

Conversations with families about quality



At times, parents and carers may have questions about the quality rating of your service and what that means for the education and care of their child.

This guide aims to support educators, approved providers and other staff at your service explain the quality rating of your service and the assessment and rating process to families.

Starting a conversation about quality education and care

A conversation with families about your quality rating should not be daunting. If a family asks about your quality rating use it as an opportunity to celebrate the things you are doing well. Talk to families and make them part of your quality improvement journey.

This can even help you, for example with Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships.

Common questions

What are quality ratings anyway?

Families may not understand how quality ratings work or be aware of the National Quality Standard (NQS). You can help them understand by explaining:

- Quality ratings are not the same as 'minimum standards' - these are set by the National Law and Regulations.
- Quality is measured on a continuum starting with a very high benchmark.
- Ratings are meant to promote continuous improvement, the system is not designed to 'call-out' services who may need to improve in one or two areas.
- Ratings are 'point in time' based on the evidence available to the authorised officer during the assessment and rating process.
- 'Quality' in education and care services is not static. All services are on a journey of quality improvement whatever their rating.

Who determines quality and how?

Many people are not aware that early childhood education and care is regulated by the NSW Department of Education (the department). You can explain:

- The National Quality Framework sets out what 'quality' looks like in early childhood education and care. Within the framework is the National Quality Standard which sets out seven key areas that contribute to the overall quality of the service.
- The department assesses quality against the National Quality Standard (NQS).
- The department also monitors compliance with the National Law and Regulations, and this is different to assessment and rating.
- Authorised officers from the department are trained to assess services against the NQS based on evidence collected and visits/discussions with services.
- Authorised officers from the department look for evidence of how services are meeting the standard across those seven areas and the overall rating is based on how well services are doing in all seven areas.

How do I explain each different rating?

Below are some tips for how you can explain each rating and what it really means.

Significant Improvement Required

If your service is rated Significant Improvement Required (SIR) you may want to discuss with families how you are working with the department to improve your performance against the seven quality areas.

It's important that families know that when a service is rated SIR, the department is keeping in regular contact with the provider and supporting them to improve while closely monitoring their progress.

Working Towards National Quality Standard

Working Towards NQS means that there are one or more quality areas identified for improvement.

Working Towards NQS does not mean a service is not safe, it just means there is room for improvement.

It may be helpful to point out which of the seven quality areas you have been rated Working Towards NQS and explain how you are planning to improve.

You should also point out any areas where your service have been rated 'Meeting' or 'Exceeding' and celebrate those.

Meeting National Quality Standard

An overall rating of Meeting NQS means that you are meeting the standards in all seven quality areas.

The NQS sets a high benchmark, an overall rating of 'Meeting' is a great achievement.

You should also point out any areas where you have been rated 'Exceeding' and celebrate those.

Exceeding National Quality Standard

An overall rating of 'Exceeding' means your service is performing above and beyond the standard.

Take the opportunity to explain all the things you have done to achieve a rating of 'Exceeding' at your service.

Excellent

If you have achieved a rating of 'Excellent' well done! You can explain to your families that not only did you get rated 'Exceeding' in all seven quality areas by the department, you also underwent a separate assessment by ACECQA who have awarded you the highest rating possible.

Why have a standard if you can be rated as not meeting it and still operate a service?

The NQS does not set a minimum regulatory requirement that services must meet to be operational. Minimum standards are set by the National Law and Regulations and all services must comply with the Law and Regulations. The National Law and Regulations ensure that services are safe.

How often are services assessed and rated?

Families may want to know how regularly your service or educators are visited by the department. You can explain that the department takes a risk-based approach to scheduling assessment and rating so the more areas identified as needing improvement the more likely a service will be prioritised for assessment and rating.

You can also explain that compliance visits happen independently of assessment and rating visits, so even if you haven't been assessed for a while that doesn't mean the department has not visited.

Compliance visits can be used to monitor the way your service is operating, or instigated in response to an issue that comes to the department's attention, such as a serious incident or a complaint.

What if I have a provisional rating?

If you have not yet been assessed, you can explain the quality areas to families and tell them how you will plan to continually self-assess your service to ensure you are meeting the quality areas when you do get assessed. This will not only help build relationships with families, it will help you prepare for your assessment and rating.

Where can families and services find out more information?

For information for families about the NSW Quality Rating system:

education.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education/information-for-parents-and-carers/safety-and-quality

For more information for services about the quality rating system as well as information sheets:

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

startingblocks.gov.au

Unpacking the seven quality areas

Familiarising families with the seven quality areas and what they really mean will help them to understand your rating.



Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice

Educational programs and practices should be play-based, child-centred and enhance learning and development.

In early childhood, the educational program includes all aspects of a child's development including socialisation, life skills, hygiene and emotional regulation.

In school aged care, the educational program should complement a child's school education as well as provide opportunities for social and emotional learning.

Assessment of Quality Area 1 will look at how your service programs and practices meet the educational and developmental needs of all children through ongoing observation and assessment of all children and documentation of progress under the Early Years Learning Framework and My Time, Our Place: Framework for School Age Care in Australia.

Quality Area 2: Children's health and safety

Children's health and safety relates to both the physical and emotional wellbeing of children.

This includes supporting each child's growing competence, confidence and independence, and encouraging healthy lifestyles.

Assessment of Quality Area 2 will look at your service policies, procedures and practices that ensure the health and safety of children, including those related to physical safety, hygiene and food handling, injury, illness, excursions and emergencies.



Quality Area 3: Physical environment

Physical environment refers to the spaces where children learn, play and rest. These spaces should be safe and provide opportunities for different experiences that contribute to both learning and wellbeing.

Quality environments should reflect the interests and cultural background of the children who attend the service and include age appropriate opportunities for both individual and group play, sensory learning and physical activity.

Quality Area 4: Staffing arrangements

Staffing arrangements relate to the qualifications and experience of staff members. Services must meet minimum ratio and qualification requirements under the National Law and Regulations.

Assessment of Quality Area 4 will look at how your service utilises its staffing arrangements to support children's learning and development, and how professionalism of staff is promoted as an individual and as a team.



Quality Area 5: Relationships with children

Strong relationships between educators and children are vital for the wellbeing of children. These relationships should foster trust and respect and provide children with a sense of security and belonging.

This quality area also covers children's relationships and interactions with each other and how educators help them to develop positive relationships that contribute to all aspects of children's learning.

Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities

Positive relationships with families and the wider community are an important aspect of service quality.

Assessment of Quality Area 6 will look at how your service collaborates with and supports families. Consideration will be given to how your service supports children's access and inclusion in the program and their engagement in the local community.



Quality Area 7: Governance and leadership

Governance and leadership set the tone for the whole service. Strong leadership and good governance feed into all the other quality areas.

Assessment of Quality Area 7 will look at the relevance of your service philosophy, governance, leadership and the management systems, including policies and the roles and responsibilities that are in place. And how educators and staff are supported in their roles and professional development.