



NQS ASSESSMENT & RATINGS PROCESS:
MEMBER INSIGHTS
FAMILY DAY CARE AUSTRALIA



Family Day Care Australia (FDCA) would like to acknowledge and thank ARTD Consultants for assisting in the production and publication of this resource.



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ABOUT THIS REPORT

WHY WAS THIS REPORT DEVELOPED?

The *NQS Assessment and Ratings Process: Member Insights* report was developed to:

- assist family day care services across Australia who are required, under the National Quality Framework (NQF), to undergo the National Quality Standard (NQS) assessment and rating process; and to
- support their ongoing continuous improvement process and strategic planning.

The report draws on relevant Australian Children's Education and care Quality Authority (ACECQA) data as well as aspects of recent research undertaken by ARTD on behalf of Family Day Care Australia's (FDCA) which surveyed FDCA members about their experiences of the assessment and rating process.

This report supports FDCA's mission to represent, support and promote the family day care sector in delivering high quality early childhood education and care to more Australian families.

HOW TO USE THIS REPORT

The report is designed to be used alongside the [Guide to the National Quality Framework](#) and other key resources produced by ACECQA related to the implementation of the NQF.

The Resource contains three main sections as well as appendices.

SECTION 1 outlines the context for the assessment and ratings process and includes relevant data and information about the specific standards that are most challenging for the family day care sector.

SECTION 2 provides some general tips from services and information about resources that are currently available online to provide guidance on the assessment and ratings process.

SECTION 3 explores the six steps of the ACECQA assessment and rating process in more detail and includes feedback from FDCA service members who have experienced the process.

THE APPENDICES outline the processes involved in each step of the assessment and rating process as outlined in the Guide to the National Quality Framework and provide contact details for each state and territory's regulatory authority.

This report was commissioned by FDCA and produced by ARTD Consultants in 2019.

1 THE CONTEXT

In this section, we give an overview of the context for the NQF assessment and ratings process, individually revisit the seven NQS Quality Areas and look at how family day care services compare with centre-based care services in terms of overall performance.

1.1 THE NATIONAL QUALITY FRAMEWORK

The NQF was introduced in 2012 to achieve a consistent quality standard of early childhood education and care nationally (see Figure 1 below). It provides the overall context for the NQS assessment and ratings process conducted by regulatory authorities in each state and territory.

As can be seen in Figure 1, the NQF comprises the:

- Education and Care Services National Law
- Education and Care Services National Regulations
- National Quality Standard
- the two nationally approved learning frameworks ([Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia](#) and [My Time, Our Place Learning Framework for School Age Care in Australia](#))

[Place, Framework for School Age Care in Australia](#) which outline relevant practice to facilitate learning and development for children

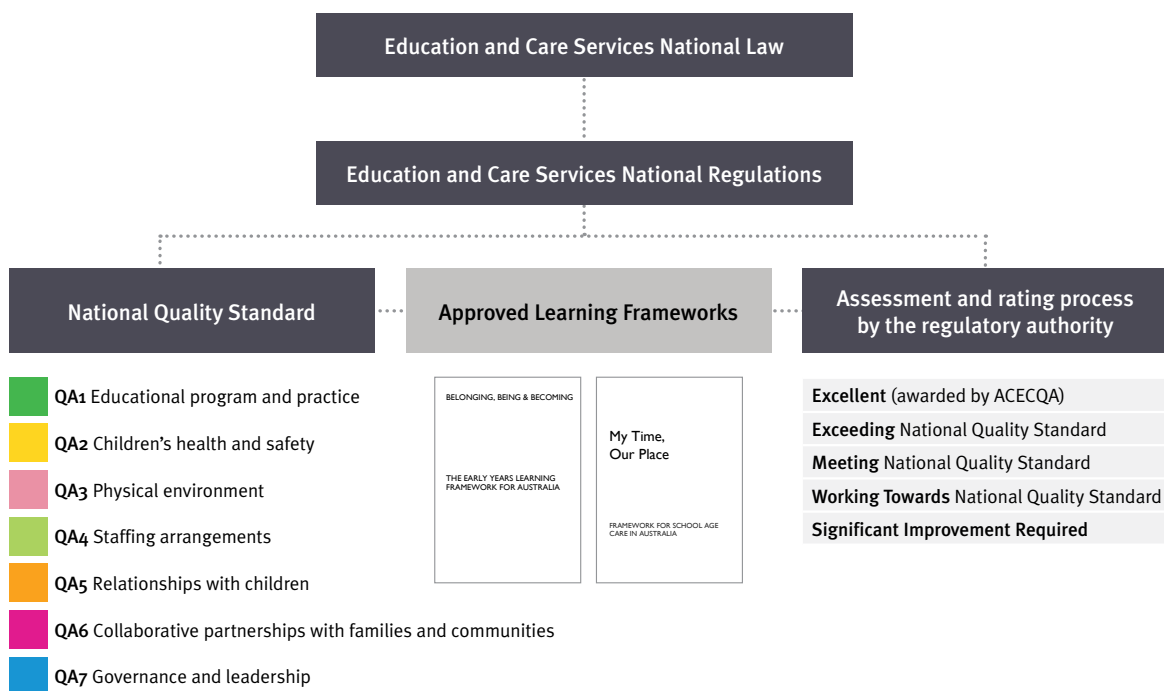
- a national assessment and ratings process.

The ACECQA guides and monitors the implementation and administration of the NQF to promote consistency across all states and territories.

A regulatory authority in each state and territory (see Appendix 2) is responsible for the approval, monitoring and quality assessment of services in their states and territories against the NQS.

The NQF applies to all approved early childhood education and care services operating in Australia, including family day care.

FIGURE 1. THE NATIONAL QUALITY FRAMEWORK



Source: ACECQA, Guide to the National Quality Framework, p,9; <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-07/Guide-to-the-NQF.pdf>

1.2 THE NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD

The National Quality Standard (NQS) is an integral part of the NQF and includes seven Quality Areas (see Table 1). Each Quality Area includes two or three standards, which represent high-level outcome statements.¹ The seven Quality Areas and accompanying standards form the benchmarks of the national assessment and rating process under the NQF.

Services are assessed and rated by their regulatory authority against the NQS, and then given a rating for each of the seven Quality Areas, as well as an overall rating based on these results. The quality ratings are published on the national register on the [ACECQA website](https://www.acecqa.gov.au). Steps in the NQS assessment and ratings process are detailed in Appendix 1.

TABLE 1. NQS QUALITY AREAS

QUALITY AREA	PURPOSE
Quality Area (QA) 1 – Educational program and practice	Educational program and practice of educators are child-centred, stimulating and maximising opportunities for enhancing and extending each child’s learning and development.
Quality Area (QA) 2 – Children’s health and safety	Children have the right to experience quality education and care in an environment that safeguards and promotes their health, safety and wellbeing.
Quality Area (QA) 3 – Physical environment	Physical environment is safe, suitable and provides a rich and diverse range of experiences that promote children’s learning and development.
Quality Area (QA) 4 – Staffing arrangements	Qualified and experienced educators, who develop warm, respectful relationships with children, create predictable environments and encourage children’s active engagement in the learning program.
Quality Area (QA) 5 – Relationships with children	Relationships with children are responsive, respectful and promote children’s sense of security and belonging.
Quality Area (QA) 6 – Collaborative partnerships with families and communities	Collaborative relationships with families are fundamental to achieving quality outcomes for children, and community partnerships based on active communication, consultation and collaboration are essential.
Quality Area (QA) 7 – Governance and leadership	Effective leadership and governance of the service contributes to quality environments for children’s learning and development. Effective leaders establish shared values for the service and set clear direction for the service’s continuous improvement.

Source: ACECQA, National Quality Standard, <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/national-quality-standard>





1 ACECQA, Guide to the National Quality Framework, p.11

1.3 QUALITY RATINGS

Family day care services are assessed against the NQS by the regulatory authority in the state or territory in which they operate. Each service is given a rating for each of the seven Quality Areas (see Table 1) and an overall

rating based on these results. Table 2 below outlines the five rating levels, ranging from 'Exceeding National Quality Standard' to 'Significant Improvement Required,' under the National Quality Standard and how they are determined.

TABLE 2. NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD RATING

NQS RATING	DESCRIPTION
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service promotes exceptional education and care, demonstrates sector leadership and is committed to continually improving. • Awarded by ACECQA. • Services rated Exceeding National Quality Standard in all Quality Areas may choose to apply for this rating
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service goes beyond the requirements of the National Quality Standard in at least four of the 7 Quality Areas, with at least two of these being quality areas 1, 5, 6, or 7.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service meets the National Quality Standard. • Service provides quality education and care in all 7 Quality Areas.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Services provides a safe education and care program. • There are one or more areas identified for improvement.
<p>Significant Improvement Required</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service does not meet one of the 7 Quality Areas or a section of the legislation and there is a significant risk to the safety, health and wellbeing of children. • The regulatory authority will take immediate action.

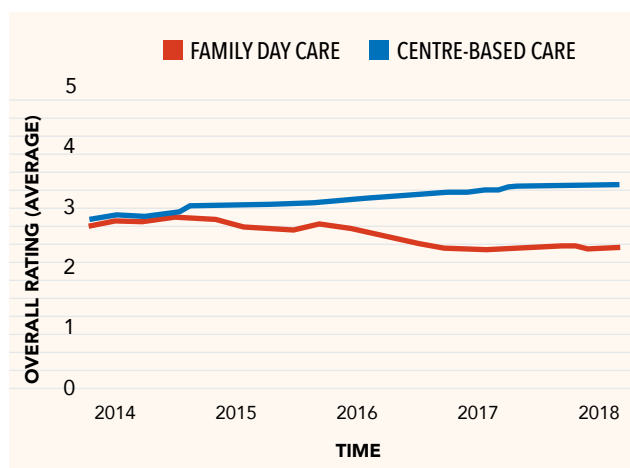
Source: ACECQA, Assessment and Ratings Process, <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/assessment/assessment-and-rating-process>

Services that have not yet been assessed are given a rating of 'Provisional—Not yet assessed under the National Quality Framework.' Like services that have been assessed, they are required to display this rating at their service. Services that receive 'Exceeding National Quality Standard' in all seven Quality Areas can apply for an 'Excellent' rating, which is awarded by ACECQA, and is valid for three years.

SECTOR TRENDS

Although subject to the same assessment and rating process, over time centre-based care services have tended to obtain better rankings than family day care services. Figure 2 shows that since the introduction of the NQF and the national assessment and rating process, the overall rating of family day care services has decreased while the overall rating of centre-based care services has increased slightly. One reason for this decrease appears to have been the large number of new family day care providers coming into the sector from 2014. Some of these newer entrants have since left the sector due to compliance enforcement action undertaken by the Commonwealth and state and territory regulatory authorities. However, as a general rule, newer entrants often start off with lower ratings. This report aims to help support family day care services to understand the experience of going through assessment and rating, and to make changes to improve their services and increase their overall rating.

FIGURE 2. OVERALL RATING OVER TIME



Source: ACECQA Data SPSS.

Looking at the performance of the family day care sector across each of the Quality Areas as at 30 June 2019 (see Figure 3 below), almost half (48%) of family day care services are rated as *Meeting NQS* or above. This proportion represents a small but significant improvement on 12 months ago, when it was 43%.

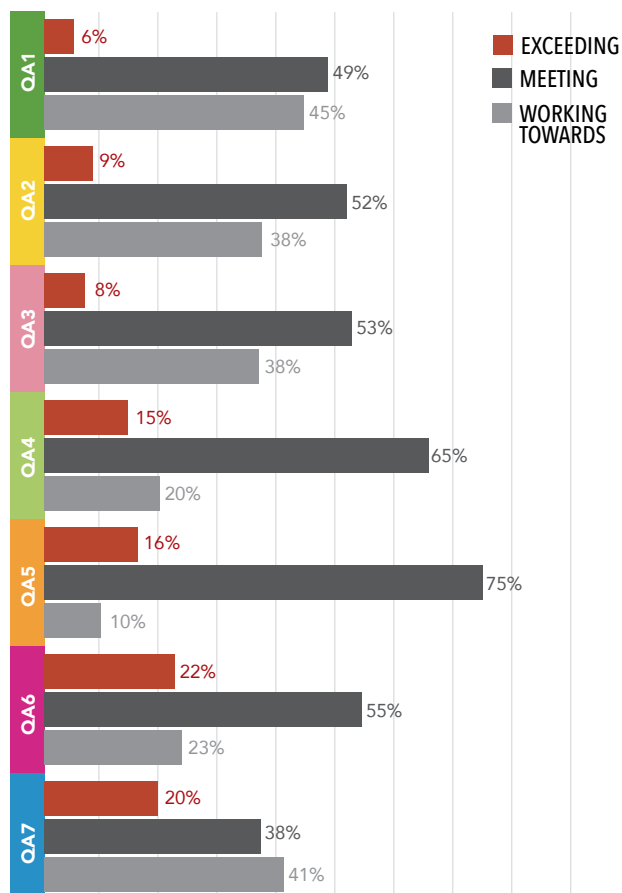
The Quality Areas where family day care performs best, based on the proportion of *Meeting NQS* or above, are:

- Relationships with Children (QA 5): 91%
- Staffing Arrangements (QA 4): 80%
- Collaborative Partnerships with Families and Communities (QA 6): 77%.

In contrast, the most challenging Quality Areas of the NQS for family day care services, based on the proportion rated as *Meeting NQS* or above are:

- Educational program and practice (QA 1): 55%
- Children's health and safety (QA 2): 61%
- Physical environment (QA 3): 61%
- Governance and Leadership (QA 7): 59%.

FIGURE 3. SERVICE QUALITY AREA RATINGS AS AT 30 JUNE 2019



Source: FDCA, Family Day Care Sector Profile Report, June 2019.

According to ACECQA NQS IT data as at 1 July 2019, the three most challenging elements² for the family day care sector are:

- Element 1.3.1 - Assessment and planning cycle (38% not meeting)
- Element 1.3.2 - Critical reflection (39% not meeting)
- Element 7.1.2 - Management systems (30% not meeting)

HOW SERVICES CAN DEMONSTRATE THE QUALITY AREAS

FDCA members who have been through the assessment and ratings process say that there it is important to consider the unique ways their family service meet each standard. They also acknowledge that there are also significant challenges to navigate.

This section outlines some considerations for services in relation to demonstrating each of the Quality Areas. FDCA also strongly encourages services to refer to the detailed guidance on each element of the NQS set out in the Guide to the NQF.

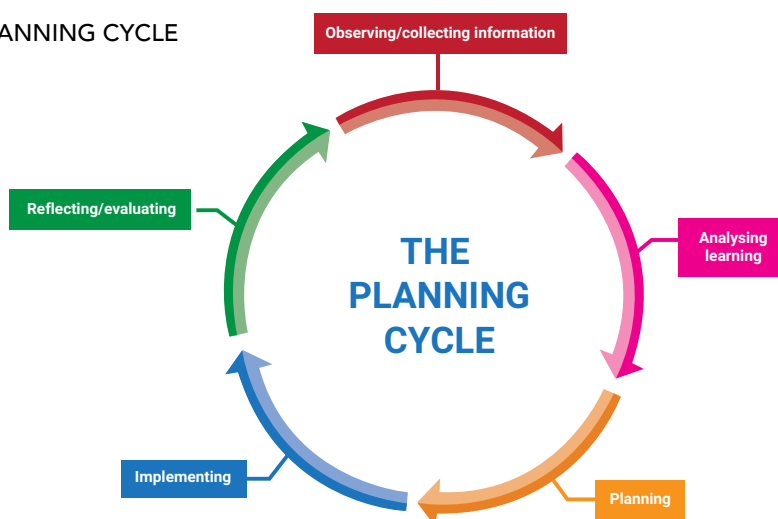
QUALITY AREA 1 – EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM AND PRACTICE

Family day care provides educators with the unique opportunity to develop and implement learning programs, based on the requirements of the approved learning frameworks identified in the NQF, that not only suit their own philosophy as an educator, but also respond to the needs and interests of individual children.

Nevertheless, performance of the sector in this Quality Area (see above) shows clear challenges in meeting the standard required. Services tell us that documenting reflective practice can be difficult and inexperienced educators struggle at times which can lead to inconsistent practice across the service. ACECQA data³ highlights the following aspects of QA 1 as particularly challenging for family day care compared to the national average:

- Approved learning frameworks (1.1.1)
- Assessment and planning cycle (1.3.1)
- Critical reflection (1.3.2)

FIGURE 4. THE PLANNING CYCLE



Source: ACECQA, Guide to the National Quality Framework, p.125, <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-07/Guide-to-the-NQF.pdf>

² This is determined by the elements which have the highest proportion of family day care services not meeting the requirements of the element.

³ ACECQA NQA ITS data dated 1 July 2019.

Services should consider how they might strengthen educators' understanding on how these three important elements link together, that is, how curriculum decision making based on the approved learning frameworks should feed into an ongoing assessment and planning cycle for each child, and the importance of regular periodic review or 'critical reflection' of the assessment and curriculum plan. Services should refer educators to the planning cycle outlined in ACECQA's Guide to the NQF and presented on page 9 in Figure 4.

One large regional family day care service dealt with the challenge of relying on inexperienced educators by running a programming night that was mandatory for all educators to attend, drawing on the expertise of the educational leader. The role of the educational leader is very important in improving quality in QA 1 as they:

- collaborate with educators and provide curriculum direction and guidance.
- support educators to effectively implement the cycle of planning to enhance programs and practices.
- ensure children's learning and development are guided by the learning outcomes of the approved learning frameworks.

Another large metropolitan family day care service suggests that each service can set its own goals each month to ensure reflective practice, develop templates based on the industry standards and then provide extensive professional development opportunities. Educators can then use and adjust their templates accordingly.

QUALITY AREA 2 – CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND SAFETY

Services tell us that there are some good opportunities for family day care to address some aspects of QA 2. For example, planning around sicknesses and infections can usually be well-managed as educators often have a smaller number of children to manage.

In contrast, services tell us that challenges associated with delivering on QA 2 include management of children with allergies (such as anaphylaxis) and keeping relevant staff up to date with child protection qualifications.

ACECQA data⁴ highlights the following elements of QA 2 as more challenging for family day care, compared to the national average:

- Supervision (2.2.1)
- Incident and emergency management (2.2.2)

These are areas in which services should be providing clear guidance to all educators. Services have the opportunity to take a strong lead in implementing service-wide and uniform policies, procedures and practices particularly in relation to incident and emergency management. There are a range of other

FDCA service members suggest a variety of strategies to consider in meeting QA 2 including:

- providing educators with recommendations, conducting risk assessments and asking them questions about specific elements to encourage self-reflection.
- visiting educators once a month to record what's happening and provide ideas to help implement changes.
- being ready and available to provide additional support to your educators if needed so that the health and safety of children is not compromised.
- having open lines of communication with parents of children at family day care services so they are aware of any health and safety issues or upgrades which might affect their children.

4 ACECQA NQA ITS data dated 1 July 2019.

opportunities to improve quality in QA 2 by going beyond the requirements for simply meeting a standard, such as increasing educator awareness of child protection responsibilities, laws and obligations.

QUALITY AREA 3 – PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

An often-cited strength of family day care is the familiar home-like environment in which it takes place. However, this can bring challenges for services and educators in meeting QA 3 which includes elements such as design of the facilities, fit for purpose spaces, upkeep of premises, inclusivity of the environment, and environmental responsibility. Some of the challenges shared by members associated with delivering on QA 3 include limited or no outdoor space available for children to use.

ACECQA data⁵ highlights the following element as the most challenging for family day care in meeting QA 3, compared to the national average:

- Environmentally responsible (3.2.3)

FDCA service members suggest a range of strategies to consider in delivering on QA 3 including:

- encouraging and enabling educators to conduct excursions to allow children to engage with their local community, particularly for those educators that may have limitations with outdoor space at their residence (e.g. local parks, community spaces, libraries and sustainability trails).
- recognising that every family home is different and has the ability to be adapted to an effective and safe family day care space.

Again, this may be an element that a service could provide significant guidance on and implement policies that promote children's understanding about their responsibility to care for the environment and the

development of life skills (such as growing and preparing food, waste reduction and recycling).⁶ They could also assist with the development of planning documents that support children's learning through investigation and exploration of the natural environment.⁷

QUALITY AREA 4 – STAFFING ARRANGEMENTS

Family day care educators often work alone and can therefore be at risk of being professionally isolated.

ACECQA data⁸ highlights the following elements as more challenging for family day care in meeting QA 4, compared to the national average:

- Organisation of educators (4.1.1)
- Professional standards (4.2.2)

FDCA service members suggest that:

- services should have procedures in place to assist families to access alternative care if the usual educator is unavailable due to illness, leave etc.
- educators should document relationships with children through reflective practice and utilise these reflections to inform their program and practice.
- educators and/or the service should have a system to monitor Working With Children Checks and relevant educational requirements to ensure qualifications remain up to date.

It is the role of coordinators, educational leaders and nominated supervisors to take on leadership roles relating to ensuring all educators registered with the service have high professional standards. The Guide to the NQF offers some clear guidance in this area, which may involve some relatively straightforward measures to implement, such as guiding professional conversations relating to utilising Early Childhood Australia's Code of Ethics to guide day-to-day practice of educators.⁹

5 ACECQA NQA ITS data dated 1 July 2019, shared with FDCA by ACECQA.

6 ACECQA, Guide to the NQF, p.199.

7 ACECQA, Guide to the NQF, p.199.

8 ACECQA NQA ITS data dated 1 July 2019.

9 ACECQA, Guide to the NQF, p.221.

Some educators may need specific support in terms of how to adhere to professional standards in their interactions and relationships with families, given the oftentimes blurred line between the personal and the professional in an educator's role.

QUALITY AREA 5 – RELATIONSHIPS WITH CHILDREN

A unique aspect of family day care emphasised by services around QA 5 related to the small group sizes, including:

- the strong bonds and personal relationships formed between children and their educators
- educators becoming a consistent and important person in the lives of the children due to regular contact.

FDCA service members suggest that:

- services embed critical reflection strategies into their daily practice.
- mentor educators and provide them with additional educational materials (e.g. templates in critical reflection).

ACECQA data¹⁰ shows family day care performs as well as, if not better, than the national average in all aspects of QA 5.

However, a challenge shared by services associated with delivering on QA 5 was that critical reflection about an educator's relationships with children could be hindered by the educator's educational qualifications, language skills and other abilities.

QUALITY AREA 6 – COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS WITH FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

Aspects of family day care emphasised by services as especially relevant in meeting QA 6 were that:

- the model enables strong collaboration and partnerships between services and their educators
- parents and educators have consistent (often daily) contact about the care provided for their child
- parents have an opportunity to see what an educator does on a one on one basis.

FDCA service members suggest that services could:

- establish alternative communication platforms such as a newsletter or Facebook page to post things that can promote the service and increase the local presence.
- have activities in the communities and/or join up with city activities to build or strengthen partnerships (e.g. participate in Family Day Care Week).

ACECQA data¹¹ highlights the following elements as more challenging for family day care in meeting QA 6, compared to the national average:

- Families are supported (6.1.3)
- Transitions (6.2.1)
- Access and participation (6.2.2)

In addition, feedback from services indicate specific challenges associated with delivering on QA 6 were that:

- parents can be time poor and generally just want to see their children cared for and to make sure they are happy and safe; and
- parents may not have an opportunity to see what an educator does on a one-on-one basis.

10 ACECQA NQA ITS data dated 1 July 2019.

11 ACECQA, NQA ITS data dated 1 July 2019.

12 ACECQA, Guide to the NQF, p.278.

13 ACECQA NQA ITS data dated 1 July 2019.

QUALITY AREA 7 – GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

QA 7 can sometimes be overlooked but is very important and scores in this quality area correlate strongly with overall ratings.

It is important services document how they communicate with educators, the degree of quality assurance you undertake and efforts to assist educators with continuous improvement. The Guide to the NQF states 'Effective evaluation and self-review enables a service to continuously improve their practice, policies and procedures. An ongoing cycle of self-assessment, planning and review, together with engagement with all stakeholders including families, creates a culture of continuous improvement at the service.'¹²

FDCA service members suggest:

- establishing clear guidelines around the relationship between the service and its educators (e.g. some services charge educators a weekly fee which in turn can enforce understanding of the business relationship).
- keeping up with changes to compliance (if a service can do this, they are likely to have strong governance and leadership).
- educate, train and guide educators on compliance.

ACECQA data¹³ highlights that aspects that appear less well done by family day care in meeting QA 7, compared to the national average, are:

- Management systems (7.1.2)
- Continuous improvement (7.2.1)
- Educational leadership (7.2.2)

Some services also say it can be difficult to meet QA 7 because it can be difficult for some services to maintain relationships with all their educators and implement coherent management systems if the number is large and they are geographically spread.

2 PRACTICAL TIPS AND RESOURCES

In this section we include general tips from FDCA service members for navigating the assessment and ratings process. We also provide a list of ACECQA resources and other websites which family day care services and educators find useful.

2.1 FOCUS ON THE ASSESSMENT AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN AND GROW, NOT AS A THREAT

The assessment and rating process is based on a model of continual improvement and is implemented by the various state and territory regulatory authorities. The model relies on family day care services and educators to continually reflect on their practice based on the NQS. This self-reflection should be documented so Authorised Officers can make note of this process through service practice and the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP).

“Shine through the successes and where you come from as well so you’re showing them the journey of quality improvement and don’t be scared to admit when you have done things wrong; it’s about the process of putting things right is what they’re looking for.” [FDCA Service Member]

Services should support all their educators by helping them prepare for any upcoming assessment and rating for the service. Established services have suggested it helps to:

- host workshops online or in person to discuss each of the Quality Areas
- utilise checklists to help educators prepare and ensure relevant documentation could be easily given to the Authorised Officer(s).

“We see it as a partnership; these are adults who are professionals, so we have tried to set up the way in which we support our educators to be a partnership and more of a sort of mentoring program so that yeah it just leads to better outcomes.” [FDCA Service Member]

Other hot tips, recommended by FDCA service members, are for:

- services and educators to constantly be constantly prepared for an assessment and rating visit e.g.

regularly update and review their QIPs and other necessary documentation required, conduct audit checks and ensure paperwork is in order

- preparatory work to be viewed as ongoing practice to help ensure educators and service staff are well versed on the NQS
- services to undertake mock assessment and rating visits for each educator to help them prepare and identify areas of improvement
- services to have a support person attend the educator’s home during the assessment and rating visit, so they can supervise the children whilst the primary educator is engaged with the Authorised Officer(s)
- services to provide their educators with enough time and support to provide additional data or evidence that cannot be answered while an Authorised Officer is visiting their home
- educators and service staff to confidently ‘sell’ their practice to the Authorised Officer(s) to highlight how the service’s QIP is actioned.

“We’re already starting to get ready for the assessment and rating because it should be next year, whether or not it will happen. It’s not a process that you can start a month before you’re due.” [FDCA Service Member]

2.2 MAKE USE OF EXISTING RESOURCES

ACECQA produces a range of valuable and free resources that are available on their website. FDCA recommends that service members make use of these resources to deepen their understanding of the NQS and support continuous improvement. These resources are listed on page 15.

For more information, other useful online resources can be found on the following websites:

- Family Day Care Australia: www.fdca.com.au
- Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority: www.acecqa.gov.au
- Australian Government, Department of Education: www.education.gov.au/child-care-australia
- Early Childhood Resource Hub: www.echr.edu.au/national-quality-standard
- Starting Blocks: www.startingblocks.gov.au
- Early Childhood Australia: www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au

ACECQA RESOURCES

GUIDE TO THE NQF

The Guide to the National Quality Framework (NQF) is designed to help education and care services, educators and Authorised Officers understand and apply the requirements of the NQF. Within the guidance for each Standard, it includes a set of reflective questions for each standard of each NQS Quality Area which are grouped as questions for all service types.

www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/about/guide

EDUCATIONAL LEADER RESOURCE

The Educational Leader Resource is a collection of practical advice, resources, case studies, research, reflections and references to support new, experienced or future educational leaders, as well as approved providers.

www.acecqa.gov.au/resources/educational-leadership

QIP TEMPLATE

The aim of a Quality Improvement Plan is to help services self-assess their performance in delivering quality education and care, and to plan future improvements. The QIP template can be used by providers to prepare their own QIP which must:

- include an assessment of the programs and practices at the service against the National Quality Standard and National Regulations

- identify areas for improvement
- include a statement about the service's philosophy.

www.acecqa.gov.au/assessment/quality-improvement-plans

DEVELOPING AND REVIEWING YOUR QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Developing and reviewing your QIP information sheet helps services with their ongoing self-assessment against the NQS which drives continuous improvements in practice, which therefore leads to better quality outcomes for children. It helps services understand other supporting tools, provides tips and legislative requirements.

www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-03/DevelopingandReviewingYourQualityImprovementPlan.pdf

SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL

Developed in response to sector feedback, the Self-assessment Tool can be used to support approved providers, service leaders and educators assess the quality of their education and care service's practices, policies and procedures, against the NQS, and the National Law and National Regulations.

www.acecqa.gov.au/assessment/quality-improvement-plans#SAT

INFORMATION SHEETS

Produced by ACECQA, the information sheets offer practical strategies to support educators and providers to think about quality practice and topics related to the seven Quality Areas of the NQS. Some of the information sheets are general while others focus on a particular Quality Area.

www.acecqa.gov.au/resources/supporting-materials/infosheet

3 THE ASSESSMENT AND RATING PROCESS AND VISIT

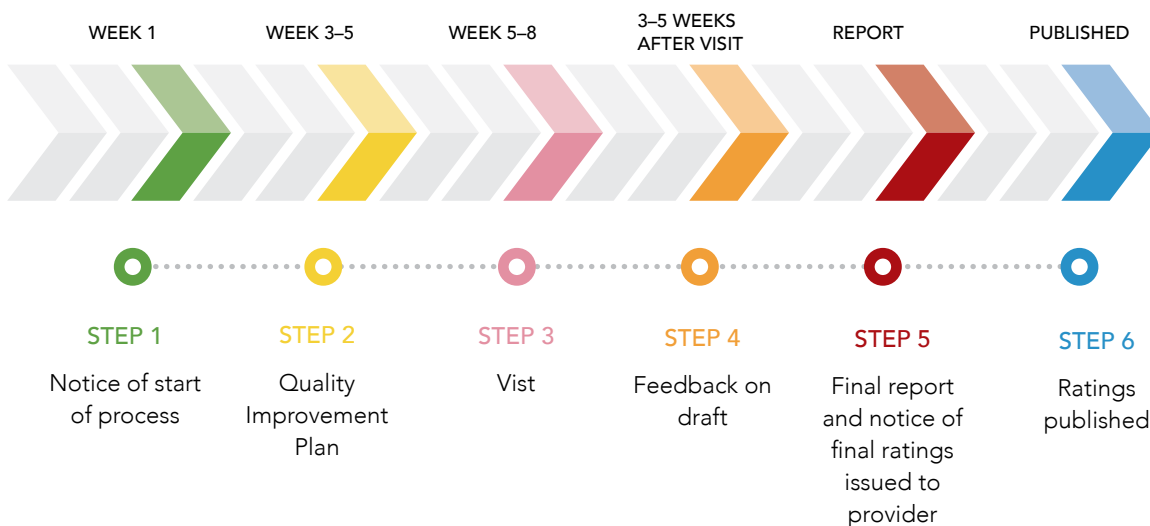
The assessment and rating process include six steps. In this section, we explore each step and include perspectives and suggestions from FDCA service members.

3.1 THE ASSESSMENT AND RATING PROCESS

THE SIX-STEP PROCESS

The assessment and ratings process involve six steps outlined in Figure 5 below. Each step is discussed in further below in the sections that follow and in Appendix 1. This content assumes that services are very familiar with the explanation of the assessment and ratings process as outlined in ACECQA's Guide to the National Quality Framework.

FIGURE 5. ASSESSMENT AND RATINGS PROCESS



Source: ARTD Consultants.

3.2 BEFORE THE ASSESSMENT AND RATING VISIT

STEP 1: NOTICE OF START OF PROCESS (WEEK 1)

This step involves the state or territory regulatory authority providing written notice to an approved provider informing them that the assessment and rating process has commenced.

HOW SERVICES WILL BE NOTIFIED?

FDCA members tell us that they were almost always notified by their relevant state or territory regulatory authority of their upcoming assessment and rating visit email or over the phone. In some cases, a service may receive a follow up phone call, to confirm they have been given notice, but this was not always the case.

HOW MUCH NOTICE CAN SERVICES EXPECT?

Current regulations require the regulatory authority to provide a service with a minimum of four weeks' notice as to when an assessment and rating visit could occur. However, this varies substantially. There may also be a variation in when regulatory authorities provide services with an exact date and time for the initial visit of the Authorised Officer(s).

If a service is given less than four weeks' notice, FDCA members suggest that services should seek to remind the regulatory authority of the current regulations and push for at least four weeks. When given notice, services are also encouraged to follow up and ask the regulatory authority if they can provide an exact date and time.

"...obviously we are always on [to our educators] to make sure [they] are ready because a department visit can happen anytime so we do give them notice when we get notice that we are all going to be [assessed and] the office goes through it as well and then once we get to know which educators are undergoing it they then know as soon as we know."

[FDCA Service Member]

WHEN SHOULD SERVICES ADVISE THEIR EDUCATORS?

While services get notice of an assessment and rating visit – there is usually very little notice given to the specific

educators who will be visited. This can vary from being advised the day of the visit to two weeks beforehand.

Members stress that services should inform their educators as soon as possible of the impending assessment. Such notice should include informing educators that their service has been selected for an assessment and rating visit and to put them on notice to be prepared.

FLEXIBILITY OF AUTHORISED OFFICERS

If the date or time given to the service is not convenient – either for the initial visit or any visits to educators – the service should check directly to see if the regulatory authority or Authorised Officer(s) can display any flexibility. While Authorised Officers are not required to allow flexibility, FDCA members suggest that it does occur on occasions and across different jurisdictions and for various reasons. The service should use the same contact method for requesting a change of date or time as the one used by the service or regulatory authority.

To support a change in time or date, services should:

- clearly explain the reasons why they are requesting a date and/or time change
- outline any extenuating circumstances which might impact their assessment and ultimately the ratings awarded to them
- ask the Authorised Officer(s) for a selection of alternative dates that might work well for them to conduct a visit
- propose a selection of alternative dates that they are open to a visit.

"The Authorised officer took into consideration her arrival time to the Coordination Unit due to my need to ensure my child with additional needs was dropped off to school as per his routine." [FDCA Service Member]

EXPECT A QIP REQUEST

Services should be aware that they are required to have a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) and will be asked to submit this once they have been selected for an assessment and rating visit. QIPs form a key part of the overall assessment. However, there may be variations in the amount of notice that services are given to submit

their QIP, so it pays to ensure your QIP is revisited regularly as part of your commitment to continuous improvement. While the format for the QIP is not mandated, it must:

- include an assessment of the programs and practices at the service against the National Quality Standard and National Regulations
- identify areas for improvement
- include a statement about the service's philosophy.

ADDITIONAL PREPARATION ACTIVITIES

Although they are not compulsory, more than half the FDCA services who completed the survey indicated that they had taken additional activities to prepare for their upcoming assessment and rating visit, which they might not otherwise have done.

To prepare, services should also consider:

- updating and reviewing their QIPs and other necessary documentation required
- ensure relevant documentary evidence has been collected and can easily be shared with the regulatory authority and/or Authorised Officer(s)
- ensure relevant certificates are valid (e.g. first aid qualifications, working with children checks)
- provide additional support to educators to help them fully prepare for the assessment
- conduct audit checks at a service or educator level (this could include reviewing all elements of the service that will be reviewed during the assessment and rating e.g. educational program and practice, physical environment or staffing arrangements)
- organise meetings with families of children at the service to notify them of the assessment visit, what is required and any disruptions that could potentially occur as a result.

“Educator audits were conducted to ensure that everything was up to date. Three Educator meetings were held to assist Educators prepare for the visit. Boost confidence and reinforce policy and procedures.” [FDCA Service Member]

STEP 2: QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN (WEEK 3–4)

This step involves the submission of the approved provider's QIP to the regulatory authority prior to their visit occurring. The provider may also have to provide additional information requested by the regulatory authority.

SUBMITTING YOUR QIP

To ensure the entire assessment and rating process is conducted within the planned schedule, each service should do its best to submit their QIP on or before the date notified to them by their regulatory authority.

Services may attempt to negotiate a change to their proposed submission date with their regulatory authority but are reminded that Authorised Officers are not obligated to change their date. FDCA members have reported significant differences in the amount of time services have taken to submit their QIP, so may request an explanation of the timeframe given to them if it is not feasible.

If a service is likely to experience a delay in submitting their QIP, they should seek to inform their regulatory authority for their own planning purposes as they are required to conduct multiple assessments. Any extenuating circumstances that explain why a service cannot submit their QIP on time should be put forward to the regulatory authority as soon as possible as it might later impact the ratings they are awarded.

USING THE ACECQA QIP TEMPLATE

Services can prepare, update and submit their QIP in a format they select but it must include the following three elements:

1. service philosophy
2. assessment of the quality of service practices against the NQS and the Regulation
3. identification of any areas that require improvement.

There is 'no requirement to address all 15 standards and 40 elements in their QIP'¹⁴ as the focus should be on areas of improvement.

Many services choose to use the free QIP template provided by ACECQA ([available online](#)) which has been developed in response to sector feedback 'to offer a planning format that supports approved providers to meet their obligations under the National Regulations.'¹⁵ Services are free to tailor the template to suit their own needs and requirements.

Many FDCA service members realised during or after their assessment that their QIP should have been more detailed when it was first submitted. While members acknowledge that each service is different, being aware of this, might encourage services to provide more (rather than less) information in their QIP, to help them through the assessment process.

USING THE ACECQA SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL

Many services also find it useful to use the ACECQA Self-assessment Tool as part of the process of reviewing and updating their QIP.

This Tool encourages services to reflect on and better understand their current practices, identifying strengths as well as areas for improvement.

The free Tool is available for download and use or adaptation on the ACECQA [website](#). Services are free to amend and adapt the Tool to suit their needs.

GETTING FEEDBACK ON YOUR QIP

An Authorised Officer is not required by law to provide feedback on a service's QIP prior to their visit occurring.

On some occasions, however, FDCA service members say that Authorised Officers have provided feedback. If a service wants to receive feedback, they should make this clearly known to their regulatory authority and/or nominated Authorised Officer(s), preferably in writing, and follow up with their Authorised Officer once they have submitted their QIP.

FDCA service members suggest that feedback delivered verbally rather than in a written format can still be very

useful to services. Benefits of receiving feedback for services have included:

- learning more about what an Authorised Officer assessed on the day of their visit
- better understanding additional evidence provided in relation to items stated on their QIP
- gaining a better understanding of the Authorised Officer's understanding of a service.

"At first it was very overwhelming because they had a whole page full of questions from our QIP, we needed to answer from our QIP. Like what we said we were doing, we had to provide evidence for all of that so that is where the memory stick came in. I think I actually gave them in total over 3,000 pieces of evidence on a memory stick." [FDCA Service Member]

14 ACECQA, <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/assessment/quality-improvement-plans>

15 ACECQA, Quality Improvement template, p.2

3.3 DURING THE ASSESSMENT AND RATING VISIT

STEP 3: VISIT (WEEK 5–8)

This step involves the regulatory authority visiting a service to conduct the assessment on-site.

NUMBER OF EDUCATORS SELECTED FROM SERVICE

The number of educators that are selected for a visit as part of the assessment and rating process varies across services and across jurisdictions. FDCA members who have been through the process twice indicate that the number of educators visited can also vary from assessment to assessment. On average, around 4 educators are visited per service.

There are several metrics that will be used by regulatory authorities to determine who is selected – services should not try and predict who will be selected but instead focus on ensuring all educators are ready if an assessment occurs at their place. However, FDCA members suggested the total number visited may depend on the:

- quality of the service's QIP submitted in advance
- size of the service and its number of educators
- number of Authorised Officers assigned to the assessment and rating visit
- experience of the Authorised Officers
- availability and capacity of educators to support Authorised Officers during the assessment and rating visit.

While the decision regarding the educator sample is made by the Authorised Officer(s), a service – once they have been selected for an assessment and rating visit – should consider which educators they would prefer an Authorised Officer to visit if they are asked to put forward suggestions for consideration. Potential criteria¹⁶ for consideration may include:

- experience of educator
- childcare and teaching qualifications of educator

- location of education and/or geographic distance away from other service educator(s)
- overall number of educators
- availability of educators during likely/ notified assessment and rating visit period.

CONVENIENCE OF AUTHORISED OFFICER'S ARRIVAL TIME

FDCA members suggested that for most services, their Authorised Officer(s) arrived at their service at a convenient time for their assessment and rating visit.

Potential factors¹⁷ when considering the most convenient time for an Authorised Officer to visit include:

- the ability of educator(s) and staff to provide 'as usual' services on the day of the planned visit without being negatively impacted
- ability of educator(s) to allocate enough time to the Authorised Officer(s) on the day of the visit
- after school pick up times
- availability of educators and staff on the day
- any major changes/ upgrades being implemented which might negatively impact the assessment
- willingness/ ability of Authorised Officer(s) to reschedule if time proposed is inconvenient.

NUMBER OF AUTHORISED OFFICERS VISITING SERVICE / COORDINATION UNIT AND TIME SPENT THERE

FDCA members suggest that a service selected for an assessment and rating visit will be visited by either one or two Authorised Officers and this is consistent across jurisdictions. Services should be aware that this is a decision taken by a regulatory authority and could be influenced by various factors¹⁸ including:

- staffing and resourcing requirements of the regulatory authority
- experience of the Authorised Officer(s) in conducting assessment and rating visits

16 FDCA Member Survey and FDCA Member Survey for Educators

17 FDCA Member Survey and FDCA Member Survey for Educators

18 FDCA Member Survey and FDCA Member Survey for Educators

- number of visits to the service required
- size of the service
- location of service
- quality of service's QIP submitted in advance
- current ratings of service (if applicable)
- time elapsed since service's previous assessment and rating visit (if applicable).

FDCA members also highlight that educators may be visited by one Authorised Officer or two. The amount of time they spend at the educator's home could also vary. Service members and their educators should attempt to ensure that when they visit, the Authorised Officer(s) should have adequate time to observe and assess all aspects of the service (particularly in relation to what is on a service's submitted QIP). Where possible, educators should try and arrange support so they can spend as much time as required with the Authorised Officer(s) during their visit.

"I think when they were visiting the educators and the educators were busy with the children some of the visits were an hour or two hours not very long to capture much information about what's happening within the service." [FDCA Service Member]

Members indicate that the amount of time Authorised Officer(s) spent at their services/ coordination units can also vary. Their feedback suggests that Authorised Officers can spend as little as three hours or as much as 12.5 hours visiting a service.

REQUESTING ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

FDCA service members who have been through the process stressed that services should be aware that Authorised Officers might request additional data or documents following their visit(s) to a service and their educators. Feedback from services suggests that Authorised Officers are generally able to clearly convey the purpose of collecting any additional data or documents they might require to the service which is also consistent across different jurisdictions.

Additional data or documents that services have been asked to submit include:

- internal documents and/or programs and policies (e.g. enrolment forms, medication records, educator registers, medical condition policy, sleep and rest policy etc.)
- certificates and registrations (e.g. Working with Children Checks, safety checks)
- photographic evidence of items/ activities in an educator's home
- evidence of educational programming, planning and evaluation, and reflective practice.

Services are encouraged to:

- ask whether they can submit additional data or documents to the Authorised Officer (and regulatory authority) following their visit based on the comments, inquiries and questions asked by the Authorised Officer during the visit. Requesting this in advance or during the Authorised Officer's visit can demonstrate additional aspects they may consider while determining the service's ratings.
- prepare as much as possible for the assessment and rating visit in advance to potentially help the Authorised Officer prepare for their visit.
- make relevant enquiries during the visit and determine what follow-up data or documents they might need to request.
- enquire as to the purpose of any additional data or documents requested by an Authorised Officer and/ or regulatory authority. This could potentially help them understand better how or why it is needed for the assessment and rating process and how it might contribute to the quality area and overall ratings given to the service. While the reasons why any additional data or documents are needed are likely to vary from service to service, it is important that services are aware that such requests can be made of them.

"One of the biggest things that we do here is encourage [our educators] because a lot of them get scared, because a lot of them are intimidated by [an assessment and rating process because] they have never had it or gone through it before."

[FDCA Service Member]

3.4 AFTER THE ASSESSMENT AND RATING VISIT

STEP 4: FEEDBACK ON DRAFT REPORT (3–5 WEEKS AFTER THE VISIT)

This step involves the regulatory authority providing the service with a draft assessment and rating report. The service then has a chance to review the report and give feedback on any factual inaccuracies in the report and provide evidence to support their feedback.

TIMING OF THE DRAFT REPORT

Services should be aware that during their visit, Authorised Officers are expected to inform them of when they will be provided with a draft report containing ratings for all quality areas and an overall rating. This is meant to occur approximately three to five weeks after their visit.

Members indicate that Authorised Officers do inform the service of the timing in most assessments, and this is consistent across jurisdictions. However, services are encouraged to be aware of the NQF guidelines and the timelines for being informed.

PROVIDING FEEDBACK ON A DRAFT REPORT

Once they receive their draft report, services have a period of about ten working days to provide feedback on their draft report, before it becomes the final report. Feedback from FDCA service members indicates that Authorised Officers are generally informing services of the period they have to provide feedback.

Services are not obligated to provide feedback on their draft report but are encouraged to do so unless they have been awarded the highest rating possible (Exceeding National Quality Standard) in all quality areas and overall. Feedback from FDCA members indicates that an almost equal number of services decide to provide feedback as those who don't.

Services should be aware that the feedback they provide, can be in relation to:

- any section of their draft report

- the content within it
- the draft ratings that have been given.

Services are encouraged to closely review their draft report and provide any additional feedback they consider relevant and that might help provide the Authorised Officer(s) with:

- additional or new information in order to make a revised determination
- data or information that might address/ correct any errors, inaccuracies or misassumptions
- answers or insights to any questions or issues raised directly by the Authorised Officer(s) during their visit
- evidence of service activities, systems, processes that are in place but not witnessed or understood by the Authorised Officer(s) during their visit.

STEP 5: FINAL REPORT AND NOTICE OF FINAL RATINGS ISSUED TO PROVIDER

This step involves the consideration of feedback before the final report is finalised and issued. The service may then decide to apply for a review of final ratings within the set review period. First Tier and Second Tier Reviews are available options (Second Tier Reviews can only occur after a provider's First Tier review has been completed) to services and they can also pay to receive a reassessment and re-rating.

PROVIDING FEEDBACK FOR THE FINAL REPORT

While able to provide feedback, services cannot determine the extent that the feedback they provide will have on any changes made by the Authorised Officer(s) to their draft report (which will then become the final report) or the ratings they have been given. However, services should be made aware if their rating has changed as a result of their provision of additional data or documents.

Just over one quarter of services indicated that feedback they had provided at an earlier stage of the assessment and rating process resulted in their overall rating being changed. Sometimes this was the result of errors in the draft report being corrected.

“We were given a rating of Meeting in the draft report, this was changed to Exceeding after additional supporting documentation was provided.”

[FDCA Service Member]

REQUESTING A REVIEW

FDCA members highlight that services should be aware that they can request a review. While they are under no obligation to do so, some services report that the review processes led to the Authorised Officer(s) updating their ratings.

Services who decide to request a First Tier Review should be aware that they must lodge it within 14 days of their receipt of their final report. There are no particular grounds for review specified in the National Law and Regulations but the matter must be serious enough to warrant a reconsideration of the service’s rating. Possible grounds for a review¹⁹ might include situations where a service:

- disagrees with a rating based on the evidence described in the final report
- has additional contextual information about the evidence described in the final report
- believes the Authorised Officer(s) did not take into account all of the relevant evidence at the time
- believes the service was not given adequate opportunity to demonstrate how it meets an element or standard.

The review must be conducted by the regulatory authority within 30 calendar days of them receiving the request, but this timeframe may be extended by up to additional 30 calendar days under specific circumstances.

Services should consider whether their concerns can be better handled through the regulatory authority’s complaints process or through seeking a reassessment of a service’s ratings.

Once they have received and reviewed their final report, a service can apply to their regulatory authority for a First Tier Review to query their ratings. If they are unhappy with the First Tier Review process they may also be eligible to apply for a second-tier review. If they are, a service can go to ACECQA and query their ratings in front of a panel.

¹⁹ ACECQA, Guide to the NQF, p.346

STEP 6: RATINGS PUBLISHED

This step involves the publication of a provider’s ratings on National Registers once the review period has finished. There is a register listing approved services and approved providers for each state and territory.

To view the ratings of other education and care services and providers, visit the [National registers](#) page on the ACECQA website.

APPENDIX 1. STEPS IN THE ASSESSMENT AND RATING PROCESS²⁰

The steps in the Assessment and Ratings process as explained by [ACECQA](#).

TIMELINE	STEP	PROCESS
Week 1	1. Notice of start of process	<p>Approved provider is notified the assessment and rating process has commenced and the four (4) week period in which the assessment and rating visit will occur. The notification may also include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the purpose of the assessment and rating process • a request to submit the service QIP and a date for when it should be submitted, typically within three to four weeks • that the Authorised Officer will advise of the actual assessment and rating visit date at least five working days in advance • guidance on how to source information on the assessment and rating process and developing/updating the QIP • a request for the approved provider or their key contact person (usually a nominated supervisor) to be available at specific times during the visit, for example at the beginning and the end. <p>At the same time, the Authorised Officer starts an analysis of the available information about the service, including reviewing the compliance and rating history.</p>
Week 3–4	2. Quality Improvement Plan (QIP)	<p>The approved provider submits the QIP to the regulatory authority. The regulatory authority notifies the approved provider that the QIP was received. The notification may also include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a reminder that the approved provider or their key contact person (usually a nominated supervisor) is to be available at specific times during the visit. • details of the visit, including the approximate time and minimum length for the visit. <p>For centre-based services the letter may advise that the assessment covers each room and all common areas (including outdoors).</p> <p><i>For family day care services, the letter may advise that there will be an initial visit to the service's principal office, a request for the service's family day care register, an assessment of a sample of educators and a final visit to the service's principal office.</i></p> <p>The Authorised Officer reviews the service's QIP and prepares for the assessment and rating visit.</p>
Week 5–8	3. Notice of visit	<p>For all service types, the Authorised Officer will confirm the date of the visit and approximate time of arrival at least five working days before the assessment and rating visit.</p> <p><i>For family day care services, the Authorised Officer will give notice of the educator sample to be visited either on the day of the visit or up to five days before the visit occurs.</i></p>

²⁰ Australian Children's Education and Quality Authority (2019). Guide to the National Quality Framework. [online] ACECQA, pg. 322 - 323. Available at: https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2018-11/Guide-to-the-NQF_0.pdf (Accessed on 11th June 2019)

TIMELINE	STEP	PROCESS
	Visit occurs	<p>The authorised officer conducts the assessment visit and records observations and evidence. The Authorised Officer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • focuses on observations of practice • visits a sample of family day care educators' residences or venues, for family day care services • engages in discussion with the approved provider or their key contact person, educators and staff members, and co-ordinators for family day care services • sights and considers documentation. <p>The Authorised Officer may give some general feedback at the time of the visit but will not give an indication of the service rating.</p> <p>The Authorised Officer also gives the approved provider, at the time of assessment or as soon as practicable afterwards, an indication of any minor adjustments that may be made at the service before the draft assessment and rating report is issued to the approved provider.</p> <p>Any minor adjustments made by the service are included on the Authorised Officer's notes and in the assessment and rating report.</p>
	After the visit	<p>The Authorised Officer analyses the information gathered through the assessment and rating process, including whether there was any evidence of inconsistent practice at the service. The Authorised Officer prepares the draft report with the proposed ratings. The Authorised Officer also:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • addresses any issues that need to be attended to immediately as a result of a risk to the safety, health or wellbeing of a child or children • clarifies any identified non-compliance • informs the service that a draft report with ratings for all quality areas and an overall rating will be provided approximately three to five weeks after the visit, and that the provider will have 10 working days to provide feedback.
Approx. 3–5 weeks after the visit date	4. Draft report	<p>The approved provider is issued the draft report and covering letter. The covering letter includes the contact details of the regulatory authority for providing feedback on any factual inaccuracies in the report and providing evidence to support their feedback. It also states that the draft report will become the final report if no feedback is received within ten (10) working days.</p>
	Consider feedback	<p>The regulatory authority considers feedback received from the approved provider.</p>
Approx. 8 weeks after the visit date	5. Final report	<p>The report is finalised, the final ratings are determined, and the notice of final ratings is issued to the approved provider. The regulatory authority informs the approved provider and provides information about the review process, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • requests for a review must be lodged within 14 days of the approved provider's receipt of the report • details of the person to whom a review application is made (name and address) • what can/cannot be reviewed • the review timeline. <p>The approved provider has 14 days to apply for a First Tier Review. The 14-day period commences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • from the day the rating notice is sent if provided electronically • from the fourth day after the rating notice was posted.

APPENDIX 2. STATE/ TERRITORY REGULATORY AUTHORITIES

ACT

REGULATORY AUTHORITY:

Australian Capital Territory

Children's Education and Care Assurance, Early Childhood Policy and Regulation, Education Directorate, ACT Government

ADDRESS:

GPO Box 158, CANBERRA ACT 2601

WEBSITE:

www.education.act.gov.au

EMAIL:

ceca@act.gov.au

PHONE:

(02) 6207 1114

FAX:

(02) 6207 1128

NSW

REGULATORY AUTHORITY:

New South Wales

Early Childhood Education Directorate, NSW Department of Education

ADDRESS:

Locked Bag 5107, PARRAMATTA NSW 2124

WEBSITE:

www.education.nsw.gov.au

EMAIL:

ececd@det.nsw.edu.au

PHONE:

1800 619 113 (toll free)

FAX:

(02) 8633 1810

NT

REGULATORY AUTHORITY:

Northern Territory

Quality Education and Care NT, Department of Education

ADDRESS:

GPO Box 4821, DARWIN NT 0801

WEBSITE:

www.education.nt.gov.au

EMAIL:

qualityecnt.det@nt.gov.au

PHONE:

(08) 8999 3561

QLD

REGULATORY AUTHORITY:

Queensland

Regulation, Assessment and Service Quality

Early Childhood and Community Engagement, Department of Education and Training

Early Childhood Education and Care

Department of Education and Training

ADDRESS:

PO Box 15033, CITY EAST QLD 4002

WEBSITE:

www.qed.qld.gov.au

EMAIL:

ecec@qed.qld.gov.au

PHONE:

Early Childhood information service: 13 QGOV (13 7468)

SA

REGULATORY AUTHORITY:

South Australia

Education Standards Board

ADDRESS:

GPO Box 1811, ADELAIDE SA 5001

WEBSITE:

www.esb.sa.gov.au

EMAIL:

ESB.EarlyChildhoodServices@sa.gov.au

PHONE:

1800 882 413 (toll free)

FAX:

(08) 8226 0077

TAS

REGULATORY AUTHORITY:

Tasmania

Department of Education and Care Unit

ADDRESS:

GPO Box 169, HOBART TAS 7001

WEBSITE:

www.educationandcare.tas.gov.au

EMAIL:

ecu.comment@education.tas.gov.au

PHONE:

1800 816 057 (toll free)

VIC

REGULATORY AUTHORITY:

Victoria

Department of Education and Training

ADDRESS:

GPO Box 4367, MELBOURNE VIC 3001

WEBSITE:

www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/regulation

EMAIL:

licensed.childrens.services@edumail.vic.gov.au

PHONE:

1300 307 415

WA

REGULATORY AUTHORITY:

Western Australia

Department of Communities, Education and Care
Regulatory Unit

ADDRESS:

Level 1, 111 Wellington Street, EAST PERTH WA 6004

WEBSITE:

[www.dlgc.wa.gov.au/LegislationCompliance/Pages/
Education-and-Care.aspx](http://www.dlgc.wa.gov.au/LegislationCompliance/Pages/Education-and-Care.aspx)

EMAIL:

ecru@communities.wa.gov.au

PHONE:

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