



Australian Children's  
Education & Care  
Quality Authority

# Promoting consistency and efficiency under the National Quality Framework

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## Overview

This occasional paper is the third in a series on the National Quality Framework (NQF). The paper reports on activities to promote consistency and efficiency in the implementation and administration of the NQF, which are key functions of the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) under the Education and Care Services National Law (the National Law).

Given the joint governance arrangements in place for the NQF, striving for consistency and efficiency is a collaborative effort between the eight state and territory regulatory authorities, the Australian Government and ACECQA. The paper highlights the breadth and depth of collaboration to identify, implement and review approaches to promote consistency and efficiency under the NQF. This is intended to offer visibility and assurance to external stakeholders of these collaborative strategies and activities, much of which occurs 'behind the scenes'.

In the context of the NQF, consistency is most importantly about the outcomes that result from the way the NQF is administered.

The paper provides an overview of ACECQA's approach to consistency, which is outlined in *ACECQA's National Consistency Strategy and Implementation Plan 2015-16*. The plan, published in October 2015, is informed by the experiences of service providers and guided by the principles of best practice regulation. It identifies seven consistency related priorities:

- training and support for authorised officers employed by state and territory regulatory authorities to administer the NQF
- national audits of aspects of the NQF
- application and assessment functions
- sector and family communications
- analysis of assessment and rating data
- collaboration with state and territory regulatory authorities, and other partner organisations
- maintaining and enhancing the National Quality Agenda Information Technology System (NQA ITS), the national IT system used by state and territory regulatory authorities to administer the NQF.

A description of the activities, most of which are done in collaboration with governments, that support these priorities is then provided, along with up to date progress against each priority. Case studies are also provided to illustrate in more detail how certain activities contribute to consistency and efficiency under the NQF.

By highlighting completed, current and planned activities to make the NQF a consistent and efficient system, the paper is intended to be of interest to the wide range of stakeholders within the education and care sector, including:

- government policy makers
- regulatory authorities
- providers, services, educators and peak bodies
- families and carers
- higher education, vocational training and qualification bodies.

# Introduction

In 2009, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) endorsed the Early Childhood Development Strategy (ECDS) – ‘Investing in the Early Years – A National Early Childhood Development Strategy’. The ECDS was developed to ensure that ‘by 2020 all children have the best start in life to create a better future for themselves, and for the nation’.<sup>1</sup> As part of that strategy, the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments agreed to a National Partnership Agreement (NPA) on the National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care.

To implement the NPA, each state and territory enacted laws creating a unified national system for regulating education and care services catering for children aged from birth to 13 years, including most long day care (LDC), family day care (FDC), preschool/kindergarten, and outside school hours care (OSHC) services.

The introduction of the NQF on 1 January 2012 represented a significant policy reform involving national collaboration between governments and the regulated sector. The success to date of this reform is due in no small part to the support from service providers and peak bodies for the main tenets of the reform, namely the national learning frameworks, the National Quality Standard (NQS), the national approval of providers and the shared national infrastructure, such as the National Quality Agenda Information Technology System (NQA ITS) and the national authority (ACECQA).

## ■ ■ ■ Key changes introduced through the National Quality Framework

Prior to the introduction of the NQF, individual state and territory regulatory authorities administered different regulatory schemes for licensing and minimum standards, while the Australian Government’s National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC) regulated for quality assurance. As noted by the COAG<sup>2</sup> and the Regulation Taskforce<sup>3</sup>, the duplication and inconsistency between these nine regulatory schemes resulted in increased and unnecessary burden on service providers.

The NQF came into effect across Australia with the goal of improving quality in education and care services, and the efficiency and cost effectiveness of regulation. The goal of improved efficiency was in part achieved by replacing the pre-existing and complex system of eight different state and territory regulatory schemes, plus an overlapping national quality assurance regulatory scheme.

Prior to the NQF, requirements such as the safety of a service’s physical environment were often duplicated in the licencing and quality assurance processes. Regulation was also inconsistent across states and territories, with differing standards for services, and ratios and qualification requirements varying between jurisdictions. Further, there was a complex patchwork of licensing

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.coag.gov.au/sites/default/files/national\\_ECD\\_strategy.pdf](https://www.coag.gov.au/sites/default/files/national_ECD_strategy.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.coag.gov.au/sites/default/files/ris\\_early\\_childhood\\_education\\_care\\_quality\\_reforms.pdf](https://www.coag.gov.au/sites/default/files/ris_early_childhood_education_care_quality_reforms.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.pc.gov.au/research/supporting/regulation-taskforce/report/regulation-taskforce2.pdf>

requirements and minimum standards for different service types, depending on which jurisdiction the service operated in.

While the introduction of the NQF did not immediately signal a single set of national requirements, the phasing out and phasing in of some of these over time was a pragmatic and appropriate approach to transitioning from a number of disparate systems, approaches and expectations.

**Table 2** in **Appendix A** provides an overview of the regulation of education and care services prior to the NQF. This shows that, for many jurisdictions, the introduction of the NQF brought a number of additional education and care service types under the same regulatory scope. For example, the number of services regulated in South Australia trebled, from around 350 LDC services before the NQF, to around 1,100 centre-based services, relatively evenly split between LDC services, OSHC services and preschools.

## ■ ■ ■ Efficiency improvements through a single legislative system

A single legislative system reduces administrative burden for all education and care providers that were previously required to meet separate requirements. It also reduces complexity for service providers operating services in multiple jurisdictions and/or multiple service types. Under the NQF, minimum enforceable standards and quality rating are encompassed in a unified system, which has efficiency benefits for both providers and governments. The NQF also offers consistency for the many families who move between jurisdictions and/or use multiple service types.

Some examples of the types of efficiencies gained from the introduction of the NQF include:

- **reduced administrative compliance costs** particularly for providers operating across more than one state or territory
- **workforce mobility** with national recognition of qualifications supporting a national labour market
- **child-focused objectives across children's education and care services** with the national learning frameworks supporting a more consistent approach to young children's learning and development across service types and jurisdictions. Agreed, consistent terminology and approaches build shared understandings, and support transitions between services for children, educators and families. This also builds consistency in vocational and higher education programs for educators. The NQF brings OSHC into a unified system, meaning that children attending OSHC services have the same expectations for safety, wellbeing and quality as children attending other modes of education and care

- **national systems and infrastructure** with service providers able to use consistent application, notification and feedback forms that can be submitted electronically through an online national IT system. Regulatory authorities also benefit from national systems, including an e-learning portal for online training and support materials. This in turn benefits service providers and educators through consistent messaging and expectations of quality
- **national collaboration and problem solving** with ACECQA facilitating national discussion and information sharing about the progress and administration of the NQF. This national perspective allows for the identification of issues and brokering of national solutions. Stakeholders include state and territory regulatory authorities, the Australian Government, peak bodies, community organisations, large providers and academic institutions.

## Developments since the introduction of the NQF

ACECQA regularly collaborates with governments and the education and care sector to review and analyse the performance of the NQF. For example, collaboration through the Quality and Consistency Committee (QaCC) provides an opportunity for ACECQA and governments to identify and understand potential sources of inconsistency and inefficiency, and respond accordingly.

The 2014 Review of the National Partnership Agreement on the National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care (the Review) provided an opportunity to consider possible improvements to the system by addressing issues emerging since the implementation of the NQF. In particular, the Review noted that while there has been significant improvement in national integration and consistency, there remains variability of approach, application and practice within and across jurisdictions. One potential reason cited for this variability was differing interpretation and/or a lack of clarity around laws, regulations and operational policy.<sup>4</sup>

At the time of writing, the outcomes of the Review are being finalised. As part of the Review, it was noted that while some variability is to be expected due to the different operating contexts within and between jurisdictions, the policy focus has always been on promoting national consistency of outcomes. This is particularly relevant when looking at the variation in the spread of quality ratings across jurisdictions.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.deloitteaccessseconomics.com.au/our+services/nqf+consultation+ris>, p.18.

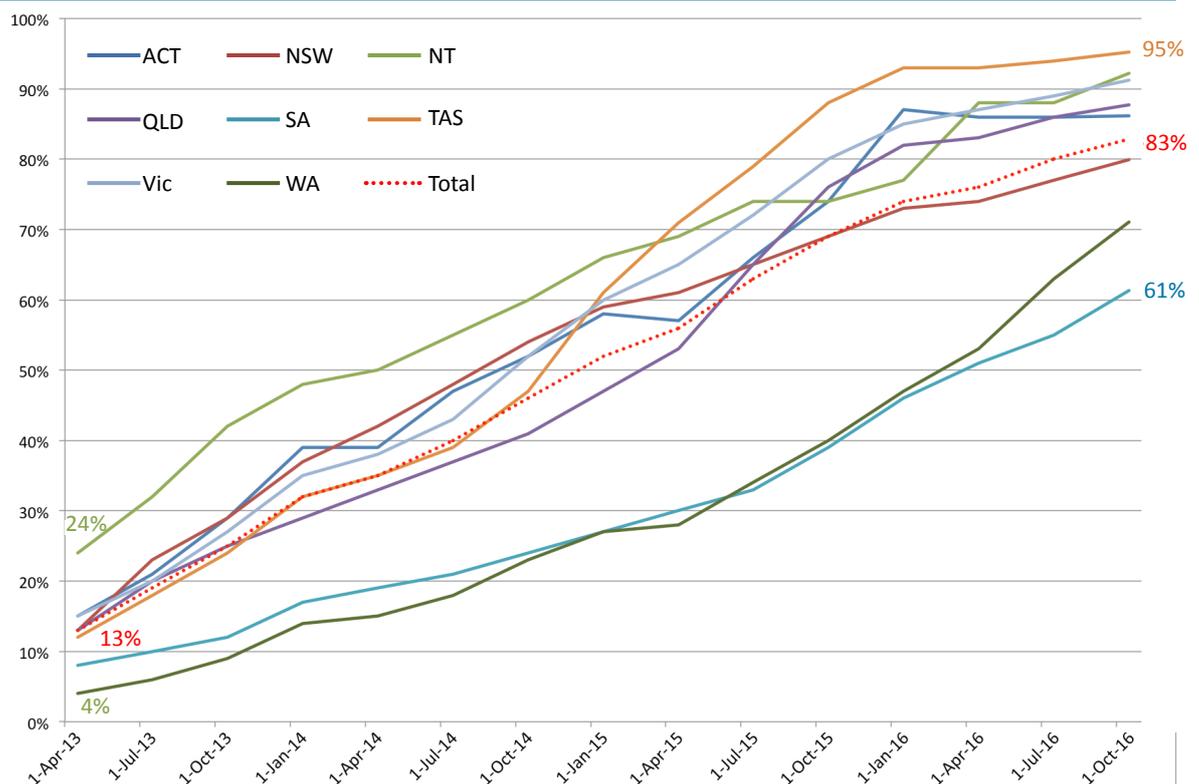
## Quality rating progress and results

In early 2012, before the assessment and rating system had been implemented, the aspiration was for every service to be assessed and rated within three years. The progress of assessment and rating has been reported on each quarter since early 2013, through ACECQA's published NQF Snapshots.

**Figure 1** summarises the progress of quality rating. At 1 April 2013, 13% of all approved services had been assessed and rated, with the Northern Territory (24%) having the highest proportion of rated services and Western Australia (4%), which implemented the NQF six months later than all other states and territories, the lowest. At 1 October 2016, 83% of all approved services had been assessed and rated, with Tasmania (95%) having the highest proportion of rated services and South Australia (61%) the lowest.

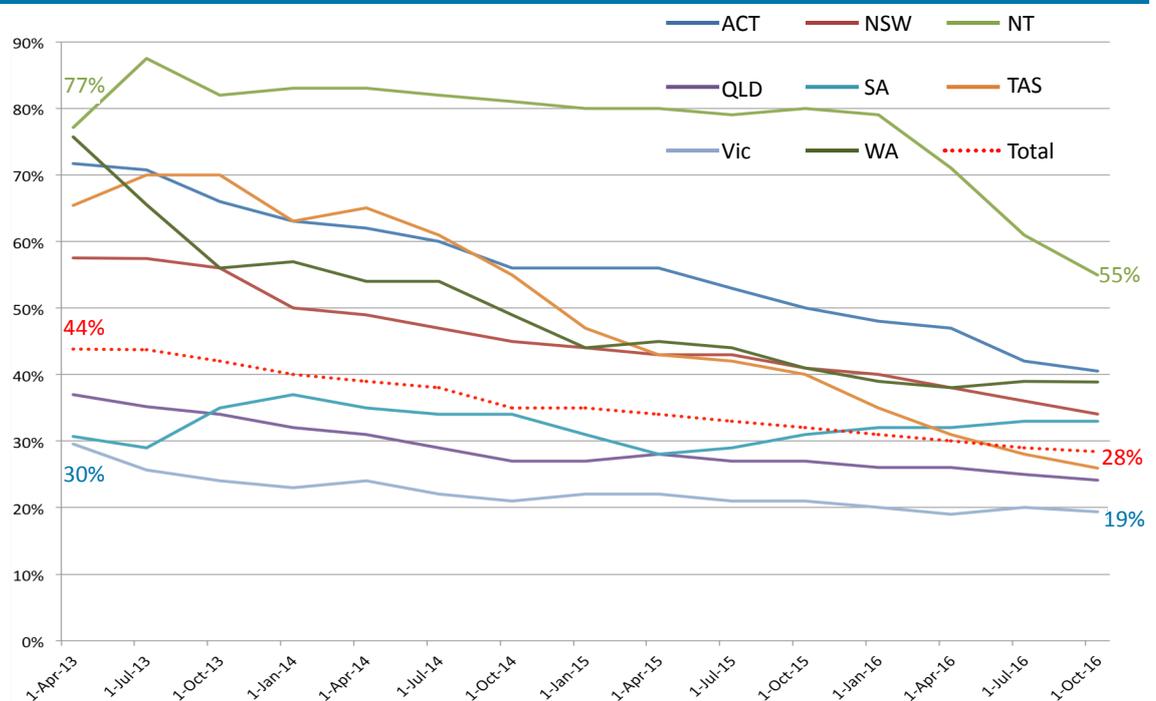
The lower proportion of services assessed and rated in South Australia and Western Australia can partly be attributed to the former establishing an independent statutory authority (the Education and Early Childhood Services Registration and Standards Board of South Australia) in 2012 to oversee the regulation of services under the NQF, and the latter introducing the NQF six months later than all other states and territories.

Figure 1: Proportion of services with a quality rating



**Figure 2** examines the results of quality rating. At 1 April 2013, 44% of all assessed services were rated at Working Towards NQS, with the Northern Territory (77%) having the highest proportion of Working Towards NQS services and Victoria (30%) the lowest. At 1 October 2016, 28% of all assessed services were rated at Working Towards NQS, with the Northern Territory (55%) again having the highest proportion of rated services and Victoria (19%) again the lowest.

**Figure 2: Proportion of services rated Working Towards NQS**



In addition to the anticipated improvement of quality rating results over time due to service providers and educators becoming more aware of the requirements of the NQF and NQS, there are a range of factors that will contribute to variation in quality rating results across jurisdictions and over time. These factors include differences in the:

- **scheduling and prioritisation of assessment and rating visits.** While regulatory authorities consider a common set of factors in prioritising assessment and rating visits, the outcome of these considerations can result in different types of services being prioritised. For example, jurisdictions differed in how they prioritised services for first assessment, with some initially focussing on those services they viewed as most prepared for the new assessment and rating system, while others concentrated on services due to be assessed under a previous regulatory system or where little information was available about their level of quality

- **profile of service and provider types within each jurisdiction.** For example, nearly all preschool/kindergarten services in Western Australia and Tasmania are out of scope of the NQF. Furthermore, preschool/kindergarten services make up more than a third of approved services under the NQF in South Australia, compared to just 15% of approved services under the NQF in New South Wales
- **history of state and territory and Australian Government subsidies,** which have targeted particular child outcomes
- **legacy of how sub-sectors have developed and been supported by governments,** in terms of professional development, management capability and other areas.

Within and across jurisdictions there have been various innovations in the conduct of quality rating that contribute to consistency of outcome. For example, in 2014 the New South Wales regulatory authority commenced the roll-out of its structured assessment methodology (SAM) for conducting all assessment and rating tasks, which included the development and implementation of an electronic assessment tool, eSAM, in 2015. Following the SAM approach, New South Wales authorised officers conduct pre-visit audits, collect evidence and prepare reports in a structured way, and all decisions are evidenced based using verifiable information. This new approach has resulted in greater consistency in rating outcomes across New South Wales.

## ■ ■ ■ Waivers

Waivers play an important role in helping providers maintain their level of service while adjusting to the NQF or dealing with unexpected events. There may be situations where, despite the best intentions, providers are unable to meet certain requirements in relation to physical environment or staffing arrangements, either on a permanent or temporary basis.

Under the National Law, education and care providers are able to apply to the regulatory authority in their state or territory for two types of waivers.

The two types of waiver are:

- **service waivers** – service waivers have no specified expiry date. Where a service waiver is in force the education and care service is taken to comply with the element(s) of the NQS and National Regulations specified in the service waiver. A service waiver does not affect a service's assessment and rating against the NQS and can be revoked by the regulatory authority either at its discretion or on receipt of an application from an approved provider.

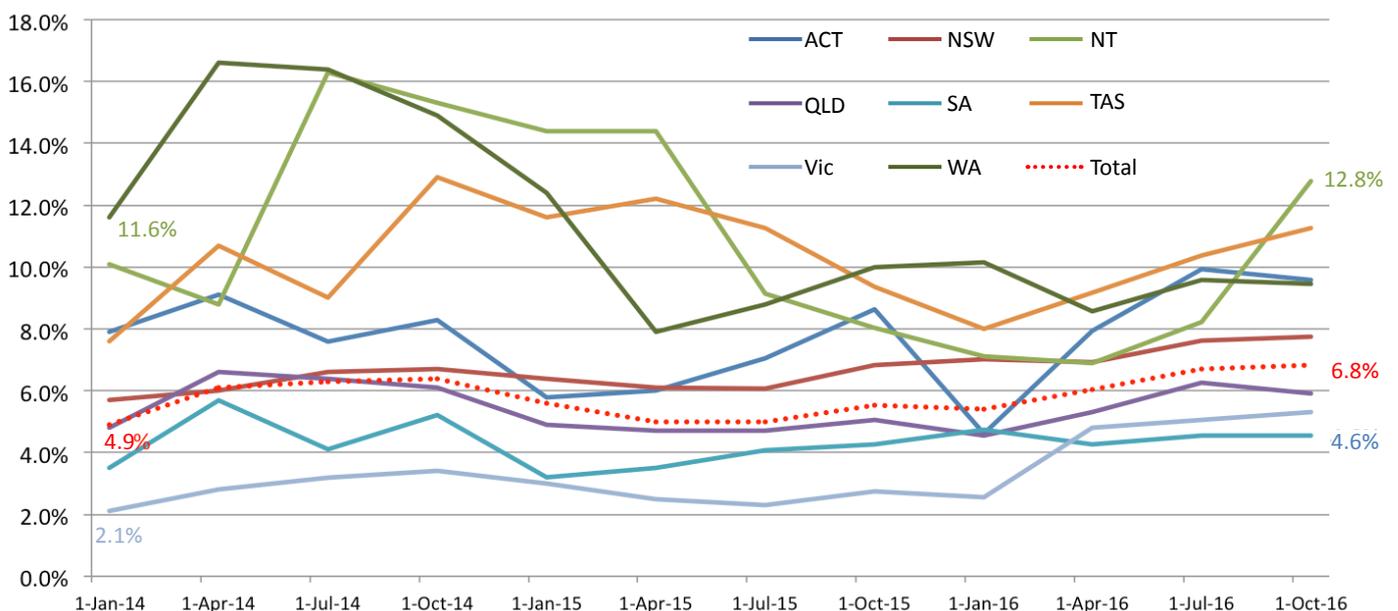
- temporary waivers** – temporary waivers apply for no more than 12 months. Where a temporary waiver is in force the education and care service is not required to comply with the element(s) of the NQS and National Regulations specified in the temporary waiver. Temporary waivers must specify the period for which the waiver applies and providers may apply to the regulatory authority to extend the period of a temporary waiver by periods of not more than 12 months. A temporary waiver does not affect a service's assessment and rating against the NQS.

**Figure 3** examines the prevalence of waivers over the last three years. At 1 January 2014, 4.9% of all approved services were operating with one or more waivers, with Western Australia (11.6%) having the highest proportion and Victoria (2.1%) the lowest. At 1 October 2016, 6.8% of all approved services were operating with one or more waivers, with the Northern Territory (12.8%) having the highest proportion and South Australia (4.6%) the lowest.

Most waivers are temporary waivers of staffing requirements, therefore it is somewhat unsurprising to see a higher proportion of services with waivers in states and territories with a higher proportion of remote and very remote services, such as Western Australia and the Northern Territory. This typically reflects the difficulties these services may face in recruiting and retaining qualified educators, particularly early childhood teachers (ECTs).

Again unsurprisingly, the proportion of services with temporary staffing waivers increased following the introduction of higher qualification requirements on 1 January 2014 and 1 January 2016.

**Figure 3: Proportion of services with a waiver**



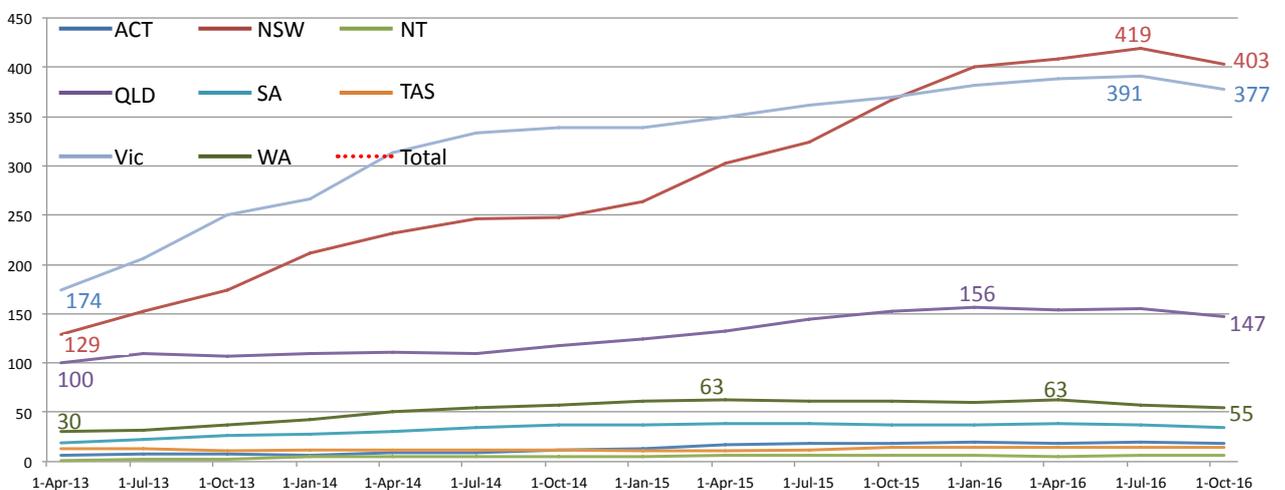
## Family day care

Before the introduction of the NQF, the FDC sector was relatively small and well established, with many services being operated by local government providers. Since 2012, the sector has changed dramatically, significantly increasing in size and altering in composition. Before the introduction of the NQF, there were around 300 FDC services, with roughly a quarter of these being operated by private for profit providers. Over the period of the NQF's implementation, around 800 new FDC services have been approved, with more than 90% of these being operated by private for profit providers.

**Figure 4** summarises the expansion of the FDC sector. At 1 April 2013, there were 472 approved FDC services, with Victoria (174) and New South Wales (129) having approaching two thirds of all approved FDC services nationally. At 1 July 2016, there were 1,100 approved FDC services, with New South Wales (419) and Victoria (391) having just under three quarters of all approved FDC services nationally.

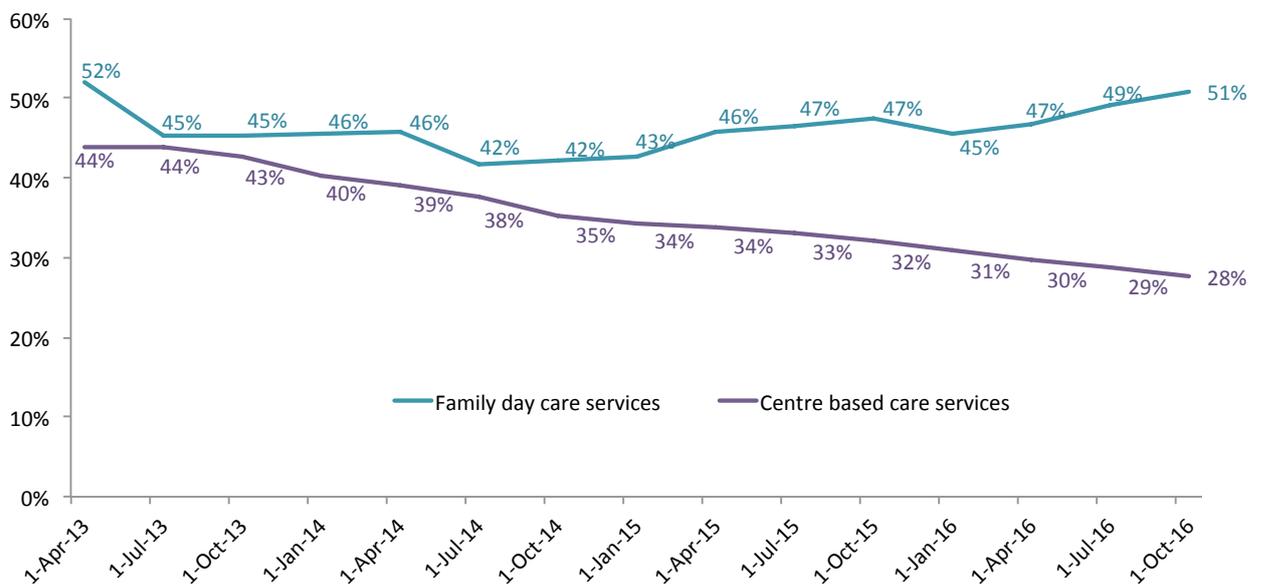
Most states and territories have witnessed notable FDC growth. Looking at jurisdictions that had 30 or more approved FDC services at 1 April 2013, the most striking growth between 1 April 2013 and 1 July 2016 has occurred in New South Wales (225% increase in services), Victoria (125% increase in services) and Western Australia (93% increase in services).

Figure 4: Number of family day care services



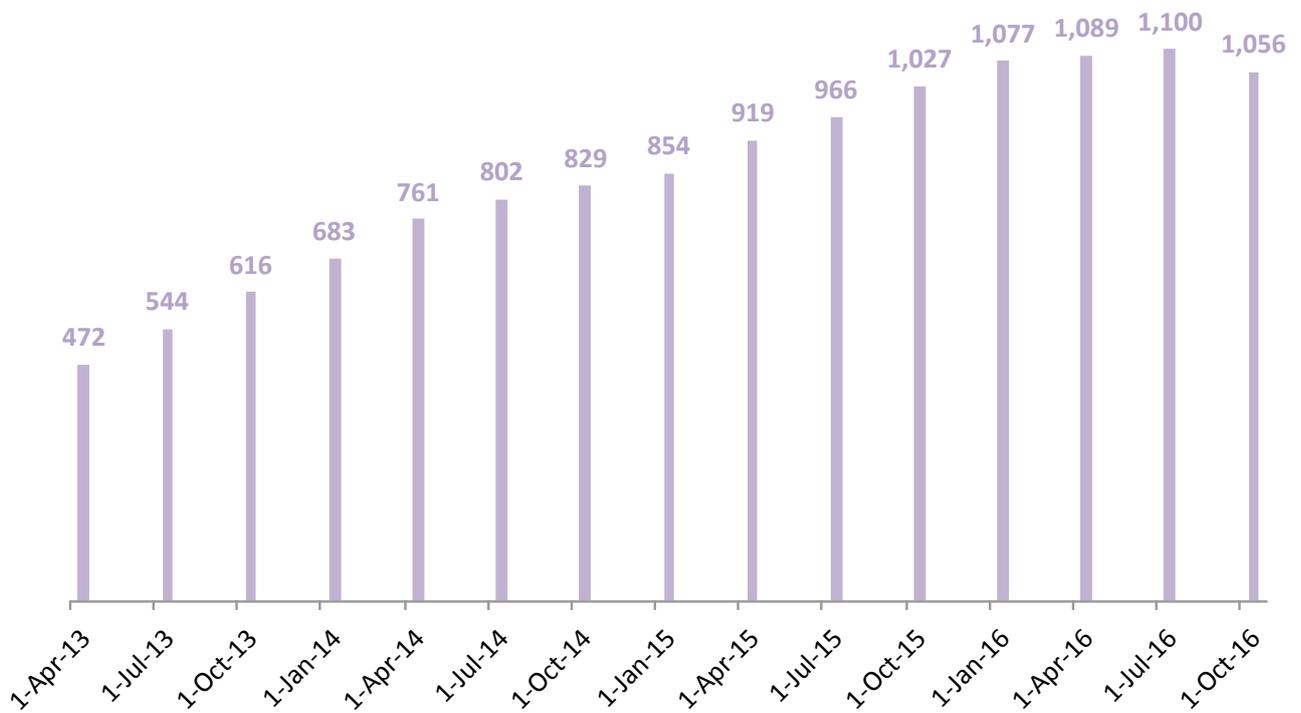
The significant increase and change in the FDC sector has resulted in state and territory regulatory authorities diverting resources to administer the associated regulatory functions, such as considering service approvals, undertaking quality assessments, and monitoring compliance with the National Law and Regulations. While many high quality FDC services and providers remain, there has been a proliferation of lower quality services and providers, some of whom are ill equipped or disinclined to comply with the requirements of the NQF. This in turn has resulted in a disproportionate amount of resources being directed towards the FDC sector, as well as an increasing gap between the proportion of FDC services and centre based care services rated Significant Improvement Required (SIR) or Working Towards NQS (see **Figure 5**).

Figure 5: Proportion of services rated below Meeting NQS



As shown in **Figure 6**, the latest quarter is the first time that there has been a decrease in the total number of approved FDC services.

Figure 6: Number of approved family day care services



# Definition of consistency under the National Quality Framework

The NQF aims to raise quality and drive continuous improvement in early childhood education and care and school age care. It acknowledges that states, territories and the Australian Government previously operated nine different regulatory systems, with diverse standards and requirements. Recognising these different histories and starting points, the NQF progressively puts in place nationally consistent standards and requirements.

In the context of the NQF, consistency is most importantly about the outcomes that result from the way the NQF is administered by governments and ACECQA. For example, when governments and ACECQA administer the NQF, one of the goals is to achieve consistent results that promote positive outcomes for children, families and carers, and providers of education and care services.

## ■ ■ ■ Consistency of outcomes for children, families and carers

Education and care practices vary between services based on the diverse needs of children, families and carers in the community. However, all service practice is guided by the NQF's legislated foundations of children's safety, health, wellbeing and development. Therefore, families and children can expect that any intervention by regulators has the consistent purpose of supporting children to realise the benefits of attending quality education and care services and protect them from potential harm.

## ■ ■ ■ Consistency of outcomes for approved providers

Consistency of outcomes among approved providers of education and care services is achieved by ensuring that services with similar characteristics experience similar regulatory intervention and support. For example, when regulatory authorities assess and rate services, providers should be confident that assessments undertaken by different assessors, or in different jurisdictions or regions, are designed and conducted to deliver comparable outcomes.

## Sector perceptions of consistency

The assessment and rating of education and care services is undertaken by state and territory regulatory authorities. ACECQA supports the process by providing training, support and guidance for authorised officers, who are employed by state and territory regulatory authorities to administer the NQF.

Members of the education and care sector expressed concerns about consistency through the 2014 National Partnership Agreement on the National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care Review consultation processes<sup>5</sup> and the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Childcare and Early Childhood Learning<sup>6</sup>.

They were most commonly concerned with inconsistencies in the assessment and rating process, both within and between jurisdictions. Perceptions of inconsistency in the assessments conducted by different authorised officers was most frequently cited, followed by challenges associated with the more subjective aspects of the NQS.

In addition to expressing concerns, members of the education and care sector also suggested ways to improve consistency. These suggestions, which have been used to inform priority areas of ACECQA's national consistency strategy and implementation plan 2015-16, include:

- clearer guidelines and information about the NQS and the assessment and rating process
- improved communication and collaboration between the state and territory regulatory authorities
- additional clarity about the roles of ACECQA and the state and territory regulatory authorities
- improved training for authorised officers responsible for undertaking the assessment and rating of education and care services, including stronger knowledge and understanding of the sector and specific service types
- implementation of a feedback mechanism to enable approved providers of education and care services to express concerns about national consistency, as well as provide information about regulations that appear to not be working as intended.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.woolcott.com.au/NQFReview/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/childcare/report>

## ■ ■ ■ Large provider perspective

A large proportion of approved services are attached to multi-service providers. Of the 15,429 approved services as at 1 October 2016, 28% were operated by medium sized providers (defined as a provider that operates 2-24 services) and 31% were operated by large providers (defined as a provider that operates 25 or more services).

ACECQA, the regulatory authorities and Australian Government regularly engage with some of the largest national providers to discuss a range of issues relating to the consistent implementation of the NQF.

For example, some of the issues covered in recent discussions between ACECQA and these providers include:

- feedback on the assessment and rating process
- preparedness for changes to qualification requirements in the National Regulations
- guidance for services rated Working Towards NQS
- sources of evidence to inform work undertaken as part of the draft NQF evaluation framework
- suggestions for future topics to be covered at ACECQA's National Workshops offered to educators across the country.

# ACECQA's role in monitoring and promoting consistency

ACECQA was established on 1 January 2012 as the national authority responsible for guiding the implementation and administration of the NQF. Two of ACECQA's functions under section 225 of the National Law explicitly mention consistency. These are:

- guiding the implementation and administration of the NQF, and monitoring and promoting consistency
- establishing consistent, effective and efficient procedures for the operation of the NQF.

ACECQA engages in a number of activities to monitor and support consistency. These include:

- reporting to the state and territory governments, in particular the regulatory authorities, and Australian Government about the NQF
- determining the arrangements for national auditing
- publishing, monitoring and reviewing ratings of approved education and care services
- publishing guides and resources to support parents, the community and the sector
- publishing information about the implementation and administration of the NQF
- determining and assessing the qualifications required to be held by educators
- managing, developing and providing support and training for the NQA ITS
- providing a nationally available customer services function.

# Collaboration with state and territory regulatory authorities, and other partner organisations

One of ACECQA's seven consistency related priorities is to collaborate with state and territory regulatory authorities, and other partner organisations. Highlights of some of this collaboration are detailed below.

## Operational Policy Manual for Regulatory Authorities

ACECQA developed the Operational Policy Manual for Regulatory Authorities (OPM) in close collaboration with state and territory regulatory authorities and the Australian Government. The manual, first published in early 2013, is intended to assist authorised officers and other regulatory staff to apply the National Law and Regulations. In particular, it is intended to support the nationally consistent application of the NQF.

The OPM is a working document that is regularly reviewed by ACECQA for potential knowledge gaps that could contribute to inconsistent practice.

In May 2015, the OPM was the topic of one of ACECQA's national audits. The audit examined the use and value of the OPM, with the findings used to update and enhance the manual. The OPM was most recently updated in October 2016 and is available on ACECQA's website.

## Case Study - Family Day Care

FDC is a unique operating environment primarily delivered in a home based setting, under the direction of a central coordination unit or FDC service. As noted earlier in this paper, the FDC sector has grown rapidly over the past five years. This growth has been accompanied by increased levels of serious non-compliance among the many new FDC providers.

### **Family day care protocol**

In 2014, regulatory authorities and ACECQA identified a need to formalise collaboration for the effective regulation of FDC services operating across multiple jurisdictions. ACECQA began developing a protocol that promotes timely and coordinated regulation by regulatory authorities, including a nationally consistent approach.

The protocol, published on ACECQA's website as part of the OPM, sets out procedures for establishing a host regulatory authority, knowledge sharing and operational collaboration, which aim to achieve consistent outcomes from regulatory interventions.

Issues associated with FDC services operating across jurisdictions were also addressed in June 2015, with the introduction of new Commonwealth requirements for FDC providers to hold

a separate service approval in each jurisdiction for the purpose of receiving funding under Commonwealth Family Assistance Law (exemptions may be granted by the Commonwealth for services that straddle jurisdictional boundaries).

### **Compliance and enforcement initiatives**

Another important area of interjurisdictional collaboration is responding to heightened levels of non-compliance in some parts of the FDC sector, particularly among new providers. While most FDC providers comply with relevant laws, some have intentionally engaged in fraudulent activities. This includes providers that have illegally claimed childcare funding subsidies from the Australian Government.

Governments and ACECQA work collaboratively on these issues by focussing on ways to strengthen regulatory practice under the National Law, and coordinate the application of Commonwealth Family Assistance Law and the National Law. This collaboration also includes representatives from the Australian Federal Police (AFP), and other regulatory agencies such as the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA).

In 2015 and 2016, state and territory regulatory authorities and the Australian Government conducted successful joint enforcement campaigns that have seen the closure or suspension of some non-compliant and poor quality FDC services. Particular areas of focus have included the fitness and propriety of people who control and manage FDC services, and the systems of management these providers have in place to ensure educators are providing education and care consistent with the National Law. Other areas for targeted intervention have included the qualifications of FDC educators, as well as the keeping of proper records.

ACECQA assists this work by examining data on trends in the FDC sector, contributing to discussion about potential policy and legislative solutions, making enhancements to the NQA ITS to support risk assessment and compliance activities, and developing targeted guidance material for the FDC sector.

## Quality and Consistency Committee (QaCC)

The QaCC comprises senior representatives from state and territory regulatory authorities, the Australian Government and ACECQA. The role of QaCC is to:

- provide a forum to share information about the implementation of the NQF and discuss any issues or concerns
- assist ACECQA to meet its statutory responsibilities for monitoring and reporting on national consistency
- assist regulatory authorities to meet their statutory responsibilities for implementing the NQF consistently across the nation.

## Educator qualifications

ACECQA works with a range of partner bodies to streamline and improve processes and procedures, and promote the status and importance of the early childhood sector, its educators, and their qualifications.

ACECQA continues to work collaboratively with a range of higher education and qualification bodies. For example, in March 2016, ACECQA co-hosted a provider roundtable with ASQA to improve industry engagement with providers and strengthen information sharing. A second roundtable is scheduled to take place before the end of 2016.

In April 2016, following discussion and joint working with ACECQA, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) announced it had changed its assessment criteria for ECTs.

The change promotes greater consistency for overseas qualified ECTs who need to have their qualifications assessed by AITSL for skilled migration purposes and by ACECQA to work in services covered by the NQF. AITSL has expanded its age focus to consider supervised teaching practice with children aged birth to eight years of age after previously only considering supervised teaching practice with children aged three to eight years of age.

ACECQA has also offered advice and support to the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) and the NSW Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES) in preparing for and implementing the registration of ECTs in Victoria in 2015, and the accreditation of ECTs in New South Wales in 2016.

# ACECQA's approach to consistency under the NQF

National consistency is not an end in itself. Achieving consistent outcomes for children and families is the focus of collaborative efforts between ACECQA and the state and territory regulatory authorities. This focus on consistent *outcomes* rather than consistent *process* has guided ACECQA's consistency function. Strategies implemented in partnership between ACECQA and the state and territory regulatory authorities focus on building confidence and enabling constructive relationships between regulator and regulated.

ACECQA's approach to national consistency under the NQF is guided by the best practice regulation principles<sup>7</sup>. These principles are summarised below.

## ■ ■ ■ Outcomes focussed

National consistency is pursued to:

- promote improved quality outcomes for children, families and carers
- further children's safety, health, wellbeing and development
- increase efficiency and reduce unnecessary burden for providers of education and care services
- complement the objectives of the National Law.

## ■ ■ ■ Proportionality and efficiency

The design and application of national consistency strategies are proportionate to the problem or issue they are seeking to address. Effort and resources are efficiently prioritised to areas where, based on the available evidence, the potential benefits and risks are more significant.

## ■ ■ ■ Responsiveness and flexibility

Consistent regulatory interventions are based on the available evidence, remain relevant and appropriate by responding to changes in the sector, and are sufficiently flexible so as not to constrain appropriate and desirable innovation and diversity.

## ■ ■ ■ Transparency and accountability

Efforts to enhance national consistency are open, transparent and accountable to public and sector scrutiny, including the regular reporting of performance information about national consistency.

<sup>7</sup> A full description of the best practice regulation principles that guide ACECQA's and regulatory authorities' work can be found in the [Operational Policy Manual for Regulatory Authorities](#).

## ■ ■ ■ Communication and engagement

Engaging appropriately with stakeholder groups (such as government agencies, the regulated sector and service users) about national consistency makes related activities more transparent, efficient and effective.

## ■ ■ ■ Mutual responsibility and cooperation

ACECQA, regulatory authorities and the Australian Government all have roles and responsibilities in relation to consistency. These are acknowledged and understood, and help direct mutually productive and beneficial working relationships. Cooperation and coordination is critical to improve the efficiency, consistency and predictability of regulatory systems. This also means that public resources are employed effectively, reducing duplication of regulatory effort.

# ACECQA's national consistency strategy and implementation plan 2015-16

ACECQA's national consistency strategy and implementation plan 2015-16 was developed in response to concerns, and suggestions for improvement, expressed by the education and care sector. The plan forms an overarching strategy to monitor and promote consistency under the NQF, and covers:

- ACECQA's seven consistency priorities
- activities that support those priorities
- progress made to date.

The next section of the paper provides a description of the activities and progress to date in support of ACECQA's consistency priorities (one of the priorities has already been summarised earlier in this paper).

## ■ ■ ■ Training and support for authorised officers

ACECQA offers national training and support for state and territory regulatory authority authorised officers through:

- an eLearning website
- the national authorised officer training program
- interrater reliability initiatives
- lead assessor workshops.

## eLearning website

Since 2013, ACECQA has maintained and enhanced an eLearning website for regulatory authorities. The website hosts training resources, primarily to support authorised officers in the assessment and rating process.

Authorised officers currently have access to more than 30 eLearning modules addressing topics such as:

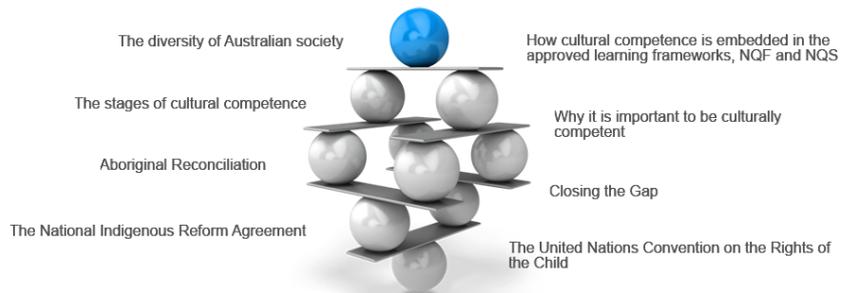
- part one of the national authorised officer training program, which provides an overview of the National Quality Framework and the approved learning frameworks
- assessment and rating report writing, which promotes consistent and high quality report writing
- an introduction to cultural competence
- familiarisation with Montessori and Steiner services
- assessing quality education and care for under three year olds
- assessing OSHC services against the seven quality areas of the NQS.

Below are screenshots from some of the eLearning modules.



ACECQA eLearning **Introduction to Cultural Competence: Part I**  
Learning objectives

After completing this module you will have foundation knowledge and understandings of:

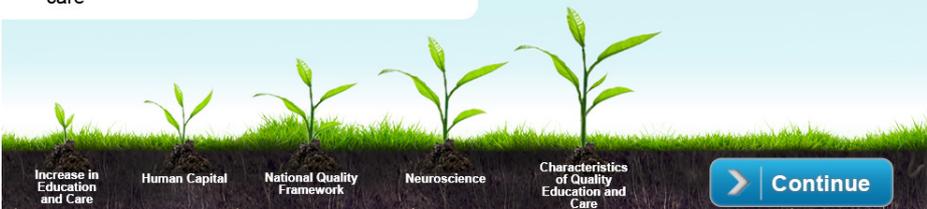


Navigation controls: back, forward, search, volume, and a blue 'Next' button.

ACECQA eLearning **Assessing quality education and care for birth to two**  
Learning objectives

The objectives of this module are to support your knowledge and understanding of:

- The increase in number of children aged birth to two in education and care
- The significance of the National Quality Framework in quality care for children aged birth to two
- The characteristics of quality education and care
- Human capital
- Neuroscience and early childhood development



Increase in Education and Care

Human Capital

National Quality Framework

Neuroscience

Characteristics of Quality Education and Care

Navigation controls and a blue 'Continue' button.

ACECQA eLearning

### Assessing quality education and care for birth to two Human capital and investing in early childhood education

The Heckman Equation acknowledges that...




<b>INVEST</b> in educational and developmental resources for disadvantaged families to provide equal access to successful early human development	+
<b>DEVELOP</b> cognitive skills, social skills, and physical well-being in children early – from birth to age five when it matters most	+
<b>SUSTAIN</b> Early development with effective education through adulthood	=
<b>GAIN</b> more capable, productive and valuable citizens that pay dividends for generations to come	

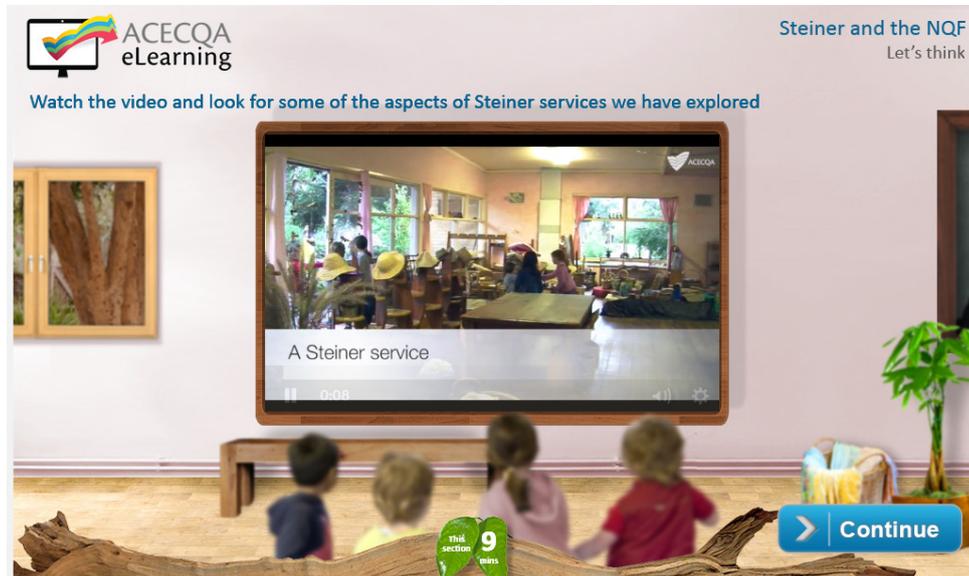
Human Capital

ACECQA eLearning

### Montessori and the National Quality Framework Montessori in Australia

- There are currently 250 culturally diverse Montessori schools and services in Australia
- Many services are run by community-based, not for profit associations
- There are a growing number of privately owned services as well as programmes within schools
- Indigenous learning programmes are emerging given the strong respect Montessori has for Indigenous culture

> Continue



The topics for the eLearning modules are developed in consultation with various stakeholders. For example:

- the cultural competence module was developed in consultation with the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC)
- the Montessori module was developed in consultation with Montessori Australia
- the Steiner module was developed in consultation with Steiner Education Australia
- the OSHC module was developed in consultation with the Queensland Children's Activities Network and the Network of Community Activities.

Planned future eLearning modules include a comprehensive module on the topic of assessing FDC services.

ACECQA's eLearning website also includes more than 20 guidance notes, covering topics such as:

- adequate supervision in OSHC
- child protection
- children's agency
- critical reflection
- educational leadership
- expectations around documentation about each child in OSHC
- intentional teaching / intentionality
- meeting vs exceeding NQS.

Topics for guidance notes are prioritised based on feedback received from regulatory authority staff and providers of education and care services about challenging or complex aspects of the NQS.

## National authorised officer training program

In the first half of 2014, ACECQA converted introductory aspects of the authorised officer national training program into eLearning modules, enabling authorised officers to access them remotely and work through them at their own pace.

These modules are available to all authorised officers, including experienced authorised officers as refresher modules. The content of these eLearning modules is regularly reviewed and updated in response to feedback from authorised officers to ensure they are fit for purpose.

ACECQA delivers the authorised officer national training program every two months. Face-to-face training is delivered in Sydney or across the country, depending upon demand. A small number of experienced trainers deliver the training which includes opportunities for attendees to network and share information, as well as reflect individually on the NQS and other key aspects of the NQF.

Face-to-face training has been provided by ACECQA to more than 250 state and territory regulatory authority authorised officers.

## Interrater reliability initiatives

As part of the national authorised officer training program, authorised officers must successfully pass reliability testing before they can assess and rate education and care services. Authorised officers are also required to demonstrate they are maintaining that reliability through annual 'drift' testing to check that they have not 'drifted' from the common lens of the NQS.

ACECQA monitors and analyses the completion and success rates of the reliability and drift testing to inform enhancements to the testing processes and assess the need for any additional and/or targeted training and support.

The reliability and drift testing processes form part of ACECQA's overarching approach to attempt to gauge interrater reliability between authorised officers, both within individual jurisdictions and across the country. Other aspects of ACECQA's work that help inform the approach and priorities for interrater reliability include ongoing:

- analysis of national and jurisdictional assessment and rating data to identify aspects of the NQS that exhibit the greatest degree of variation between jurisdictions, regions and individual authorised officers
- surveys of authorised officers to gather feedback about the NQS and pose scenarios relating to aspects of the NQS
- trial initiatives, such as accompanying state and territory regulatory authority authorised officers on assessment and rating visits of services.

## Case study - Interrater reliability trial project

ACECQA's national consistency strategy and implementation plan 2015-16 details the broad approach and suite of activities to monitor and promote consistency under the NQF, which includes the trialling of methods to gauge the level of interrater reliability between authorised officers.

Interrater reliability trials seek to measure consistency between the quality assessment and rating decisions of different authorised officers. To achieve interrater reliability, all authorised officers when presented with a similar quality service should draw similar conclusions about the service's quality rating.

For children, families and carers, and providers of education and care services it is important that the outcome of quality assessment and rating of a service should be comparable to other similar services irrespective of the authorised officer that conducts it. Families and carers can then be confident that quality ratings are truly reflective of service quality and providers can be confident that they will experience equitable treatment when being quality assessed and rated.

Between June and December 2015, following agreement with state and territory regulatory authorities, an ACECQA lead assessor shadowed 31 authorised officers on assessment and rating visits, effectively conducting a parallel assessment and rating of the service for research purposes.

The trial revealed that the ACECQA lead assessor's assessment and rating judgements were largely consistent with those of the authorised officers. 80% of judgements were consistent at the overall rating level and the standards with the highest level of agreement were:

- Standard 4.1 (staffing arrangements)
- Standard 6.1 (relationships with families)
- Standard 5.1 (relationships with children)
- Standard 5.2 (relationships with other children and adults).

The standards with the lowest level of agreement were:

- Standard 3.3 (sustainable practices and environmental responsibility)
- Standard 7.3 (administrative systems)
- Standard 2.3 (child protection)
- Standard 7.1 (effective leadership).

It should be noted that during the trial, the ACECQA lead assessor was not always able to be present for the full duration of assessment and rating visits or be privy to all discussions and interactions occurring outside of the assessment and rating visit itself. This meant that the lead assessor and authorised officer did not necessarily have the same level of information available to them in making rating determinations. For example, the authorised officer had full access to the compliance history of the service and any current information regarding compliance issues. There were also occasions where either the ACECQA lead assessor or authorised officer noted instances of practice that the other was not aware of, because they were observing other practice at the time. This, along with the resource intensive nature, was one of the main challenges of this type of interrater reliability exercise.

### **Outcomes and actions**

ACECQA continues to work with state and territory regulatory authorities to develop an appropriate model for the ongoing monitoring and strengthening of interrater reliability. The model will consist of activities undertaken independently by ACECQA, activities undertaken independently by regulatory authorities, and activities undertaken collaboratively. By adopting a flexible approach, ACECQA will be able to focus efforts based on available evidence. For example, the focus of interrater reliability efforts may be upon individual standards, rating levels, service types, jurisdictions, regions or authorised officers, dependent upon the available evidence.

## **Lead assessor workshops**

ACECQA hosts national workshops twice a year for state and territory regulatory authority lead assessors. Lead assessors are tasked with overseeing the assessment and rating process in their jurisdiction and providing mentoring and support to authorised officers.

The two day workshops provide a valuable opportunity for lead assessors to come together to discuss and prioritise the training and support needs of authorised officers, consider emerging trends and issues, and analyse assessment and rating data.

In the weeks prior to lead assessor workshops, ACECQA takes the opportunity to survey authorised officers to gather feedback on a number of topics, including the assessment and rating process, eLearning modules and guidance notes, and emerging themes and issues.

At recent workshops, lead assessors have reviewed and evaluated eLearning modules and sector guidance material, shared jurisdiction specific initiatives and considered proposed changes to the NQS and the NQA ITS.

## ■ ■ ■ National audits

Between 2013 and 2016, ACECQA completed 11 audits of the NQF as part of its legislated national audit function. Audit topics are identified, prioritised and agreed in collaboration with regulatory authorities and the Australian Government.

The 11 completed audits have examined the following topics:

- Conditions on approval
- Waivers
- Compliance and monitoring resources
- First tier reviews
- Determining NQS rating levels
- Drift testing reliability
- Use and value of the OPM
- Serious incidents (child missing or unaccounted for)
- Significant Improvement Required (SIR) rating
- Individual standards and elements analysis
- Scheduling and undertaking quality assessment and rating visits.

In most cases, the audits involve ACECQA analysing relevant data held within the NQA ITS and discussion with regulatory authority staff in each jurisdiction to gather additional information and context. Depending on the audit topic, ACECQA has also engaged with a cross-section of large service providers to gather their insights and perspectives.

Each audit report includes a list of agreed actions that typically focus on opportunities to enhance consistency or efficiency. Tangible outcomes from the audits include:

- improved quality, consistency and capture of data in the NQA ITS
- additional guidance for providers of education and care services
- additional content for the OPM to help guide authorised officers in their day-to-day work.

## Case study - Determining rating levels audit

An audit completed in September 2014 looked at how authorised officers determine ratings of Working Towards, Meeting and Exceeding NQS at the standard level. The purpose of this audit was to identify and examine practice among authorised officers in how they apply the rating levels, propose options to improve national consistency in rating decisions and provide assurance about the administration of the assessment and rating system.

The audit focused on six standards which displayed the greatest degree of variation in the rating levels across jurisdictions. It found that jurisdictions were able to provide explanatory context for the majority of variation relating to specific standards. It also found that jurisdictions generally refer to national resources about interpreting and applying the NQS.

The audit identified standards which officers find the most and least challenging to rate; these did not always correspond with the standards with the greatest level of cross-jurisdictional variation.

### **Outcomes and actions**

The audit recommended actions to improve how regulatory authorities and ACECQA monitor and guide consistency in rating decisions. These included reviewing the adequacy of existing interrater reliability initiatives and the development of additional guidance to assist with challenging aspects of assessment and rating.

## Case study - Significant Improvement Required (SIR) rating audit

In February 2016, ACECQA completed an audit that analysed services which had received an overall rating of SIR on or before 31 October 2015.

A regulatory authority may give the SIR rating for a quality area 'if the education and care service does not meet that quality area or relevant regulation for that quality area in a way that the regulatory authority is satisfied constitutes an unacceptable risk to the safety, health or wellbeing of any child or children being educated and care for by the service'.

The audit found that an overall rating of SIR had been issued 38 times since the inception of the assessment and rating system, with a total of 33 services receiving the rating.

Standard 2.3 (each child is protected) was the standard most likely to receive a rating of SIR, followed by standard 2.1 (each child's health is promoted), 3.1 (design and location of the premises) and 4.1 (staffing arrangements).

80% of services with an overall rating of SIR received an overall rating of Working Towards NQS or higher at the next assessment. Four services that received a rating of SIR either surrendered their service approval or had it cancelled by the regulatory authority, while three services transferred to new approved providers, resulting in improved service quality and provider management.

### **Outcomes and actions**

ACECQA's audit found that approaches to administering the SIR rating sometimes varied between jurisdictions. This was mainly due to regulatory authorities deciding whether a monitoring and compliance or assessment and rating visit was the most appropriate response to concerns around potential significant non-compliance at a service, as well as what steps a regulatory authority takes once significant non-compliance is identified during an assessment and rating visit. The decision rests with the regulatory authority whether to suspend the assessment and rating visit while the significant non-compliance is addressed, or to continue with and complete the assessment and rating process.

## Case study - Scheduling and undertaking quality assessment and rating audit

An audit completed in September 2016 looked at how regulatory authorities schedule and undertake quality assessment and rating.

The audit found that historically, jurisdictions have differed in how they prioritise services for first assessment. However, jurisdictions' approaches share commonalities, such as the risk factors considered when deciding which services to schedule for assessment.

The audit also found that the overall process to assess and rate a service took notably fewer days (as measured by elapsed days) in 2015-16 (66 days) than in 2013-14 (105 days). This included a reduction in the number of days between the visit being conducted and the draft assessment and rating report being issued, as well as a reduction in the number of days between the visit being conducted and the final ratings being issued.

## ■ ■ ■ Application and assessment functions

### Qualification assessments

ACECQA determines the qualifications and training that need to be held by educators working in education and care services. Both approved and formerly approved qualifications are listed on the ACECQA website, along with a list of qualifications for working with children over preschool age.

Given the importance of qualifications to the sector workforce, as well as the link between highly qualified educators and positive educational and developmental outcomes for children, ACECQA is committed to processing applications for qualifications assessment from individuals and organisations efficiently, consistently and transparently.

The types of qualifications and training approved by ACECQA are:

- ECT qualifications
- diploma and certificate III level education and care qualifications
- first aid training
- asthma and anaphylaxis management training.

Educators with overseas qualifications are also assessed by ACECQA for equivalence against the qualification requirements under the National Law and Regulations.

ACECQA provides a number of resources to help applicants, including application and assessment guidelines, an online application form and an online qualifications checker. The guidelines provide information about the four main areas that are considered as part of a qualifications assessment. These are:

- qualification level
- age focus of qualification
- supervised professional experience during qualification
- curriculum content of qualification.

ACECQA's online qualifications checker asks prospective applicants a series of questions to help them understand if they hold, or are taken to hold, an approved qualification.

As at the end of October 2016, ACECQA had received more than 5,800 applications from individuals seeking qualifications assessment, and approved more than 3,700 educators, including almost 1,500 ECTs. ACECQA has also assessed and approved more than 100 qualification applications from organisations, including more than 80 ECT qualifications.

ACECQA periodically holds information sessions for higher education institutions (HEIs) to support their understanding of the assessment requirements prior to submitting their applications for approval.

ACECQA also monitors and evaluates performance against its application and assessment functions on an ongoing basis, primarily through the use of weekly operational statistics, and a satisfaction survey for individual qualification assessment applicants.

Since August 2016, ACECQA has published data about its qualifications application and assessment function on its website. The data is updated quarterly.

## First tier review applications

If an approved provider disagrees with the final ratings given to a service operated by the provider, the provider may seek a review from the regulatory authority which gave the rating. This review of ratings by the regulatory authority is referred to as a first tier review, and is set out in sections 141 and 144 of the National Law.

In February 2014, ACECQA conducted an audit of first tier reviews. This audit found that jurisdictions follow the agreed process for first tier review described in the published first tier review guidelines.

Some jurisdictions have developed additional procedures to supplement the process and put it in the context of the relevant regulatory authority's standard operating procedures. This did not, however, lead to any discernible inconsistency.

The audit identified variation in the level of detail in jurisdictions' reasons for decisions. Given that the reasons for decisions are a key output of the first tier review process, the audit recommended developing specific guidance around this.

ACECQA has developed a sample decision notice that regulatory authorities can choose to use and adapt when completing first tier reviews. While still allowing regulatory authorities flexibility in how reviews are processed, the sample decision notice provides an example of the type of information that should be included in a decision notice.

As at the end of October 2016, more than 15,000 assessment and rating visits have been undertaken since the assessment and rating process began in mid-2012, while only roughly 300 first tier review applications have been received by regulatory authorities. The number of first tier reviews has decreased each year since 2013.

## Second tier review applications

If they disagree with the outcome and have already sought a first tier review from their local regulatory authority, providers can opt to have their assessment and rating outcome reviewed by a second tier review panel, facilitated by ACECQA.

Only 22 second tier review applications have been received by ACECQA, with just one application received so far in 2016.

The outcomes of second tier reviews are published on ACECQA's website, in part to provide helpful guidance to all jurisdictions when making rating decisions, as well as to openly and transparently inform the broader sector about the outcomes.

ACECQA publishes other resources, such as guidelines and an information sheet, to help applicants with the process of applying for a second tier review.

Since August 2016, ACECQA has published data about its second tier review function on its website. The data is updated quarterly.

## ■ ■ ■ Sector and family communications

### ACECQA's website and newsletter

ACECQA has more than 200 resources in its NQF library on its website. The NQF Resource Kit remains a key resource for services to understand their obligations under the National Law and Regulations. The kit incorporates four separate guides. These are:

- Guide to the NQF
- Guide to the National Law and Regulations
- Guide to the NQS
- Guide to developing a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP).

ACECQA also hosts a range of online videos which are designed to support families' understanding of the NQF and NQS, as well as encourage high quality practice among service providers. The topics covered in these videos include:

- how services are assessed and rated
- the meaning of the rating received by a service
- educational program and practice
- leadership in education and care.

### NQF quarterly snapshot

The NQF quarterly snapshot provides an overview of the latest information from the assessment and rating process.

ACECQA launched an online version of the snapshot in May 2016 to complement the PDF version. The maps, graphs and tables used in the online version enable users to interact with the information by hovering over, sorting and searching.

Since August 2016, ACECQA has also made available a comprehensive dataset of service level performance against the NQS, including all of the individual standard level ratings – comprising more than 200,000 ratings and growing each quarter. This allows any interested party to analyse the detailed performance of services against the NQS, including performance by standard and geographic and socio-economic area.

## Social media

ACECQA uses a variety of social media channels to convey information, answer questions and generate discussion that facilitates the consistent implementation of the NQF. For example, ACECQA's 'We Hear You' blog provides a platform for peak organisations, educators, regulators, approved providers and ACECQA. Contributions to the blog include articles from authorised officers, educators and service providers on how to prepare and learn from the assessment and rating process.

## Customer services

ACECQA's in-house customer services team handles thousands of enquiries each month. ACECQA analyses the enquiries it receives to inform newsletter articles, information sheets, blogs, social media posts and website content.

The customer services team has also developed a knowledge base of responses that is continually reviewed and updated, to support national consistency in the information provided to the sector and the public.

## National Workshops

ACECQA, in partnership with the states and territories and the Professional Support Coordinator Alliance (PSCA), has developed and delivered two rounds of National Workshops. The workshops help to drive quality outcomes for providers of education and care services by delivering consistent information and guidance to the sector about aspects of the NQF. The partnership approach to delivery of the workshops also ensures that the sector receives consistent messaging from all those responsible for NQF implementation and administration.

The workshops are designed as hands on, practical workshops. They are open to all educators and providers, but are particularly targeted at services that have received a rating of Working Towards NQS or have not yet been rated. The workshops are also a valuable professional development opportunity for educators from different services to come together, share ideas, and hear practical strategies to meet the requirements of the NQF.

The first round of workshops, designed to support services in meeting Quality Area 1 (Educational program and practice), concluded in Queensland in August 2015. The workshops were well-received and attendance exceeded expectations across all states and territories, with around 4,000 attendees across the 60 workshops.

Following completion of the inaugural workshop series, ACECQA made available an interactive podcast and resources from the workshops on its website.

The second round of workshops commenced in the Australian Capital Territory in October 2015 and concluded in Victoria in June 2016. A total of 52 workshops were delivered across Australia to more than 3,000 participants. This round of workshops focussed on one of three themes, selected by representatives from the local jurisdiction:

- Understanding cultural competence
- Agency of the child
- Educational leadership.

Demand for the 2015-16 workshops was high, and **Table 1** below shows the number of workshops held in each jurisdiction, as well as the topic and number of attendees.

**Table 1 2015-16 National Workshops**

Jurisdiction	Number of workshops	Topic	Number of attendees
ACT – Oct 2015	1	Understanding cultural competence	96
WA – Feb 2016	4	Agency of the child	237
NT – Feb 2016	4	Educational leadership	156
Qld – Mar 2016	14	Agency of the child	775
SA – Apr 2016	4	Understanding cultural competence	166
Tas – May 2016	4	Educational leadership	163
NSW – May 2016	11	Educational leadership	783
Vic – Jun 2016	10	Agency of the child	688
<b>Total</b>	<b>52</b>		<b>3064</b>

The third round of National Workshops commenced in the Northern Territory in August 2016.

## Family communications strategy

ACECQA, in consultation with peak body representatives and governments, has developed a communications strategy that focuses on delivering a consistent message about the quality of early childhood education and care to prospective and new parents.

A major component of the strategy is the Starting Blocks website, launched in April 2015. Starting Blocks provides accessible information that:

- promotes improved quality outcomes for children, families and carers
- furthers knowledge of children's safety, health, wellbeing and development
- is transparent and accountable
- supports engagement with the early education and care sector.

Starting Blocks is a starting point for families to:

- learn about children's developmental milestones
- understand what to expect from an early childhood education and care service
- find services and learn about their quality ratings
- get tips on starting early childhood education and care, and what can be done at home to encourage their child's learning and development.

## Targeted engagement with national peak bodies and large providers

ACECQA meets regularly with a number of peak bodies and large providers of education and care services. This offers an ongoing feedback opportunity, as well as a chance for ACECQA to discuss emerging trends and issues, and national developments.

The meetings also provide the opportunity for ACECQA to gather information and feedback on behalf of the regulatory authorities, and the Australian Government.

Relevant information is appropriately shared, either individually or collectively with state and territory regulatory authorities, and the Australian Government to promote consistency.

## ACECQA Forum

The ACECQA Forum provides an important platform for sharing information and engaging with representatives from the children's education and care sector. Attendees include:

- state and territory regulatory authorities
- the Australian Government
- national peak bodies
- local and state government agencies
- family, professional and employee associations.

## ■ ■ ■ Analysis of assessment and rating data

### Assessment and rating progress reports

ACECQA has been providing monthly assessment and rating progress reports to the Education Council since June 2014. These reports contribute to ACECQA's monitoring of consistency by providing a high level summary of progress and performance against the NQS.

### Assessment and rating analysis reports

With almost 13,000 services assessed and rated, ACECQA has an increasingly rich source of data for analysis. In addition to the published quarterly NQF Snapshot, ACECQA monitors performance at standard and element level, by jurisdiction, service type, provider management type, and

geographic and socioeconomic location. For the larger jurisdictions, ACECQA also undertakes analysis at regional level.

ACECQA shares assessment and rating data analysis with each regulatory authority to assist them to monitor consistency.

## ■ ■ ■ National Quality Agenda Information Technology System (NQA ITS)

The NQA ITS is the national database used by all state and territory regulatory authorities to record their regulatory activity, including the assessment and rating of services, and compliance and enforcement actions.

The system is also available to providers of education and care services through an online portal. Registered users of the NQA ITS can view their provider and service details, submit applications and notifications, submit feedback on assessment and rating reports, and pay invoices.

### System enhancements

ACECQA provides a regular, rolling program of system updates to the NQA ITS.

Consistency and efficiency related priorities include:

- increasing sector use of online application and notification forms
- streamlining and more closely aligning processes for jurisdictions
- increasing data reporting capability through the use of Business Intelligence tools and interactive dashboards.

### Data dictionary and help cards

The data dictionary and help cards were developed by ACECQA to improve data quality and completeness, and efficiency. Documentation is continually updated to ensure it remains relevant and valid.

### Information and training sessions for regulatory authorities

ACECQA offers information and training sessions to regulatory authority users to promote consistency and efficiency in the use of the NQA ITS. These sessions also provide a mechanism for gathering feedback from users to help inform future enhancements.

### Annual survey of NQA ITS users

ACECQA conducts an annual survey of NQA ITS users towards the end of each calendar year to gather feedback about current usage of the system, as well as priorities for improvements and enhancements.

<sup>31</sup> Accessed from regulatory authority websites on 2 May 2016.

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# Appendix A

**Table 2** Regulation of education and care services prior to the introduction of the NQF on 1 January 2012

Jurisdiction	Long day care	Preschool / kindergarten	Outside School Hours Care	Family Day Care	Comments
ACT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Territory licensing and standards regulation</li> <li>• NCAC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School education system / territory licensing and standards regulation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Territory licensing and standards regulation</li> <li>• NCAC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Territory licensing and standards regulation</li> <li>• NCAC</li> </ul>	N/A
NSW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State licensing and standards regulation</li> <li>• NCAC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State licensing and standards regulation / school education system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NCAC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State licensing and standards regulation</li> <li>• NCAC</li> </ul>	N/A
NT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Territory licensing and standards regulation</li> <li>• NCAC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School education system / territory licensing and standards regulation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NCAC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NCAC</li> </ul>	N/A
Qld	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State licensing and standards regulation</li> <li>• NCAC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State licensing and standards regulation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State licensing and standards regulation</li> <li>• NCAC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State licensing and standards regulation</li> <li>• NCAC</li> </ul>	N/A

Jurisdiction	Long day care	Preschool / kindergarten	Outside School Hours Care	Family Day Care	Comments
SA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State licensing and standards regulation</li> <li>• NCAC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State licensing and standards regulation/ school education system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State licensing and standards regulation</li> <li>• NCAC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State licensing and standards regulation</li> <li>• NCAC</li> </ul>	<p>Licensing and standards regulation for OSHC services applied only to services provided on a school site</p> <p>FDC educators in SA were sponsored by the Government and subject to conditions of approval, but were not within scope of the children's services regulations</p>
Tas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State licensing and standards regulation</li> <li>• NCAC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School education system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State licensing and standards regulation</li> <li>• NCAC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State licensing and standards regulation</li> <li>• NCAC</li> </ul>	<p>Kindergartens in Tasmania are not in scope of the NQF</p>
WA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State licensing and standards regulation</li> <li>• NCAC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School education system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State licensing and standards regulation</li> <li>• NCAC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State licensing and standards regulation</li> <li>• NCAC</li> </ul>	<p>The NQF commenced in WA on 1 August 2012</p> <p>Preschools in WA are not in scope of the NQF</p>
Vic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State licensing and standards regulation</li> <li>• NCAC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State licensing and standards regulation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State licensing and standards regulation</li> <li>• NCAC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State licensing and standards regulation</li> <li>• NCAC</li> </ul>	<p>N/A</p>



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