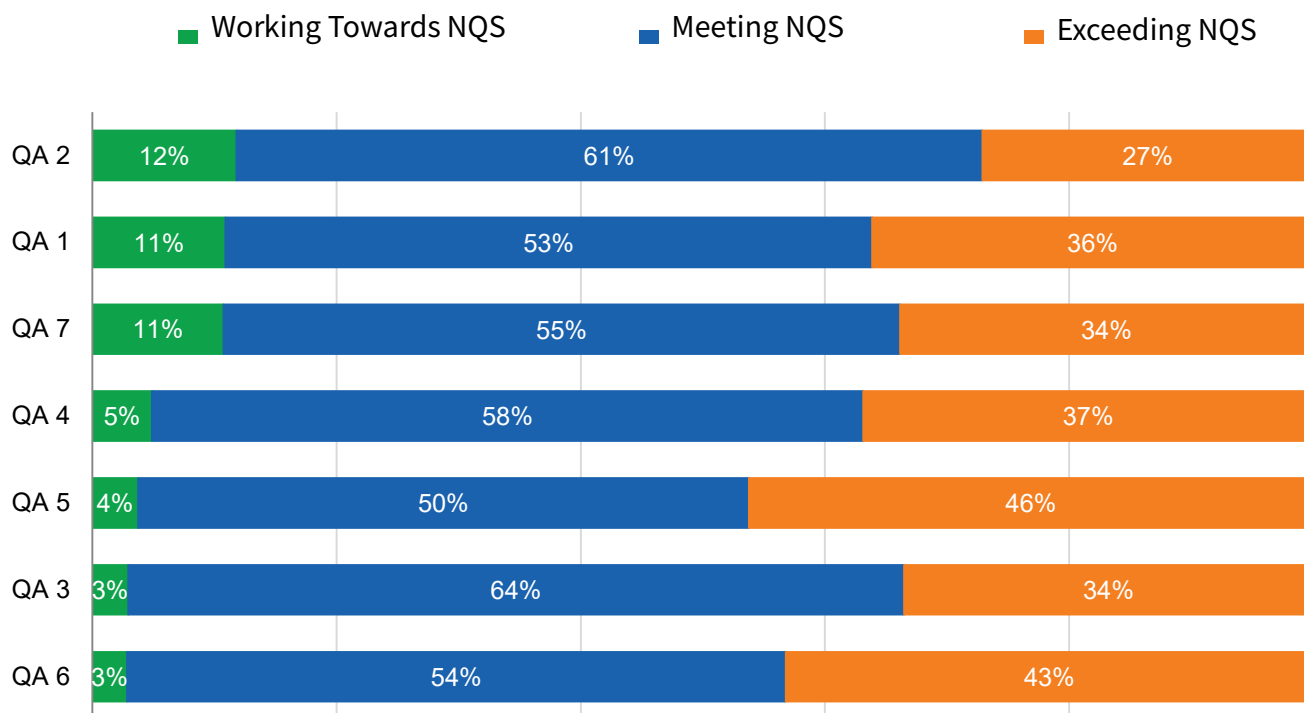


Figure 22 ranks the seven quality areas of the NQS in descending order based on the proportion of services rated Working Towards NQS in each quality area.

Figure 22: Quality area ratings



Contact details

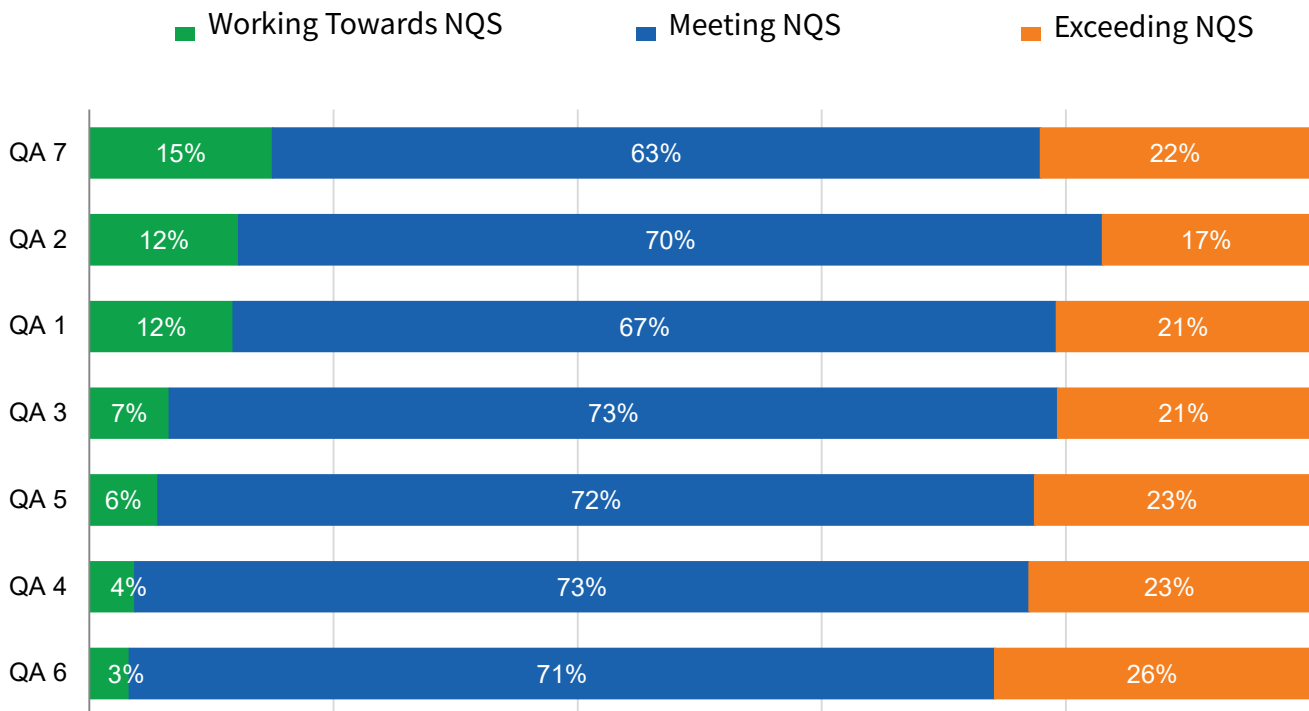
Education and Early Childhood Services Registration and Standards
Board of South Australia
www.esb.sa.gov.au/early-childhood

Tasmania summary



Figure 23 ranks the seven quality areas of the NQS in descending order based on the proportion of services rated Working Towards NQS in each quality area.

Figure 23: Quality area ratings



Contact details

Department for Education, Children and Young People
Education and Care Unit

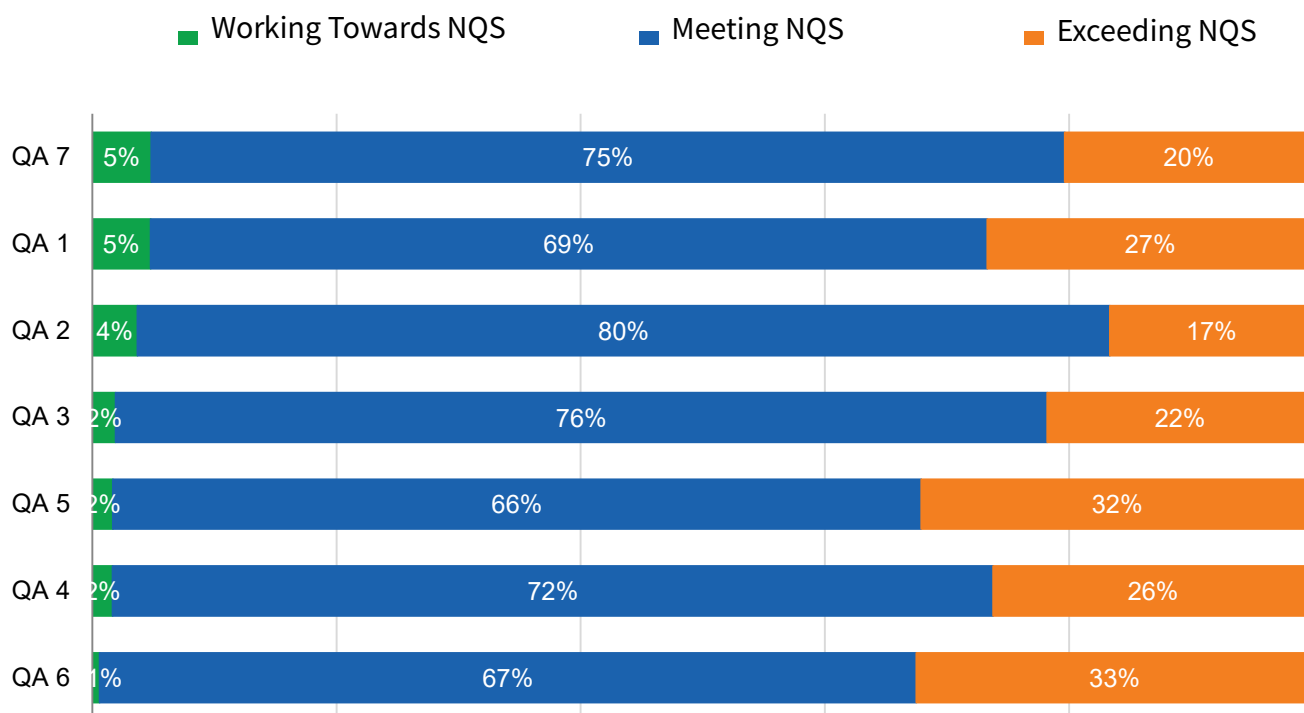
www.educationandcare.tas.gov.au

Victoria summary



Figure 24 ranks the seven quality areas of the NQS in descending order based on the proportion of services rated Working Towards NQS in each quality area.

Figure 24: Quality area ratings



Contact details

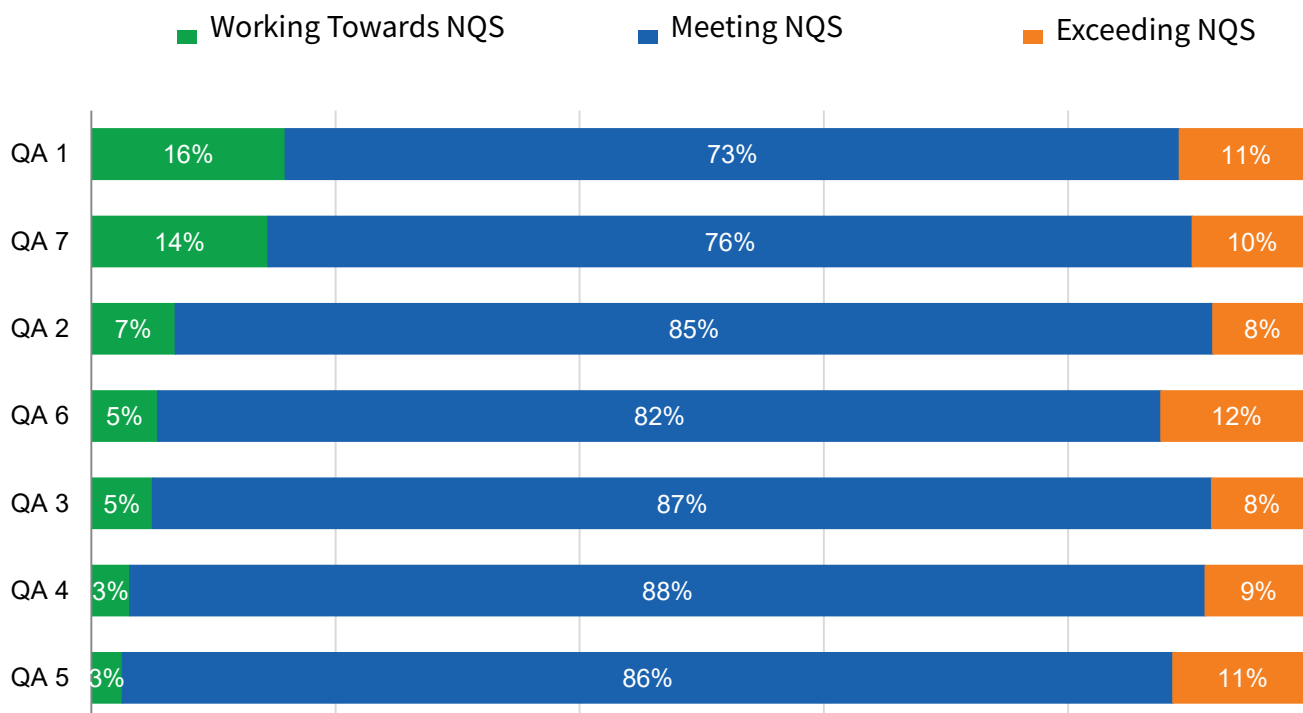
Department of Education and Training
 Quality Assessment and Regulation Division
www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/regulation

Western Australia summary



Figure 25 ranks the seven quality areas of the NQS in descending order based on the proportion of services rated Working Towards NQS in each quality area.

Figure 25: Quality area ratings



Contact details

Department of Communities
Education and Care Regulatory Unit

www.wa.gov.au/organisation/department-of-communities/education-and-care-regulatory-unit



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Published by ACECQA

ABN 59 372 786 746

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