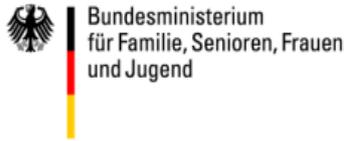


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Australian National ECEC reforms with a focus on the National Quality Framework and the National Quality Standard

Expert report for the German Youth Institute

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Gerry Mulhearn
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Wissenschaftliche Texte

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**Australian National ECEC reforms, with a focus
on the National Quality Framework and the
National Quality Standard**

Expert report for the German Youth Institute

The German Youth Institute (Deutsches Jugendinstitut e.V., DJI) is one of Germany's largest social science institutes focusing on research and development around the topics of children, youth and families, as well as the political and practical areas related to them.

The German Youth Institute is based in Munich with a branch office in Halle/Saale. Founded in 1963, its supporting organisation is a non-profit association whose members stem from the political and academic spheres, as well as from other associations and institutions dedicated to the support of children, youth and families. Its institutional budget is primarily funded by the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ), and, to a lesser degree, by the German federal states (Länder). Additional financial contributions are made by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) as part of the Ministry's project funding, and by various foundations, the European Commission and institutions for the promotion of research.

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Preface

As a key to children's positive developmental process, the preschool years are getting more and more attention by international policy, science, and practice. Empirical longitudinal studies show that Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) settings can contribute to a positive child development through high quality services.

To meet the quality requirements, policy is interested in the establishment of quality development and management systems. While science and policy in Germany are currently discussing the implementation of national quality standards in ECEC, other countries already have legally founded and implemented quality management systems on a national level. Against this background, these countries' experiences can offer an orientation and a source of information and provide important input to the German debate.

To derive benefit from existing experiences of other countries, the International Center Early Childhood Education and Care (ICEC) at the German Youth Institute has assigned expert reports about the quality management systems to Australia and Sweden. The authors are scientists in the field of ECEC and have relevant experiences in quality development and monitoring. The expert reports give insight into Sweden's and Australia's ECEC systems and describe how the two countries deal with the issue of quality development and management. The methods of quality measurement are reported extensively and evaluated in the context of the current political discourse.

Following expert report introduces the Australian system.

Munich, February 2015

International Centre Early Childhood, Education and Care (ICEC)

Vorwort

Die Jahre vor der Einschulung rücken als Schlüssel für einen positiven Entwicklungsverlauf von Kindern zunehmend in den Fokus der internationalen Politik, Fachwissenschaft und Praxis. Empirische Längsschnittstudien zeigen, dass Einrichtungen frühkindlicher Bildung, Betreuung und Erziehung (FBBE) durch eine qualitativ hochwertige Betreuung zu einer günstigen Entwicklung von Kindern beitragen können.

Um diesem Anspruch gerecht zu werden, ist die Politik daran interessiert, Systeme zur Qualitätsentwicklung und –sicherung einzusetzen. Während in Deutschland momentan die Einführung nationaler Qualitätsstandards in der FBBE von Fachwissenschaft und Politik diskutiert wird, haben andere Länder bereits Systeme der Qualitätssicherung auf nationaler Ebene gesetzlich verankert und implementiert. Vor diesem Hintergrund können die Erfahrungen dieser Länder als Orientierung und Informationsquelle dienen und wichtigen Input für die in Deutschland geführte Debatte liefern.

Um auf bestehende Erfahrungen aus anderen Ländern zurückgreifen zu können, wurden vom Internationalen Zentrum Frühkindliche Bildung, Betreuung und Erziehung (ICEC) am Deutschen Jugendinstitut Expertisen zu den Systemen der Qualitätssicherung in Australien und Schweden in Auftrag gegeben. Die Autorinnen sind Wissenschaftlerinnen aus dem FBBE-Bereich mit einschlägigen Erfahrungen in Qualitätsentwicklung und –monitoring. Die von ihnen verfassten Expertisen geben einen Einblick in die frühkindlichen Bildungs- und Betreuungssysteme beider Länder und beschreiben den unterschiedlichen Umgang mit der Frage nach Qualitätsentwicklung und –sicherung. Die Verfahren der Qualitätsmessungen werden umfassend beschrieben und im Kontext des aktuellen politischen Diskurses bewertet.

In folgender Expertise wird das australische Modell vorgestellt.

München, im Februar 2015

Internationales Zentrum Frühkindliche
Bildung, Betreuung und Erziehung (ICEC)

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Zusammenfassung der Expertise in deutscher Sprache

Nationale FBBE Reformen in Australien, mit Fokus auf dem nationalen Qualitätsleitrahmen und dem nationalen Qualitätsstandard¹

Australien² ist wie Deutschland föderal organisiert und steht durch eine politisch und administrativ geteilte Verantwortung im Bereich der frühkindlichen Bildung, Betreuung und Erziehung (FBBE) ähnlichen Herausforderungen in der Sicherung der Angebotsqualität gegenüber. In Australien wurde die FBBE im Zuge eines Regierungswechsels 2008 landesweit reformiert und ein *nationaler Qualitätsleitrahmen* (National Quality Framework – NQF) entwickelt. Mit dem Ziel diese Umgestaltung vorzustellen, gibt vorliegende Expertise einen Einblick in Entwicklung und Einführung von Qualitätssicherung und Monitoring in der australischen FBBE. Die Autorinnen, welche selbst an verschiedenen Stellen bei der Entwicklung des australischen Monitoringsystems beteiligt waren, nehmen folgende Fragen in den Fokus:

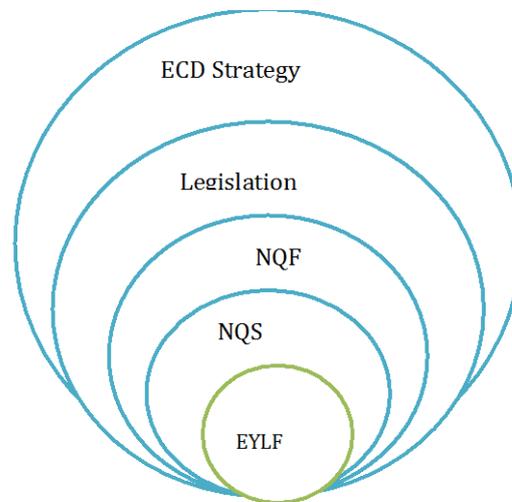
- Was sind die Hintergründe und Motive für die Entwicklung des NQF? Wie stellt sich die Ausgangslage dar?
- Wer sind die Akteure im Monitoringverfahren?
- Wie wird das nationale Monitoring organisiert und durchgeführt?
- Wie bewertet die Fachwissenschaft den NQF?
- Was sagen bisherige Ergebnisse über die Qualität des australischen FBBE-Systems aus?

Die 2008 in Kraft getretene *Reformagenda zur frühen Kindheit* (Early Childhood Reform Agenda) zielte darauf ab, das FBBE-System landesweit übersichtlicher zu gestalten und einheitlicher zu machen. Auch sollte die Reformagenda als integrativer Ansatz wirken, der Bildung, Betreuung, Gesundheit und familiäre Unterstützung ganzheitlich betrachtet.

1 Originaltitel: "Australian National ECEC reforms, with a focus on the National Quality Framework and the National Quality Standard" von Margaret Sims, Gerry Mulhearn, Sue Grieshaber, Jennifer Sumsion – zusammengefasst vom Internationalen Zentrum Frühkindliche Bildung, Betreuung und Erziehung (ICEC).

2 Australiens föderales System richtet sich auf sechs Staaten sowie zwei Territorien (zu Australien gehören noch weitere externe Territorien außerhalb der Landesgrenzen, die in vorliegendem Bericht jedoch aufgrund konstitutioneller Besonderheiten nicht berücksichtigt werden können). Die Staaten haben jeweils ihre eigene Verfassung, wohingegen die Territorien direkt der Bundesregierung unterliegen.

Die Komponenten der Reformagenda: Übersicht



ECD Strategy: National Early Childhood Development Strategy

Legislation: Gesetzliche Verankerung der ECD Strategy in allen Staaten/Territorien

NQF: National Quality Framework

NQS: National Quality Standard

EYLF: Early Years Learning Framework

Im Zuge dessen stellte die *föderale Regierung* (Council of Australian Governments – COAG) die *Nationale Strategie zur Frühkindlichen Entwicklung* (National Early Childhood Development Strategy – ECD Strategie) vor, die von der Idee getragen wird, dass alle Kinder einen optimalen Start ins Leben haben sollen, um für diese und die Nation eine bessere Zukunft zu sichern. Die ECD Strategie dient als Rahmen für verschiedene Bereiche der Reformagenda und ist per Gesetz in allen Staaten und Territorien Australiens eingeführt worden. Dieses Gesetz legt auch den NQF fest, welcher 2012 implementiert wurde.

Der nationale Qualitätsleitrahmen (NQF)

Der NQF wurde anhand internationaler Forschungserkenntnisse zu guter Praxis in FBBE entwickelt und ist so konzipiert, dass er trotz der Festlegung national übergreifender Qualitätsstandards, den Staaten/Territorien Raum lässt, die Inhalte unterschiedlich umzusetzen. Der NQF setzt sich aus dem *nationalen Qualitätsstandard* (National Quality Standard – NQS) sowie dem *frühkindlichen Bildungsplan* (Early Years Learning Framework – EYLF) zusammen, die beide in frühkindlichen Betreuung- und Bildungseinrichtungen³ verbindlich sind⁴. Darüber hinaus regelt der NQF die nationalen

3 Im australischen FBBE-System unterscheidet man vornehmlich zwischen Bildungseinrichtungen (Vorschule) und Betreuungseinrichtungen (Kindertagespflege, Hort, Kindergarten etc.).

Bewertungs- und Ratingprozesse von Qualität.

Die Vorbereitungen zur Einführung des NQF beginnen 2008 mit dem in Kraft treten der *Reformagenda zur frühen Kindheit*. Zur Entwicklung einer gesetzlichen Grundlage, eines *frühkindlichen Bildungsplans* (Early Years Learning Framework – EYLF), eines Evaluationsverfahren und Messinstrumenten wurde über vier Jahre ein Budget von 22.2 Millionen australische Dollar zur Verfügung gestellt. In den Prozess waren VertreterInnen aus allen Regierungen beteiligt, die sich in unterschiedlichen Konsortien und Gruppen zusammensetzten. Auch Fachkräfte, Träger und Familien wurden durch Umfragen eingebunden. Als erste Komponente des NQF wurde der EYLF fertiggestellt und 2009 veröffentlicht. Die Einrichtungen hatten fortan zwei Jahre Zeit, den EYLF zu implementieren und sich auf die Einführung des NQS vorzubereiten.

Der nationale Qualitätsstandard (NQS)

Der NQS dient als nationaler Qualitätsmaßstab für frühkindliche Bildungs- und Betreuungseinrichtungen, der sowohl Struktur- als auch Prozessqualität berücksichtigt. Im NQS sind sieben *Qualitätsbereiche* (Quality Areas) festgelegt, anhand derer die Einrichtungen geprüft werden. Diese beziehen sich auf das pädagogische Konzept, die Sicherheit und Gesundheit der Kinder, das räumliche Umfeld, die Personalstruktur, die Erzieher-Kind-Beziehungen, die Zusammenarbeit mit Familie und Kommunen und die Leitung. Die Einführung des NQF und der damit verbundenen Umsetzung der NQS wird von der *australischen Behörde für Bildungs- und Betreuungsqualität* (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority - ACECQA) begleitet und gesteuert.

Die australische Behörde für Bildungs- und Betreuungsqualität (ACECQA)

Die ACECQA ist eine unabhängige nationale Behörde, die 2012 eingerichtet wurde, um die Qualität der FBBE zu erhöhen und kontinuierlich Verbesserung zu bewirken. Hierzu agiert die ACECQA auf verschiedenen Ebenen – sie informiert, analysiert und konzipiert. Die ACECQA informiert über den NQF und hält relevante Erkenntnisse und Praxisanleitungen im Bereich der FBBE für Fachpublikum und Öffentlichkeit bereit. Sie analysiert die aggregierten Daten der geprüften Einrichtungen entlang des NQF und veröffentlicht die Ergebnisse in regelmäßigen Abständen. Auch konzipiert die ACECQA u. a. Verfahren für *Exzellenz-Ratings* (Excellent Rating) von Einrichtungen und legt auf nationaler Ebene Rahmenbedingungen für das Monitoring der FBBE fest.

Dennoch ist ein Trend zu verzeichnen, der andeutet, dass zunehmend beide Konzepte integrativ umgesetzt werden.

- 4 Einige wenige Einrichtungen sind davon jedoch ausgenommen. Diese werden im Anhang der Expertise erläutert.

Monitoringverfahren

Ausgehend von der auf nationaler Ebene festgelegten Rahmung zur Qualitätsmessung in der FBBE sind die einzelnen Staaten und Territorien für die Organisation des Monitorings verantwortlich. Den *staatlichen/territorialen Aufsichtsbehörden* (State and Territory Regulatory Authority) obliegen u. a. die Verwaltung des NQF und die Evaluation der Einrichtungen. Die Evaluierung und das Rating von FBBE Einrichtungen finden sowohl durch eine interne als auch durch eine externe Evaluation statt.

Staatlich geförderte Träger müssen für jede ihrer Einrichtungen einen *Plan zur Qualitätsverbesserung* (Quality Improvement Plan) entwickeln, der im ersten Schritt die interne Evaluation anhand des NQS vorsieht. Dabei werden Bereiche identifiziert, die einer Verbesserung bedürfen. Im *Plan zur Qualitätsverbesserung* werden diese festgehalten und der pädagogische Ansatz der Einrichtung vorgestellt. Der Plan muss von den Trägern regelmäßig aktualisiert werden und dient als Grundlage für das externe Evaluationsverfahren.

Die externe Evaluation wird durch *autorisierte PrüferInnen* (Authorised Officer) der jeweiligen *staatlichen/territorialen Aufsichtsbehörde* durchgeführt. Die Richtlinien für die Autorisierung von PrüferInnen von FBBE-Einrichtungen werden von der ACECQA festgelegt und in den einzelnen Staaten und Territorien ergänzt.

Die Evaluation ist ein dreigliedriger Prozess bestehend aus Beobachtung, Diskussion und der Begutachtung von Dokumentationen. Die abschließende Bewertung der Einrichtungen setzt sich aus den Werten zusammen, die sie in den einzelnen Qualitätsbereichen erzielt haben sowie einer Gesamtbewertung. Die Einrichtungen können in die folgenden Bewertungskategorien eingeteilt werden: 1. *übertrifft NQS (Exceeding NQS)*, 2. *erfüllt NQS (Meeting NQS)*, 3. *arbeitet auf Umsetzung des NQS hin (Working Towards NQS)*, 4. *signifikante Verbesserungen sind notwendig (Significant Improvement Required)*. In Abhängigkeit von der Gesamtbewertung wird der Rhythmus festgesetzt, in dem die Evaluationen stattfinden. Umso höher die Einrichtungen bewertet wurden, umso größer ist die Zeitspanne zwischen den externen Evaluationen. Einrichtungen mit der Bewertung *signifikante Verbesserungen sind notwendig* sind verpflichtet umgehend Änderungen vorzunehmen, da ansonsten Sanktionen wie z.B. Geldstrafen verhängt werden. Einrichtungen die die Qualitätsstandards *übertreffen* haben die Möglichkeit sich um eine *Exzellenz-Rating* bei der ACECQA zu bewerben. Ziel dieses Ratings ist es, Einrichtungen mit besonders hoher Qualität beispielhaft hervorzuheben, überragende Leistungen anzuerkennen und die Qualitätsdebatte weiter anzuregen und voranzutreiben.

Erfahrungswerte

Die regelmäßig veröffentlichten Berichte der ACECQA legen offen, wie die Qualität in der australischen FBBE derzeit zu bewerten ist. So *erfüllen* bzw. *übertreffen* im Frühjahr 2014 61% der geprüften Einrichtungen die Standards und 39% wurden eingestuft, auf die *Umsetzung der Standards hinzuarbeiten*. Aufgrund der noch jungen Geschichte des Qualitätsmonitorings in Australien gibt es bisher kaum evidenzbasierte Erfahrungswerte zu den Auswirkungen der Reform und der damit verbundenen Einführung des NQF. Ein umfassender Bericht zum NQF soll 2014 beendet werden. In der Expertise werden bereits vorhandene Studien beschrieben und aus deren Ergebnissen erste Rückschlüsse zur Rezeption und Auswirkung der Reform gezogen. So wird der EYLF vom pädagogischen Personal überwiegend positiv aufgenommen, gleichzeitig aber mehr Unterstützung bei dessen Umsetzung gefordert. Auch die Kosten eines qualitativ hochwertigen FBBE-Systems sind Gegenstand des fachwissenschaftlichen Diskurses. Inwiefern bzw. ob das Qualitätsmonitoring nachteilig auf die Betreuungskosten wirkt, bleibt bislang jedoch strittig. Die Autorinnen ziehen schließlich das Fazit, dass der FBBE-Ausbau von einer durchgehenden Unsicherheit geprägt ist, die besonders dem Regierungswechsel 2013 und der damit verbundenen politischen Neuorientierung geschuldet ist. Während die Erkenntnisse aus den bisherigen Studien andeuten, dass der NQF die pädagogische Praxis gestärkt hat, stellen besonders die Spannungen zwischen den Staaten/Territorien und der Bundesregierung aktuell eine Herausforderung für das australische Monitoringsystem dar. So werden die auf nationaler Ebene festgelegten Standards und Maßstäbe für das FBBE-System auf staatlich/territorialer Ebene unterschiedlich umgesetzt und erschweren schließlich eine einheitliche Bewertung und das Rating von Einrichtung.

Zu den Autorinnen:

Die Expertise „Nationale FBBE Reformen in Australien, mit Fokus auf dem nationalen Qualitätsleitrahmen und dem nationalen Qualitätsstandard“ wurde 2014 von Margaret Sims, Gerry Mulhearn, Sue Grieshaber und Jennifer Sumsion verfasst. Die Autorinnen sind Wissenschaftlerinnen aus dem FBBE-Bereich und an der University of New England, der Monash University und der Charles Sturt University in Australien tätig. Im Rahmen ihrer wissenschaftlichen Laufbahn waren sie neben vielen weiteren Projekten und Forschungen im FBBE-Bereich u. a. an der Entwicklung des EYLFs, einer großangelegten Evaluation von Einrichtungen entlang des NQFs und der Erhebung einer von der ACECQA geförderten Studie zur Umsetzung des EYLFs beteiligt.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In preparing the report the team was mindful of the information required as outlined in the brief. Whilst the final shape of the report is somewhat altered from this based on feedback from staff at the *International Center Early Childhood Education and Care (ICEC)*, the Executive Summary is organised around the required themes from the original brief.

Contextual information on the Australian ECEC system

Prior to 2008, funding for child care was administered by the national government, and preschool education for children in the year prior to starting primary school was largely funded and administered by the States and Territories. However, with the advent of a new Australian (Labour) Government in 2008 the largest and most urgent Early Childhood Reform Agenda ever to take place in Australia was established. The Reform Agenda consisted of several components collectively identified as the National Quality Strategy from which arises the National Quality Framework as outlined in Part 2 of this report. The National Quality Framework consists of:

- National Law
- Regulations enacted in each State and Territory jurisdiction
- The National Quality Standard embedded in the law, that outlines consistent expectations for programmes about quality
- A national quality rating and assessment process that rates services against the National Quality Standard and the Regulations.
- The Early Years Learning Framework which outlines principles, practices and outcomes for early childhood programmes.

The multiple complexities involved in attempting to establish a coherent and consistent national system have been identified in Part 1, including laws and regulations, types of services, attendance, characteristics of children attending services, funding arrangements, and costs. The National Quality Framework is still in its early stages, having been introduced from 1 January 2012 by the previous government (Labour). With the election of a new Australian Government (National-Liberal Coalition) in 2013, the Framework is under intense scrutiny. Early childhood policy in Australia (and elsewhere) appears to be particularly susceptible to changes in government ideology and the new reviews to this point have a stronger focus on child care as a tool to enhance parental employment and position child care (particularly that for children under 3) as separate from early education services.

Monitoring and quality assurance systems in the Australian ECEC system

Conceptualisation

It could be said that as the Early Years Learning Framework was the first component of the National Quality Framework to be made publicly avail-

able in 2009, prior to the legal framework in 2011, children's learning and development has been placed at the heart of the reforms. The Early Years Learning Framework heralded a new focus for quality improvement in the Australian early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector.

Assessment and Instruments

The legislative changes and governance arrangements were an important part of establishing a consistent, reliable and rigorous national ECEC system. Once these were in place, it was possible to implement and manage the National Quality Framework. This included establishing the national coordination body Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA), responsible for the monitoring and assessment of quality as defined under the National Quality Standard.

In Part 3 of the report the components of the assessment and rating system are discussed in detail. This includes an explanation of the approvals required to operate a service, the components of the quality improvement plan, the steps in the assessment and rating process, and the peer review process. The external assessment is conducted using a specially developed National Quality Standard Assessment and Rating Instrument and is a three tiered process involving observation, discussion, and sighting of documentation.

Uses of Data

Since the National Quality Framework took effect from 1 January 2012, there has been some time for research and consultation to be undertaken concerning the introduction and implementation of the National Quality Framework (the Early Years Learning Framework has been available since 2009). From available assessment data, 39% of services were rated as *Working towards* National Quality Standard; 35% as *Meeting* National Quality Standard and 26% as *Exceeding* National Quality Standard. There were eight services nationally that required *Significant Improvement* and 11 that were rated as *Excellent* (percentages are not available as they were less than one percent). Less remote services have been assessed compared to metropolitan and inner regional services (45%) at this point. Interestingly, 26% of Centre based and 26% of Family Day Care services were rated as *Exceeding* National Quality Standard. Quality Areas related to Staffing Arrangements, Relationships with children, and Partnerships with families and communities, were most likely to have been rated as *Exceeding* or *Meeting* National Quality Standard. Quality Areas related to educational programme and practice; Children's health and safety; Physical environment and quality; Leadership and service management were less likely to achieve this standard.

Reflections on Experiences so far

There have been a small number of independent studies and several commissioned by ACECQA itself that provide an indication of the impact of the system and the experiences of those operating within it. A commissioned study by Monash University aimed at establishing a baseline of existing practice related to the Early Years Learning Framework (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), 2011) and

found that early years educators, whilst positive towards the framework, felt they needed more support. One of the major providers commissioned an evaluation of their services' engagement with the National Quality Framework (Sumsion, Harrison, & Irvine, 2013), flagging the increased demands of the system and the support offered by the provider organisation. There are two independent studies funded by the Australian Research Council but these have only begun and there are no results as yet to report.

Relevant information can sometimes be gleaned from national data sets such as that produced through the implementation of the Australian Early Development Census. This provides a population measure of children's development when they start school. Another useful source of data is *Growing up in Australia: the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children*. Data from this study is made available to researchers and it is possible to track cohort changes in outcomes that reflect the different policy conditions in which young children were raised (for example, Sims & Phan, 2013).

Reviews by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority have addressed a range of issues. The review of the regulatory burden of the National Quality Framework (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2013h) reported that those who had gone through the process perceived it as less burdensome than those who had yet to complete. Costs incurred by services in preparing for, and going through the process were identified.

Government reviews also contribute to our understanding. The current Productivity Commission draft report recommends significant changes (Productivity Commission, 2014) in funding and staffing that many in the sector worry will significantly impact on quality. Two parliamentary Senate Inquiries have been undertaken, both released reports in July 2014. One recommended the continuation of universal access for 4 year old children and the other the continuation of the implementation of the National Quality Framework. The implementation plan for the National Quality Framework outlined in the National Partnership Agreement on the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care builds in two additional reviews, one in 2014 and a second in 2019. The purpose of the 2014 Review is to assess the extent to which the objectives and outcomes of the National Partnership Agreement on the National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care have been achieved. At the time (September 2014) there is no information about the proposed 2019 review.

Final Reflections and Tensions in a changing landscape

The Australian early childhood sector is extremely complex and strongly influenced by political agendas. There are many unresolved issues (as identified in work undertaken as part of an Australian Government Office of Learning and Teaching Fellowship - Lloyd, 2013) and action on these is dependent on the political agenda in play at the time, and the values held by those enacting the political agenda around the role of early childhood services (in particular perceptions of the child, the role of women, and the economic value of women's employment).

On May 1, 2014 the Australian Government released the Commission of Audit Report which addressed a range of recommended spending cuts across the entire government portfolio (<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-05-01/-commission-of-audit-report-released-by-federal-government/5423556>). This report recommended replacing the child care rebate and child care benefit with a single, simpler, means tested payment to families to help meet the costs of childcare. This and the Productivity Commission final report; and the 2014 Review of the National Partnership Agreement on the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care mean there are still at least two other uncertainties faced by the early childhood sector in Australia besides the Commission of Audit report recommendations.

Accreditation of teachers remains a tension. Nationally-consistent accreditation of initial teacher education programmes was announced in 2011 and began in 2012 (<http://www.aitsl.edu.au/initial-teacher-education/-national-approach-to-accreditation>). The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership has accredited all pre-service teacher education courses in Australia since late 2012. The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority also accredits pre-service teacher education programs that prepare teachers to work with young children in Long Day Care, kindergarten, preschool and school settings. Currently, accreditation needs to be sought from both Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership and Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority for early years teacher education programs because these agencies have different processes for accrediting programs. Institutions must prepare two submissions and wait for approval from both agencies and as at the end of 2013 there were no formalised shared processes and no consensus about the handling of applications (Lloyd, 2013). The way in which these agencies differ can be traced back to their origins: through acts of state or Federal Government or through less legislative means. Nevertheless, these tensions need to be resolved.

The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority requirements exceed those of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership in regard to the length and location of professional experience. Because Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership Programme Accreditation Standard 4.7 classifies the early years as non-traditional settings, graduates must be 'prepared' for both primary and early childhood settings. The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership requires content for primary preparation as well as field experience placements in different grades in primary schools.

There are several agencies that define the knowledge required for graduate teachers: state and territory curriculum authorities; Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership; Australian Qualifications Framework; the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood; and Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (Lloyd, 2013). Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority provides a list of suggested content in prescribed categories called specifications:

1. Psychology and child development
2. Education and curriculum studies
3. Early childhood pedagogies
4. Family and community contexts
5. History and philosophy of early childhood
6. Early childhood professional practice (including research).

Institutions have some decision making space in how the content is sequenced but there is little scope for flexibility outside the prescribed categories; and these categories differ from the way in which the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership Program Accreditation Standards are written (Lloyd, 2013).

In addition, the existence of different curriculum authorities suggests that content and curriculum methods and approaches will vary in the States and Territories. This tension between States and Territories and the Federal Government is endemic in the system. Whilst the overall direction and focus are designed nationally, each State interprets and acts individually. This tension plays out across a range of different elements of the overall agenda not just in teacher accreditation but, for example in compliance, assessment and rating of services.

The expansion of early childhood services in Australia is underpinned by ongoing uncertainty. Whilst the National Quality Framework has attempted to ensure that pedagogical practice is assured to be of high quality there are tensions between different States/Territories, different monitoring and accreditation agencies and various other stakeholders which serve to create a challenging system subject to rapid change. Those working in the sector often feel overwhelmed by the degree of change with which they are required to cope. Certainly significant gains have been achieved towards the nation's recognition of the importance of the early years for individuals and society and the provision of quality ECEC services but there are also concerns that some actions are retrograde steps. What is certain is that a close eye must be kept on progress and the implications of any new changes must be evaluated and new opportunities for research must be seized.

1 PART 1: POLICY AND SOCIAL CONTEXTS

1.1 Introduction

This report provides deeper insights into the development and implementation of monitoring and quality assurance practices in Australia. The National Quality Framework was recently implemented in Australia and like Germany, Australia is a federation of states and territories and therefore there is familiarity with the challenges of shared responsibility in an ECEC system. The report provides contextual information on the Australian ECEC system and explains the different steps involved in designing the quality practices. It reflects on initial experiences related to the implementation of the National Quality Framework, and considers strengths, possible weaknesses and challenges encountered in the process of implementation.

With the advent of a new Australian Government in 2008 the largest and most urgent Early Childhood Reform Agenda ever to take place in Australia was established⁵. The Reform Agenda consists of several components collectively identified as the National Quality Strategy from which arises the National Quality Framework and these are outlined in Part 2 of this report. Australia operates on a federal system with 6 States and 2 Territories all of which have authority to make their own laws. Thus reforms need to obtain the support of all States and Territories and be enacted co-operatively. The Early Childhood Reform Agenda was prompted by international evidence about the importance of the early years of life and their social, emotional and economic impacts for individuals and society as a whole. It was also stimulated by the fragmented arrangements for the separate provision and administration of child care and preschool education services, inequalities in access to high quality services for children's early education and support for parents' ability to re-enter the workforce. Prior to 2008, funding for child care was administered by the national government, and preschool education for children in the year prior to starting primary school was largely funded and administered by the States and Territories.

The Child Care Act (1972) [the Act], was passed in the national parliament in 1972 and it arguably was the first recognition of the importance of quality in early childhood service provision in Australia (Logan, Sumsion, & Press, 2013, pp. v-vi). However, the lack of parental involvement, and the positioning of care as the responsibility of each individual mother rather than a universal concern had a significant impact in shaping the inequitable provision evident in Australia today (Fenech, 2013). The evolution of a market-driven philosophy in the years following the Act also contributed to the quasi-market, mixed service provision (Irvine & Farrell, 2013) upon which to build the current early childhood reforms. History cannot be discounted in working towards the potentially far-reaching reforms of today.

5 The Australian political context from which the actions addressed in this report arise is outlined briefly in Appendix 1.

There were several key features of the multi-faceted reform, one of which was joint decision-making and commitment from all States and Territories as well as the Australian Government, through the Council of Australian Governments. Australia's history of federation since 1901 with its shared powers and responsibilities has made for a complex system of early childhood education and care, with diversity of service types and many administrative variations between jurisdictions. The Reform Agenda aimed to achieve consistency across the nation, across the diverse service types, and a more integrated approach between education, care, health, and family support. The principles underlying this new approach were (Council of Australian Governments, 2009):

- Children are important
- It takes a village to raise a child
- What happens in early childhood education and care affects later development
- Quality early childhood development and family support programmes can make a positive difference.

In order to ensure children had the best possible start to life the policy agenda focused on achieving the following outcomes (Council of Australian Governments, 2009, pp. 13-14)⁶:

Children are born and remain healthy.

Children's environments are nurturing, culturally appropriate and safe.

Children have the knowledge and skills for life and learning.

Children benefit from better social inclusion and reduced disadvantage, especially Indigenous children.

Children are engaged in and benefiting from educational opportunities.

The second group recognises the primary importance of the family. The strategy seeks outcomes for families related to parenting relationships and workforce participation that underpin the five earlier outcomes:

Families are confident and have the capabilities to support their children's development.

Quality early childhood development services that support the workforce participation choices of families.

Consistent with the Child Care Act (1972)[the Act], the **National Early Childhood Development Strategy** [the Strategy], agreed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) has provided an umbrella framework for a number of reform areas. With its vision of *All children have the best start in life to create a better future for themselves and the nation* it is a collective strategy to improve child outcomes and contribute to the social cohesion, health, well-being and productivity of Australia. The strategy has six priority areas (Council of Australian Governments, 2009):

6 Where we provide page numbers in the in-text citation this identifies the text as a direct quote. A larger quote is also identified by offset text of a different font.

- making mother, child and family health services stronger
- giving help to children at risk
- helping parents and communities understand the importance of early childhood development
- improving schools and early childhood centres that give services to young children and families
- giving help and training to workers in early childhood services so they can support families better
- collecting facts and figures about childhood services to help make better plans for the future.

Emanating from this Strategy is The **National Quality Framework** for Early Childhood Education and Care which includes (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2012):

- **National Law and Regulations** enacted in each State and Territory jurisdiction.
- The **National Quality Standard** embedded in the law, that outlines consistent expectations for programmes about quality.
- a national quality rating and assessment process that rates services against the National Quality Standard and the Regulations.
- The **Early Years Learning Framework** which outlines principles, practices and outcomes for early childhood programmes.

The following figure (Figure 1) shows the relationship between these components in the context of the Early Childhood Development Strategy. The **National Early Childhood Development Strategy** is the overarching framework which is enacted in each State and Territory by **legislation**. This legislation defines the **National Quality Framework**, one component of which is the **National Quality Standard**. The National Quality Standard requires the use of an approved learning framework, which at the present time is defined as the **Early Years Learning Framework**. In Outside School hours Care (for children of primary school age – 6 to 12 years) the approved learning framework is the Framework for School-Aged Care (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011).

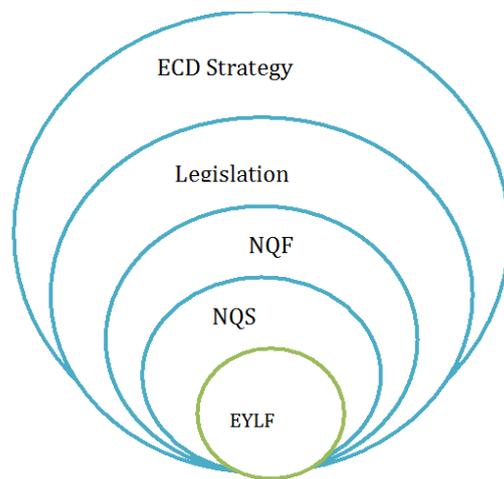


Figure 1: The relationship between national early childhood reform components

The National Quality Framework is still in its early stages, having been introduced from 1 January 2012⁷ by the previous government (Labour). With the election of a new Australian Government (National-Liberal Coalition) in 2013, it is under intense scrutiny for its impact on the early childhood field and on families. This paper outlines the context of this major aspect of the Reform Agenda, provides information about its components and processes, and comments on its progress to date. It also provides information about very recent initiatives introduced by the new Australian Government that are expected to bring about changes and make modifications that, consistent with the views of conservative governments elsewhere, may impact on lowering standards, especially those which it believes are economically unsustainable (Karvelas, 2011). It is anticipated that an early description of the Australian early childhood education context in this paper will assist the reader to understand the complexities of the establishment of the new quality improvement system. The remainder of this section provides background information on the existing system: types of services, attendance and funding. Part 2 discusses the administrative and legislative context including the National Quality Framework, the National Agreements that set the necessary legislation in place, and the management, implementation and components of the National Quality Framework. Part 3 covers service assessments and ratings. We present the different components of the assessment and rating system, the theoretical and empirical basis of the standards and the assessment and rating instrument. In Part 4 we identify some of the scholarly debates around the National Quality Framework. Early trends in the assessment and quality ratings are reported in Part 5 and Part 6 presents existing relevant evaluations and research.

7 There is a step-wise implementation of different provisions. Thus different dates reflect different implementation dates of different components of the Framework as identified in relevant section throughout the report.

1.2 Early Childhood Education and Care in an Environment of National Reform

The Early Childhood reforms are one area among a number of reforms established by the previous Australian Government (October 2007-September 2013) to address a productivity agenda and to redress social and economic disadvantage. The Reform Agenda has been characterized by new national partnerships and agreements. In addition to introducing the rationale for reform and the new financial and accountability arrangements, we explain in the following sections the terms that are used to define Australian ECEC services, and provide contextual information about these services including attendance, funding arrangements and costs.

The early childhood reforms were driven by a productivity agenda which aimed to strengthen the economy through investing in social and human capital and so increase national productivity over time. Human capital theorists have argued that investing in the early years brings greater returns than at any other phase of education (Heckman & Masterov, 2007). *Investing in the Early Years – A National Early Childhood Development Strategy* (Council of Australian Governments, 2009) cites Heckman and Masterov's (2004) claim that "Early disadvantage, if left untouched, leads to academic and social difficulties later in life" (p. 3). The advantages of providing early childhood programmes that strengthen outcomes for children include "improved cognitive and social development, better transitions to school and reduced need for remedial education...higher rates of school completion and employment and reduced criminal activity" (Council of Australian Governments, 2009, p. 9). Thus the productivity agenda in Australia is designed to improve outcomes for children in the short and long term by investing in early childhood education.

Underpinning this comprehensive early childhood Reform Agenda was a new approach to federal financial relations in the Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations (http://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/intergovernmental_agreements.aspx) which began on 1 January 2009. This agreement aims to enhance collaborative federalism by reducing previous complexity of the Commonwealth's financial relations with the States and the Territories, promoting greater flexibility in service delivery, and enhancing public accountability for achieving outcomes.

The **COAG Reform Council** (<http://www.coagreformcouncil.gov.au/-agenda>) established by COAG and operating as an independent body oversees the implementation of the early childhood reforms and is thus responsible for accountability. It is funded by all jurisdictions and reports on the progress of the National Reform Agenda. It is the vehicle that holds governments responsible for their commitments made to COAG.

The overall Reform Agenda is implemented through a series of national agreements and national partnerships: (http://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/intergovernmental_agreements.aspx).

National Agreements define the objectives, outcomes, outputs and per-

formance indicators, and clarify the roles and responsibilities in the delivery of services across a particular sector. **National Partnerships** describe the plans for delivery of specified outputs or projects to facilitate specific reforms and rewards for delivery of those outputs. While there are some National Partnerships about aspects of early childhood education and care initiatives, there is no National Agreement relating to the sector as a whole. The National Partnerships governing the early childhood field are discussed later in this paper.

All recent education reforms in Australia in both early childhood and schooling are informed by the **Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians** (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 2008). The Declaration provides a vision for Australian education and guides the implementation of changes aimed at a socially just nation:

As a nation, Australia values the central role of education in building a democratic, equitable and just society – a society that is prosperous, cohesive and culturally diverse, and that values Australia’s Indigenous cultures as a key part in the nation’s history, present and future (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 2008, p. 4).

Part of the aim is to close the gap in educational achievement between **Indigenous and non- Indigenous Australians** within a decade. Early childhood education has been ascribed a major role in achieving this outcome (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009b). Human capital perspectives, productivity and outcomes are prominent in the document *Investing in the Early Years – A National Early Childhood Development Strategy* (Council of Australian Governments, 2009), which is informed by the Melbourne Declaration.

The Platform articulated by the Australian Labor Party in 2007 (Australian Labor Party, 2007), prior to its election, argued that all Australian children deserved the best start in life and that quality early childhood education and care learning experiences contributed significantly to “...opportunities to realise the full benefits of citizenship” (point 7). This idea is emphasised in the COAG Strategy paper (Council of Australian Governments, 2009) which argued the cost effectiveness of investing in early childhood education and care:

National effort to improve child outcomes will in turn contribute to increased social inclusion, human capital and productivity in Australia. It will help ensure Australia is well placed to meet social and economic challenges in the future and remain internationally competitive (p. 4).

and

A positive start in life helps children develop to their fullest. The benefits accrue to the whole society, through enhanced human capital and capability, increased productivity, greater social inclusion and reduced public expenditure in health, welfare and crime related to disadvantage over the life course (p. 6).

The current Liberal-National Coalition government appears to have a different emphasis for early childhood education and care policy. A national inquiry currently being undertaken on behalf of the new Australian Government by the Productivity Commission (<http://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/-completed/childcare>) has as its first term of reference a focus on childcare as a contributor to workforce participation before identifying its contribution to child development and the transition to schooling. The introduction of the Coalition's Policy for better childcare and early learning begins with the point that:

The Coalition understands that many families are struggling to find high quality child care that is flexible and affordable enough to meet their needs. According to ABS data, nearly 120,000⁸ Australian parents say they can't access employment because they can't find suitable child care (p. 3).

And concludes with the statement that:

Australian families need a system that is not only affordable, but ensures people can work flexible hours whilst knowing that their children are receiving high quality child care (p. 3).

This suggests a change in focus: a move away from the concept of providing early childhood education and care services to benefit children and, through improved outcomes, the nation as a whole, to the provision of early childhood education and care services to support parental employment (and presumably for the benefit of the nation right now). The change from the more commonly used title of early childhood education and care to the new term of child care and early learning is perceived to reinforce a change in focus. Similar changes in government focus accompanied the election of conservative governments in the UK and New Zealand (Sumsion, Grieshaber, McArdle, & Shield, in press).

Despite this apparent shift in government thinking, the key underpinning principles still apply in the National Quality Standard (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2011c, p. 19):

- the rights and best interests of the child are paramount
- children are successful, competent and capable learners
- the principles of equity, inclusion and diversity underlie the National Law
- that Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are valued
- that the role of parents and families is respected and supported
- that best practice is expected in the provision of education and care services.

8 It is convention in Australia when presenting numbers in the thousands to indicate this with a comma: i.e. 10,000 is ten thousand.

1.2.1 Characteristics of Australian ECEC services

1.2.1.1 Types of ECEC services

Early childhood education and care services in Australia are mostly split into **child care** (Long Day Care, Family Day Care, School Age Care and some Occasional Care) and **preschool education** services. Often a single venue will only operate one kind of service, although there is an increasing trend in many places to operate both child care and preschool education together.

The following are descriptions of the definitions for types of early childhood services (Australian Government, 2013c):

- **Long Day Care:** a centre-based form of service in receipt of government subsidy (Child Care Benefit). It provides all day or part-time care for children aged birth to 6 who attend the centre on a regular basis. Care is generally provided in a building or part of a building that has been created or redeveloped specifically for use as a child care centre, and children are usually grouped together in rooms according to age. Centres, in the majority of cases, operate between 7.30 a.m. and 6.00 p.m. on normal working days for 48 weeks per year. These services may be operated by community groups or organisations, individual proprietors or corporate enterprises.
- **Family Day Care:** services in receipt of government subsidy (Child Care Benefit) where a carer provides flexible care typically in their own home for other people's children, as part of co-ordinated home-based care schemes who register, support and monitor the carers. Care is provided for children aged birth to 6 who are not yet attending school and also for school aged-children. Carers can provide care for the whole day, part of the day, overnight, and for irregular or casual care.
- **Outside School Hours Care:** services in receipt of government subsidy (Child Care Benefit) that provide care for primary school-aged children before and after school care and during school holidays. These services are usually provided from primary school premises but may be located in child care centres and community facilities. They may be operated by community groups or organisations, individual proprietors or corporate enterprises.
- **Occasional Care:** a centre-based child care service that provides care for children from birth to 6 who attend on an hourly or sessional basis for short periods or at irregular intervals. Mostly these children would not be regularly attending other early childhood services. These services, which are small in number, are generally not covered under the National Quality Framework but may be regulated in some State jurisdictions.
- **In Home Care:** care provided by an approved carer⁹ (under specific jurisdictional administration) in the child's own home. It is generally used if a

9 Carers are approved by an In Home Care service provider. The in-home service provider receives approval from the Australian government to operate. This approval means that par-

family cannot access another service and where there are very specific needs. For example this may include rural communities, family illness or disability, multiple births and non-standard hours of work. These services, which are small in number, are generally not covered under the National Quality Framework but may be regulated in some State jurisdictions.

- **Preschool:** a service that provides an early childhood education program delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher¹⁰, often but not always on a sessional basis in a dedicated service. It is offered for children for the year prior to starting primary school for up to 15 hours a week. Some children may be enrolled earlier because of special needs. This service can be held in stand-alone community settings, integrated with Long Day Care or Occasional Care, or within a school setting.

Integrated services of various kinds, especially bringing together early education and care, have always existed in Australia. They are now being developed across the early childhood sector in more strategic ways, to include multidisciplinary approaches to service provision. The aim of these is to provide families with ‘wrap-around’ services (Karp, 1996) provided by professionals from different disciplines e.g., early childhood education and care, health, counselling. This integrated approach is, itself, reflected in *Belonging Being & Becoming, the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* which states: “Holistic approaches to teaching and learning recognise the connectedness of mind, body and spirit ... [Educators] recognise the connections between children, families and communities and the importance of reciprocal relationships and partnerships for learning” (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009a, p. 14). Integrated services include the 38 Aboriginal Child and Family Centres (sometimes called Children and Family Centres) set up in targeted disadvantaged areas by the previous Australian Government under the National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development in 2009.

They also include a range of integrated services operating under the Communities for Children (C4C) umbrella (<http://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/programs-services/family-support-program/family-and-children-s-services>) aiming to provide early intervention and prevention programmes in areas identified as experiencing multiple disadvantages (Muir et al., 2009). Whilst these Communities for Children services offer a range of centre-based and outreach services, they do not come under the jurisdiction of the National Quality Framework at this current time. Partly this is because services operating in each C4C are developed locally to meet local needs and need not reflect usual early childhood services or types.

icipating families are eligible to claim the Child Care Benefit to contribute towards costs of care (<http://www.mychild.gov.au/sites/mychild/childcare-information/pages/approved>).

10 Generally this refers to a 4 year qualification in early childhood education but there are a range of other options deemed equivalent to this - See more at: <http://www.acecqa.gov.au/Early-childhood-teaching-qualifications>

1.2.1.2 Age requirements of child care and preschool programmes

The following table outlines the age range for preschool participation. Despite several discussions involving all jurisdictions towards a nationally agreed school starting age, and hence a common age for preschool participation, resolution has not been reached.

The most recent data about the number of early childhood services in Australia shows that there are 13,597 centre-based services (including Long Day Care, School Aged Care and preschool) and 761 Family Day Care services covered under the National Quality Framework, increasing by 11% from the beginning of 2013 to May 2014 (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2014). A more specific breakdown of centre-based service types corresponding to the above descriptions is not available. In addition to this data, the 2013 National Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Census identified 71 In Home Care and 117 Occasional Care services.

Table 1: Preschool Programmes across Australia (copied from Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2012, pp. 3-3)

State / Territory	Programme Name	Age of entry
NSW	Preschool	Generally aged 3 and
Victoria	Kindergarten	4 by 30 April
Queensland	Kindergarten and Pre-primary	4 by 30 June
Western Australia	Kindergarten and Pre-primary	4 by 30 June
South Australia	Preschool and Kindergarten	Entry after 4th birthday - From 2013, 4 by 30 April, and for Aboriginal children 3
Tasmania	Kindergarten	4 by 1 January
Australian Capital Territory	Preschool	4 by 30 April
Northern Territory	Preschool	4 by 30 June or 3 for Indigenous

1.2.1.3 Child care and preschool management

Child care and preschool services are managed in a variety of different ways. The Steering Committee Report (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2012) identified the proportion of these different management approaches in 2012-13 (see Table 2). The various types of child care services and preschools in this table include:

- Community managed services are those managed by a Management Committee, often consisting of parents/community members with the service manager as an ex-officio member. In the past, (1970s and 1980s) govern-

ment child care funding was limited to community-based centres; privately owned or corporate services were not eligible for government grants. Since that time there has been a growth in private and corporate services.

- Private services are registered businesses run by an identified Manager. These are often small, one-centre businesses. Also included in this category are corporate services. These are large, multi-centre organisations which are, in some cases, listed on the share market. Corporate services gained international attention with the growth of the child care provider ABC Learning in the 1990s (Rush & Downey, 2006). By 2004-5 ABC Learning declared a profit of over \$50 million; in 2006 its shares were trading at \$8.60, and it was claimed to be the biggest child care organisation in the world. Its spectacular collapse in 2008, and the lessons learned from this, are documented in a series of Youtube lectures from Certified Practising Accountants (CPA) Australia (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YYF6JW9vJKo> and also Brennan, 2007; Sumsion, 2012)
- School-based services. Some child care services and preschools are attached to private (non-government) schools. These act as 'feeder' services to the school. Preschools in particular in these situations often require children to wear the school uniform and follow school routines. This is particularly likely in Tasmania and Western Australia (Early Childhood Australia, 2011).
- Government child care and preschool services tend to be those managed by local or State and Territory governments.

Table 2: Proportion of State and Territory licensed and/or registered children's services¹¹ in 2012 - 13 by management type¹² (copied from Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2014, Table 3.2)

Type	NSW	Vic ¹³	Qld	WA	SA ¹⁴	Tas ¹⁵	ACT	NT ¹⁶
Child Care								
Community managed	28.4	29.2	47.5	33.6	Na	58.1	71.7	62.7
Private	54.7	46.8	45.5	61.3	Na	21.9	22.5	21.2
Non-gov schools	2.0	3.6	4.1	-	Na	3.8	5.0	15.3
Gov managed	8.5	20.4	2.9	5.1	Na	16.2	0.8	0.8
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Preschool								
Community managed	81.2	71.1	91.5	2.5	4.3	Na	-	Na
Private	6.2	0.7	2.7	-	Na	Na	-	Na
Non-gov schools	2.3	6.0	4.4	27.0	Na	27.3	18.1	3.1
Gov managed	10.3	22.3	7.7	70.5	95.7	72.7	81.9	96.9
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Hours of operation are also reported in the workforce survey (see Table 3). Most services reported consistent operating hours between Monday and Friday. In Home services¹⁷ had the most variable hours: some reported multiple opening and closing hours throughout the day. For example some services operated two sessions in a day on some days of the week, a model that was rarely (less than 5%) offered in any other service type. In Home Care was the only service type to offer weekend care in any significant amount: all In Home Care services operated 7 days a week and were open for about 11 hours on Saturdays and Sundays (Social Research Centre, 2011, p. 4.1). The national average in 2013 for children attending Long Day Care was 27.6 hours a week and Family Day Care 25.3 hours a week (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2014, pp. 3-28).

11 Whilst in the text of this paper we refer to these services as child care and preschool services, in this table we quote the title as it is published in the original source.

12 Management type refers to the legal status and does not relate to the profit or not-for-profit status of the organization.

13 All Victorian government preschools are managed by local government.

14 The majority of government managed child care services in SA are small occasional care programmes attached to government preschools.

15 Preschools in Tasmania include funded non-government preschools.

16 Government preschool services in NT are provided by the Department of Education and Training, but a range of management functions are devolved to school councils and parent management committees.

17 In Australia the title of these services is In Home services. These services offer In Home Care.

A number of services combine Long Day Care and preschool for children in the year prior to starting school. This has been most common in NSW where the employment of university-qualified early childhood education teachers in services licensed for 30 or more children was required under the 2004 state regulations (<http://www.legislation.nsw.gov.au/xref/inforce-/?xref=Type%3Dsubordleg%20AND%20Year%3D2004%20AND%20No%3D260&nohits=y>), whereas in Victoria and South Australia it has been more common for children to be taken from Long Day Care to off-site preschool education services. Tasmania in 2011 had the highest proportion of 4 year trained early childhood education teachers delivering preschool programmes (86.5%). Those delivering preschool education in Long Day Care were less likely to have 4 year qualifications.

Table 3: Hours of operation by service type (Social Research Centre, 2011, p. Table 4.1.1)

Long Day Care	Family Day Care	In Home Care	Occasional Care	School Age Care	Vacation Care	
	Opening	Hours	Per	Week		
Median	55:00	NA	66:00	41:00	23:45	53:15
25th percentile	52:30	NA	60:00	40:00	15:50	50:00
75th percentile	57:30	NA	91:00	45:00	26:15	55:00
Total Services	5,781	NA	53	85	3,147	2,156

1.2.2 Attendance at child care and preschool services

Nationally in 2012-13, 43.8% of children aged between birth and 5 years attended government approved child care services: this includes 52.7% of all children aged 2, 59.7% of all children aged 3 and 51.1% of all children aged 4 years (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2014). Patterns in attendance at the various child care service types is shown in Table 4. Over half the total children in care attend Long Day Care and this number increased over the 6 year period illustrated in table 5 below. This data can be further broken down into age groupings across the various service types (see Table 5 below). Children aged 3 have the greatest use of child care services.

Nationally in 2010-11 over two thirds of children (69.9%) attended government approved preschool in the year immediately before they start full-time schooling (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2012). By 2012 this had increased to 86.3% (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2014). Participation in preschool is not compulsory but the provision of universal access to pre-

school is one of the commitments of the National Early Childhood Reform Agenda¹⁸.

Table 4: Number of children attending the various service types in the reference week (Social Research Centre, 2011, p. Table 4.2.1)

Service Type	2004		2006		2010	
	No of children	%	No of children	%	No of children	%
Long Day Care	383,020	50.9	420,110	52.4	543,539	54.9
Family Day Care	89,300	11.9	84,350	10.5	93,738	9.5
In Home Care	3,240	0.4	3,200	0.4	3,513	0.4
Occasional Care	7,359	1.0	6,767	0.8	6,401	0.6
School Age Care	160,790	21.4	173,770	21.7	211,514	21.4
Vacation Care	101,710	13.5	107,280	13.4	130,747	13.2
Other ¹⁹	7,341	1.0	5,583	0.7	NA	NA
TOTAL	752,760	100	801,060	100	989,452	100

Table 5: Number of children attending per week by age and service type (Social Research Centre, 2011, p. Table 4.2.2)

	Long Day Care	Family Day Care	In Home Care	Occasional Care	School Age Care	Vacation Care	TOTAL
Ages 0-2 Years							
%	95.6	99.6	95.7	100	0.4	0.7	
No of children	231,812	41,625	1,176	3,256	350	324	278,542
Ages 3-5 Years							
%	99.1	99.2	95.7	100	91.6	90.4	

18 In some States/Territories the universal access funding is being directed to both Long Day Care and preschool programmes, whereas in others it is only being directed to preschools. The key intention of the Reform Agenda is access of 4 year old children to high quality early childhood programmes delivered by a 4-year university trained early childhood teacher irrespective of the setting in which that programme is delivered (Early Childhood Australia, 2011).

19 In 2004 other service types included Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services. In 2006 added to these were mobile and toy library services, and Aboriginal playgroups and enrichment programmes. Data was not collected in this category in 2010 as these services were out of scope.

No of children	299,572	34,917	1,120	3,141	34,595	18,770	392,116
Ages 6-9 Years							
%	19.6	94.7	95.4	4.2	98.4	97.2	
No of children	10,547	12,079	739	4	134,290	83,082	240,740

Identifying attendance of minority groups is an important indicator of equity of access. Indigenous children are more likely to attend Occasional Care services and about a third of Indigenous children attend a service where there is at least one Indigenous staff member. Nearly two thirds of services report having at least one child some with form of disadvantage including children with challenges in communication (1.7%), interpersonal interactions and relationships (1.7%) or learning (1.5%). The highest proportion of children with disabilities was in In Home Care (7.1%) (Social Research Centre, 2011, p. 4.2). Overall, children from disadvantaged groups were less likely to attend child care services than their presence in the population suggests (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2014). Attendance of children from other disadvantaged groups is as follows:

- Children whose home language is other than English - 17.3% attendance compared to a population presence of 20.0%
- Indigenous children – 2.6% compared to 4.8%
- Children with disability - 2.6% compared to 6.6%
- Children from low income families - 23.9% compared to 26.6%
- Children from regional areas - 28% compared to 33%
- Children from remote areas - 0.9% compared to 3%.

The figures demonstrate that children from remote areas (3.6% compared to 3%) and Indigenous children (5.4% compared to 4.7%) are attending preschool at rates higher than their representation in the community generally, however this varies across jurisdictions.

1.2.3 Funding arrangements and costs

The total recurrent expenditure for early childhood education and care services in 2012-13 at \$6.8 billion was equivalent to 0.3 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in that year, an increase of 10.5% from the previous year (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2014, p. 3.8). Of this, approximately 80% was expended from Australian Government funds with States and Territories contributing the remaining 20% (\$1.4 billion) mostly on preschool education. The combined recurrent expenditure amounted to \$1752 per child in 2012-13, an increase of \$362 since 2008-09 (p. 3.63).

Funding varies across service types. In the child care sector the Australian Government offers a fee subsidy (Child Care Benefit²⁰) and, an out-of-pocket subsidy (Child Care Tax Rebate²¹) both directed to families. It also finances funding to State and Territory Governments to support the achievement of universal access to early childhood education (preschool) in the year prior to starting primary school, and provides operational and capital funding to some services.

In contrast, preschool is administered through a range of funding and delivery models within each State and Territory. State and Territory governments are all responsible for monitoring and resourcing these services, planning an appropriate mix of services, providing information to parents about operating standards and availability of services as well as training and development for services/staff. Some State and Territory governments also choose to contribute financially to some child care services in addition to preschool services. These differences have arisen because of diverse histories and evolution of responsibilities.

The median weekly cost to families for government approved child care in 2012-13 varied across jurisdictions and service types, ranging from a median of \$367 per week for full-time care (50 hours) in metropolitan and inner regional areas to \$334 in outer regional areas. Preschool costs to families ranged from \$2.27 per hour in metropolitan and inner regional to \$1.86 per hour in outer regional areas. The costs for child care before government subsidy is applied amounts to 51.5% of average disposable household income²² and after subsidy 14.4% average disposable household income with lower income families being disproportionately worse off. A range of government fact sheets provide current information for parents on issues relating to cost, the Child Care Benefit, Child Care Rebate and Child Care fee assistance (see Appendix 2).

20 Rates are reviewed annually. In 2014 the current approved care rate for a non-school aged child is \$4.10 per hour, or \$205.00 per week but this is subject to an income test. For example a family with 1 child in care and a total income of \$149,597 pa are not entitled to the benefit. Claiming the benefit requires families to be using approved care, and the child to be appropriately immunised. Information is available at

<http://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink/child-care-benefit>

21 This covers 50% of out of pocket child care expenses, up to a maximum amount per child per year, in addition to any amount received from Child Care Benefit and Jobs, Education and Training (JET) Child Care Fee Assistance. The maximum amount of Child Care Rebate is \$7,500 per child per year. Further information is available at <http://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink/child-care-rebate>

22 Household disposable income is the sum of household final consumption expenditure and savings (minus the change in net equity of households in pension funds). It also corresponds to the sum of wages and salaries, mixed income, net property income, net current transfers and social benefits other than social transfers in kind, less taxes on income and wealth and social security contributions paid by employees, the self-employed and the unemployed. (OECD Factbook 2013: Economic, Environmental and Social Statistics <http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/factbook-2013-en/03/01/02/index.html?contentType=&itemId=/content/-chapter/factbook-2013-23-en&containerItemId=/content/serial/18147364&accessItemIds=&mimeType=text/html>).

1.3 Summary

Part 1 has explained the current and recent social and policy contexts operating in Australia and the aims and goals of the current government reforms. The multiple complexities involved in attempting to establish a coherent and consistent national system have been identified, including laws and regulations, types of services, attendance, characteristics of children attending services, funding arrangements, and costs. The ECEC Reform Agenda is extensive and original plans included milestones until 2020. A change of the Federal Government in September 2013 suggests some alteration to this rationale (introduced in Part 1 and discussed further in Parts 3 and 6). Part 2 explains the legislative and administrative aspects of the reforms.

2 PART 2: LEGISLATIVE AND ADMINISTRATIVE CONTEXT

2.1 The new National Quality Framework

While Part 1 described social and policy contexts, the aims of the national reforms and the complexities involved in moving to a national system in ECEC, Part 2 goes into more depth regarding the legislative and administrative context and the national agreements and partnerships that were required to create a national system.

As an integral part of the national Early Childhood Development Strategy (COAG, 2009b) and supported by legislation, national agreements and partnerships, the National Quality Framework was endorsed by COAG and took effect 1 January 2012. Part 2 explains the National Quality Framework, the national agreements and partnerships, the management and implementation of the National Quality Framework, and the components of the National Quality Framework. The National Quality Framework applies to most Long Day Care, Family Day Care, preschool (or kindergarten) and School Age Care services and is compulsory for these services. The NQF consists of (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2012):

- National Law and Regulations enacted in each State and Territory jurisdiction
- The National Quality Standard embedded in the law, that outlines consistent expectations for Programmes about quality
- A national quality rating and assessment process that rates services against the National Quality Standard and the Regulations.
- The Early Years Learning Framework which outlines principles, practices and outcomes for early childhood Programmes.

Established under an agreement between the Australian Government and all eight State and Territory Governments the Framework replaces two separate historic systems for monitoring and improving child care services, bringing together the two components of improvement and compliance. The previous National Childcare Accreditation System accredited child care services with the aim of improving what they offered and the States and Territories carried out the basic regulatory function of licensing against minimum standards for most, but not all, child care services. Licensing standards, processes and service coverage varied between jurisdictions. Government and some non-government managed preschools were not licensed and were not covered by national accreditation.

The agreement aimed to achieve (paraphrased from Early Childhood Development Steering Committee, 2009a, p. 3):

- a unified national system to replace what was the current state and territory-based licensing and quality assurance processes;

- a single set of improved national standards that encompass and integrate education and care;
- new standards that are more rigorous than the previous standards that applied to Long Day Care, Family Day Care, Out of School Care services regardless of location or setting;
- joint governance of the national quality system, to allow the perspective of all jurisdictions to be taken into account in the operation of the national system;
- a national body or bodies with joint governance arrangements to oversee the administration of the national system;
- no duplication of regulation across levels of government or sectors, with individual services needing to deal with only one organisation for regulation against the standards;
- jurisdictions not moving unilaterally to increase standards in the future, with the ability in a small number of selected areas to increase standards in a State or Territory by agreement between that State/Territory and the Commonwealth following discussion by the national body.

Long Day Care, Family Day Care, Out of School Age Care, and pre-school services are all required to meet the standards identified in the NQF. The definition of services is intentionally broad: "...any service providing or intending to provide education and care on a regular basis to children under 13 years of age', except those services that are specifically excluded either by the National Law or the National Regulations" (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2011a, p. 11). Services that are excluded from the National Quality Framework are identified in Appendix 3. Within the National Quality Framework are some specific requirements to reflect unique service types, for example, Family Day Care (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2011a). Service approvals specifically identify the type of care (centre-based and Family Day Care) and there are different fee structures relating to a range of applications and processes.

Subsequent to COAG's agreement, a National Partnership on the National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care was developed, outlining outcomes, roles and responsibilities for implementing the framework, for improving quality and allocating funding to this end. This reflected a new and serious attempt to take a national rather than a divided approach to a set of consistent standards across early education and care.

The following diagram (Figure 2) provides an overview of the relationships between the political and administrative governance of the National Quality Framework.

2.2 Early childhood education and care: National Agreements and National Partnerships

Because Australia is a federated system, in order for collaborative national reforms to progress, National Agreements and National Partnerships are negotiated between the Federal Government and the Governments of States/Territories. National Agreements are currently in place across programme areas including healthcare, school education, skills and workforce development, disability services, affordable housing and Indigenous reform. These identify objectives, outcomes, outputs and performance indicators, and clarify the roles and responsibilities of the States and Territories in relation to the whole program portfolio. National Partnerships²³ are sometimes necessary to provide more detail in order for the outcomes in National Agreements to be achieved and are generally only negotiated for significant policy matters. They may include agreed payments from the Federal Government to the States/Territories on achievement of identified milestones (<http://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/default.aspx>).

There is no overarching National Agreement on early childhood education and care. Other national agreements impact to a small degree in early childhood education and care in that they relate to children and families, and some to staff who work in early childhood education and care settings. These include:

- The *National Education Agreement* which took effect from 25 July 2012: (www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/education/national-agreement-superseded.pdf). This agreement related to the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians which do include early childhood education and care (http://www.mceecdya.edu.au/verve/_resources/National_Declaration_on_the_Educational_Goals_for_Young_Australians.pdf).
- The *National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development* (www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/skills/skillsreform/national_agreement.pdf) which includes governance and funding allocation references for the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector, and regulations around that training which includes the community services sector of which early childhood education/children's services is a component.
- The *National Indigenous Reform Agreement* (http://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/health_indigenous/indigenous-reform/national-agreement_sept_12.pdf) which aims, within the next 5 years, to provide all Indigenous children in remote communities with access to early childhood education in the year before they begin formal schooling. There are a number of strategies outlined in this agreement aimed at "Closing the Gap" between the social,

23 Sometimes National Partnerships are referred to as National Partnership Agreements.

health and educational outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous children and these include (Council of Australian Governments, 2009a, p. 6):

For an equal start in life, Indigenous children need early learning, development and socialisation opportunities. Access to quality early childhood education and care services, including pre-school, child care and family support services such as parenting Programmes and supports, is critical. Appropriate facilities and physical infrastructure, a sustainable early childhood education and health workforce, learning frameworks and opportunities for parental engagement are also important and require attention. Action in the areas of maternal, antenatal and early childhood health is relevant to addressing the child mortality gap and to early childhood development.

The main National Partnerships relating specifically to early childhood education and care are:

The *National Partnership on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education* (http://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/education/early_childhood/national_partnership.pdf).

This is the original agreement (signed in 2008) that set up the provision of universal access to early childhood education in the year prior to full-time school (see Appendix 4 for a copy of the responsibilities of the Federal Government and the States).

The *National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education* (<https://education.gov.au/national-partnership-agreement-universal-access-early-childhood-education>). This is the second agreement developed in 2013.

The *National Partnership Agreement on National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care* (http://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/education/early_childhood/quality_agenda/national_partnership.pdf). This is the most significant document in terms of the National Quality Framework because it outlines the national approach and the obligations of each jurisdiction including funding allocations and governance of the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority. It provides the foundation for the law and its enactment, and the operations of all bodies.

Closing the Gap: National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development (http://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/health_indigenous/ctg-early-childhood/national_partnership.pdf). This agreement governs the development of the Indigenous Child and Family Centres.

The *National Partnership on National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care* has a multilateral implementation plan, to represent the complexity and consistency between all jurisdictions. All the other National Partnership Agreements have an implementation plan within each State and Territory.

Diagram 2: Governance Arrangements

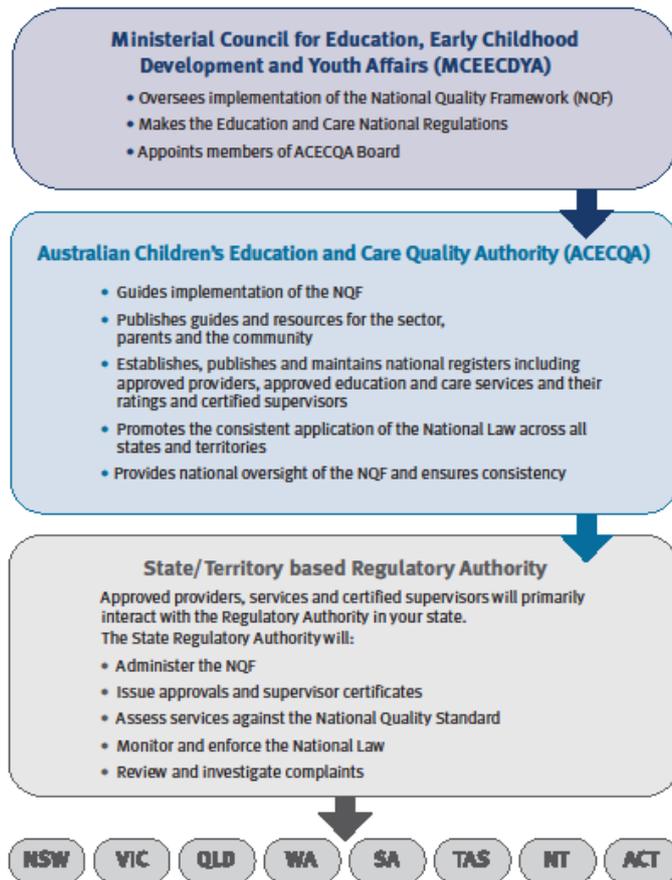


Figure 2: Overview of the relationships between the political and administrative governance of the National Quality Framework (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2011b, p. 6)

2.3 Management and implementation of the National Quality Framework

These National Agreements aimed to facilitate collaboration between the various stakeholders. To ensure this collaboration was carried through into

implementation an Early Childhood Development Working Group ECDWG (http://www.mceecdya.edu.au/mceecdya/early_childhood_development_working_group,28457.html), was established to report through a committee of senior administrators to all responsible Ministers, on a range of issues relating to early childhood education and care including:

- Implementation of the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education
- Implementation of the National Partnership Agreement on the National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care
- Implementation of the Early Years Learning Framework
- Provision of advice on the Early Childhood Development Strategy agreed by COAG on 2 July 2009
- Provision of advice on the development of a National Agreement for Early Childhood
- Provision of advice on the Early Years Development Workforce Strategy to be considered by COAG in 2010 (the final report for which was published in 2011 - Productivity Commission, 2011)
- Undertaking work on early childhood development issues referred to it by Ministers
- Identification of issues related to early childhood development, for consideration by Ministers, with a view to enhancing the development of a coordinated national approach to improving the learning, development, health and wellbeing of children from birth to eight.

The ECDWG members are nominees from each State and Territory, and the Australian Government.

In 2011 COAG established a new system of ministerial councils. One of these, The *Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood* (SCSEEC) is the group of Ministers responsible for leading the National Early Childhood Reform Agenda which includes the National Quality Framework.

(http://www.mceecdya.edu.au/verve/resources/SCSEEC_Terms_of_Reference_as_of_010_April_2_012.pdf). Members of SCSEEC have responsibility for the portfolios of school education and early childhood development in each State, Territory, and the Australian and the New Zealand Government. The Council has responsibility for a range of educational jurisdictions: primary and secondary education, youth affairs and youth policy relating to schooling, cross-sectoral matters including transitions and careers, and early childhood development including early childhood education and care. Specifically in relation to early childhood development the Council's priority issues are implementation of reforms in early childhood development with initial focus on the National Early Childhood Development Strategy and the National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care.

A group of senior officials support the Council. This group meets regularly and is called the *Australian Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs Senior Officials Committee* (AEEYSOC) (<http://www.mceecdya.edu.au/mceecdya/aeeySOC,11324.html>). AEEYSOC is responsible for the execution of Ministerial Council decisions and convenes taskforces and working groups such as the ECDWG mentioned above, as required. In addi-

tion to these bodies, the Productivity Commission undertakes an annual review of government services (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2012).

In summary, the planned incremental implementation of the National Quality Agenda was as follows:

- 2009: December - National Partnership signed, Regulatory Impact Statement released
- 2010
 - January: Transition Phase begins. Jurisdictions work collaboratively to develop their implementation plans
 - June: Field testing of assessment and rating tool in Long Day Care Centres
 - July - November: Field testing of all service types
- 2011: collaborative legislation passed in most jurisdictions
- 2012: 1 January Implementation Phase begins. Staff:child ratio of 1:4 for children from birth to 2 years begins. National body, Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority established
- 2014: First Review to be conducted on governance. Required ratios for children 3-5 years come into force. Registration of teachers. Regulation of preschools. Family Day Care ratios begin. All qualification requirements begin except for the second qualification requirements for Long Day Care and preschool which begin in 2020
- 2016: Fully Operational – all ratios and qualifications in place. Staff:child ratio 1:5 for children 25 – 35 months begins. Staff:child ratios 1:11 for 36 months to the age when school begins (school starting age is variable across Australia).
- 2019: Second Review
- 2020: Second qualification for Long Day Care and preschool begins

2.3.1 Implementation and oversight

As the national coordination body, Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) is responsible for implementing and steering the monitoring and quality assurance system. Quarterly snapshots (summary reports of progress), begun in 2013, provide an analysis of the services assessed and rated. These are made publically available (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2013a, 2013f, 2013g, 2014).

In particular, the ACECQA is responsible for (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2013b):

- Guiding the implementation of the National Quality Framework
- Reporting to the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood through the Australian Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs Senior Officials Committee
- Ensuring procedures for effectiveness, efficiency and consistency
- Carrying out national auditing arrangements
- Maintaining national information and registers

- Developing and administering the Excellent rating (awarded through a specific application process)
- Educating and informing the field and the general public
- Publishing guides and resources and promoting continuous quality improvement
- Disseminating information on the National Quality Framework and effect on developmental and educational outcomes for children
- Determining qualifications for Authorised Officers and support and training for Regulatory Authority staff
- Approving educator qualifications
- The ACECQA is overseen by a board of 13 members appointed the Ministerial Council for a period of three years, with nominations from all jurisdictions and a balance of professional skills and expertise related to running early childhood services.

State and Territory regulatory bodies are accountable to their own State or Territory Minister and have responsibility for:

- Managing assessments and determining ratings through regular external assessment visits
- Employing Authorised Officers (external assessors) to carry out ECEC service assessments
- Dealing with complaints and undertaking audit processes
- Ensuring an approach which is nationally consistent
- Undertaking data collections, review and reporting of regulatory outcomes as agreed by the Board of the ACECQA
- Stakeholder engagement and promotion in collaboration with the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority.

The governance arrangements for these bodies vary between jurisdictions.

2.4 Components of the National Quality Framework

There are four components of the National Quality Framework: the legal aspect; the National Quality Standard; the quality assessment and rating process, and approved national learning frameworks. Each is discussed in turn.

2.4.1 The legal framework

One of the 4 components of the National Quality Framework is the legal framework. In situations such as the national early childhood education and care reforms, Australia can operate an applied law system which requires one jurisdiction to pass a law, and all others to then pass corresponding legislation. The National Law is not an act of the Australian Parliament. It was first introduced into the Victorian Parliament (the Victorian Education and Care Service National Law Act 2010), followed by other State and Territory juris-

dictions. Each jurisdiction determined how to introduce and enact the law to ensure national consistency, but at the same time, retained the ability to tailor the legislation to its own context and constitutional status.

The governance system introduced by COAG and the applied law arrangements mean that all jurisdictions must agree to any changes to be made and also to any steps to repeal legislation. In essence, this requirement has the potential to ensure a range of perspectives are considered carefully before changes are agreed, but alternatively could act to delay or inhibit operational decisions that are detrimental to effective implementation. Each State and Territory jurisdiction also has administration of the Regulations that are nationally agreed, under the National Laws. Links to The National Laws and Regulations can be found at: <http://www.acecqa.gov.au/Article.aspx?pid=51&gcpid=2&acpid=372> and are outlined in Appendix 5.

The *Education and Care Services National Regulations* were made in 2001 under sections 301 and 324 of the *Education and Care Services National Law* as applied by the law of the States and Territories. The Regulations provide detail on a range of operational requirements for an education and care service covered under the National Quality Framework. These requirements include:

- processes to apply for approvals, certifications, and reviews (see 3.1.1)
- processes for assessment and rating of services against the National Quality Standard
- minimum requirements relating to the operation of education and care services organised around each of the seven Quality Areas of the National Quality Standard
- the rating levels
- individual jurisdictional provisions and transitional arrangements
- compliance matters and penalties.

During 2013 all States and Territories made amendments to the regulations which came into effect on 1 September 2013. The main amendments include:

- clarifying the definition of a ‘serious incident’
- reducing the amount of paperwork providers need to show when they want to temporarily relocate a centre-based service for less than 12 months or locate a service on a school site
- clarifying the requirements to rehearse emergency and evacuation procedures every three months
- making it easier for educators who gained their qualification overseas to have it assessed for equivalence
- making it easier for centre-based service providers to educate and care for extra children in emergency situations by temporarily waiving space, educator-to-child ratios and early childhood education and care teacher requirements for extra children (See more at: <http://www.acecqa.gov.au/-amendments-to-the-education-and-care-services-national-regulations#-sthash.04ShNPxu.dpuf>).

2.4.2 National Quality Standard

The National Quality Standard is the second part of the National Quality Framework and is intended to set the benchmark for quality across the nation. It is located at schedule 1 of the National Regulations (<http://www.legislation.nsw.gov.au/maintop/view/inforce/subordleg+653+2011+cd+0+N>). Specifically the National Quality Standard aims to support quality improvement through:

- better educator to child ratios
- greater individual care and attention for children
- educators with increased skills and qualifications
- better support for children's learning and development
- a national register to help parents assess the quality of education and care services in their area.

There is an emphasis on both structural and process elements of quality improvement. The National Quality Standard is framed around 6 principles (Council of Australian Governments, 2013):

- The rights of the child are paramount – this reflects the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the state's commitment to ensuring that all children have rights to their individual and cultural identities, to express themselves and have their views considered in decision-making that impacts upon them. Those working with children have responsibilities to protect children from harm, respect their dignity and privacy and both protect and promote children's wellbeing.
- Children are successful, competent and capable learners – this reflects children's agency: the importance of respecting children's right to construct their knowledge, meanings and understandings, their abilities to form their own opinions, express their own ideas and have their voices heard. This reflects a socio-cultural focus on learning where the aim is to start with what children already know, and support their learning through rich, meaningful and enjoyable interactions with the world around them, and people in that world.
- Equity, inclusion and diversity – Australia is a multicultural nation with a history of colonisation of the Indigenous people. A significant proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live in conditions of multiple disadvantage with dramatically worse outcomes across the life course than for other Australians. Migrant families, and particularly those for whom English is not their first language, can also experience disadvantage compared with the hegemonic population. Addressing issues of social justice and equity are particularly important and it is acknowledged that early childhood education and care services offer ideal opportunities, not only to deliver programmes that support access and inclusion of children and families who are in the minority, but also to offer opportunities for all children to develop understandings of issues related to diversity, disadvantage and social justice.

- Valuing Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures – as identified above, Australia has a special obligation to address issues of disadvantage and inequity in relation to its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This must not only be about ensuring equity in access and participation in services, but in supporting all children to understand and value diversity and social justice and the relationship that Indigenous people have to the land.
- The role of parents and families is respected and supported – this is an acknowledgement that families have a significant impact on the lives of children, and that families should be valued and supported in their roles as children’s primary carers and educators. Respectful and collaborative relationships between early childhood education and care educators and families are essential components of high quality service delivery.
- High expectations for children, educators and service providers – it is expected that services will continue to strive to improve, and that there exists an open and accountable organisational culture. Educators are also expected to reflect on their practice and strive to improve. The best interests of children and families are met in services with a focus on high standards and continual improvement.

The Standard consists of seven Quality Areas:

- Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice
- Quality Area 2: Children’s health and safety
- Quality Area 3: Physical environment
- Quality Area 4: Staffing arrangements
- Quality Area 5: Relationships with children
- Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
- Quality Area 7: Leadership and service management.

Within each Quality Area there are either 2 or 3 standards, making up a total of 18 standards, and each standard has a number of elements, with 58 elements overall. Appendix 6 presents the National Quality Standard as outlined in Schedule 1.

A number of resources have been produced to assist services to understand the National Quality Standard. For example, the Guide to the National Quality Standard

(<http://files.acecqa.gov.au/files/National-Quality-Framework-Resources-Kit/NQF03-Guide-to-NQS-130902.pdf>) outlines each Quality Area and standard accompanied by an explanation as to their relative importance, requirements for service delivery and reflective questions that can be used to guide the self assessment process that precedes an external assessment.

Because of the emphasis on both improvement and compliance, the National Quality Standard, as expressed in the Regulations, outlines penalties applied to non-compliance for some elements and standards. For example, monetary fines apply to failure to have required policies in place, to keep specified records, and to ensure that a parent has access to the centre when their child is present. A compliance direction may be issued for such mat-

ters as failure to document information about a child's learning and development, or failure to provide opportunities for children to develop respectful and positive relationships with others. It is the National Quality Standard with its Quality Areas, standards and elements that are the main feature forming the basis of the assessment and rating of services.

2.4.3 Quality Assessment and Rating Process

This comprises the third component of the National Quality Framework and begins with a service conducting a self-audit, leading to the development of a Quality Improvement Plan, linked to the National Quality Standard Quality Areas, standards and elements. An external assessment is conducted by Authorised Officers from the State and Territory Regulatory Authority and a report produced indicating comments about perceived strengths and areas for improvement. These areas may be identified for immediate action by the service or may point to a longer term strategy for improvement. There are steps in the process for the service to provide a response prior to a final report being produced and a rating being assigned. There are review processes in place and a mechanism for grievances to be addressed. The period between external assessments is dependent on the rating that is assigned, with higher ratings attaining longer periods between assessments.

The external assessment is conducted using a specially developed National Quality Standard Assessment and Rating Instrument and is a three tiered process involving observation, discussion, and sighting of documentation. The Quality Assessment and Rating Process is described in more detail in Section 3.2 of this paper and further information about the Instrument can be found in Section 3.5.

2.4.4 Approved national learning frameworks

The fourth component of the National Quality Framework includes the development of two approved learning frameworks, one for early childhood education and care and one for school-aged children in care. The first of these to be developed was *Belonging Being and Becoming, The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009a) which outlines early childhood education and care pedagogy at both principle and practice levels. Following on from its development and positive reception by the early childhood field, *My time, Our place Framework for Out of School care settings* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011) was written. It aims to ensure that children are provided with opportunities to participate in leisure and play-based experiences and follows a similar style to the early childhood framework.

These learning frameworks provide guidance about contemporary understandings of quality practice. For example, the Early Years Learning Framework is informed by 5 principles that underpin children's learning (pp. 12-13):

- Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships
- Partnerships

- High expectations and equity
- Respect for diversity
- Ongoing learning and reflective practice.

These principles underpin pedagogical practice that supports children's learning in the following ways (p. 14):

- adopting holistic approaches
- being responsive to children
- planning and implementing learning through play
- intentional teaching
- creating physical and social learning environments that have a positive impact on children's learning
- valuing the cultural and social contexts of children and their families
- providing for continuity in experiences and enabling children to experience successful transitions
- assessing and monitoring children's learning to inform provision and to support children in achieving learning outcomes.

Learning outcomes are developed to reflect the complexity and integrated nature of children's learning and development in the early years. They are not designed to reflect development as a linear concept, acknowledging that learning in relation to each outcome grows in increasing complexity and becomes transferable to new situations. The five outcomes outlined below are broad and designed to be observable (see Appendix 7).

Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity

Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world

Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing

Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners

Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators.

Guidance relating to the Learning Outcomes emphasises the important role that educators play and provides examples of evidence about children's learning and how educators promote learning.

2.5 Summary

It could be said that as the Early Years Learning Framework was the first component of the National Quality Framework to be made publicly available in 2009, prior to the legal framework in 2011, children's learning and development has been placed at the heart of the reforms. The Early Years Learning Framework heralded a new focus for quality improvement in the Australian early childhood education and care sector.

The legislative changes and governance arrangements were an important part of establishing a consistent, reliable and rigorous national ECEC sys-

tem. Once these were in place, it was possible to implement and manage the National Quality Framework. This included establishing the national coordination body (ACECQA) and the implementation and management of the National Quality Framework. As part of the National Quality Framework, the introduction of the National Quality Standard with its focus on structural and process content was accompanied by the quality assessment and rating process, and the two approved national learning frameworks: *Belonging, being & becoming: The Australian early years learning framework* (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009a); and *My time, our place: Framework for out of school care settings* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011). Having explained the legislative and administrative context and the components of the National Quality Framework, Part 3 provides details of the assessment and rating system.

3 SERVICE ASSESSMENTS AND RATINGS

3.1 Introduction to assessments and ratings

Part 3 explains components of the assessment and rating system. It begins with contextual information and then describes the components of the system, its conceptualization and development, and the instrument itself. As outlined earlier the previous processes in Australia for monitoring for compliance with regulations and assessing for service improvement were separate and carried out by separately constituted bodies. In addition, the new processes for assessment and rating of services cover a broader range of service types. The responsibilities, while designed as an integrated whole, are shared between the national coordination body and State and Territory regulatory bodies (see Figure 2). Details of these responsibilities can be found earlier in this paper at Section 2.3.

Alongside the introduction of the National Quality Standard a range of resource materials has been made available to support services to engage with the content and processes involved. One such example is available at <http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/nqsplp/e-learning-videos/getting-to-know-the-nqs/> which offers guidance through each of the 58 elements illustrated with examples, footage from early childhood and school-age settings, and animation. The videos are designed for new and experienced educators, and for the entire range of services covered by the National Quality Standard. This is supported by an eNewsletter (<http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/nqsplp/e-newsletters/newsletters-66-70/newsletter-69/>) and a resources guide (<http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/nqsplp/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Resources-guide.pdf>). The ACECQA website also has a number of guides and case examples are being developed.

The new Australian Liberal-National Coalition Government (sworn in September, 2013) has recently reallocated some of its existing resources to support child care educators. Over the next three years \$200 million will be distributed to the Long Day Care Professional Development Program for purchasing professional development that will impact on improving the quality of their service. This may be for educators to gain formal qualifications or for other more informal activities. These funds were set aside by the previous Australian Labor Government for the *Early Years Quality Fund* which was aimed at providing funding to services to improve the starting wages of 4 year university-trained early childhood education and care teachers from \$42,000 to \$50,003 per year (Department of Education and Price Waterhouse Coopers, 2013). The 2 year initiative was intended to provide interim support whilst negotiations were taking place with Fair Work Australia to improve wages and conditions on behalf of the sector. Because of the parameters of the legislation governing this fund its redirection applies only to the Long Day Care sector, rather than to the early childhood education and care field as a whole. Being in receipt of relatively large funds for this purpose for the first time will mean careful decision-making for centre management. Both

initiatives have been widely discussed, raising issues of political broken promises, possible breaches of contracts, and equitable distribution of resources. With a new government emphasis on deregulation and support of a market economy, a proliferation of low quality professional development provision may be a risk. On the other hand, this distribution may result in new professional aspirations (<http://sussanley.com/coalition-delivers-chilcare%20-educators-fairer-funding>).

3.2 Components of the assessment and rating system

This section provides an outline of the components of assessment and rating for an ECEC service from its entry into the system to completion of assessment and assignment of a rating.

3.2.1 Approvals required to operate a service

In order to attract government subsidy (Child Care Benefit) for its users an ECEC service must be assessed and rated. It is the provider of the service who must first be approved in order to operate an approved service. State and Territory authorities are responsible for the approval processes for both providers and services. These consist of (Overview of approvals: Information Sheet available at <http://files.acecqa.gov.au/files/Information%20sheets/-ACECQA%20Information%20Sheet%20%20Overview%20of%20Approvals.pdf>):

- Provider approval – nationally recognised approval for providers to apply for one or more service approvals. An Approved Provider can be an individual, an organisation or a company managing an ECEC service. Providers must provide a signed declaration of fitness and propriety (http://files.acecqa.gov.au/files/2014%20Application%20Forms/provider-approvals/PA02_DeclarationOfFitnessAndPropriety_v11.pdf)
- Service approval - authorises an Approved Provider to operate an Approved Service. Each Approved Provider must have a Nominated Supervisor
- Supervisor Certificate – nationally recognised approval for a person to be temporarily placed in charge when an Approved Provider or Nominated Supervisor is absent. An Approved Provider can also be a Nominated Supervisor.

The assessment and rating process began with the first service visits in June 2012. All services are required to develop a Quality Improvement Plan and be working with this plan before the assessment begins.

3.2.2 Quality Improvement Plan

Approved Providers must make sure a Quality Improvement Plan is developed for each of their approved services. The Quality Improvement Plan (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2013d) requires services to evaluate their current practices against the National Quality Standard and identifies those practices that need improvement. It is expected that the centre team will develop the plan. The plan must contain:

- a self assessment of performance against the standards
- identification of areas for improvement
- a service philosophy statement.

The focus is on self reflection and services are expected to use the descriptions for elements in the Standard to guide their reflections. The ACECQA provides guidelines for these reflections (http://www.acecqa.gov.au/quality-improvement-plan_1):

- Does our statement of philosophy reflect a commitment to improvement?
- What are our priorities for improvement?
- Are our resources targeted to support our plans?
- Are we collecting and using the right information to help our planning cycle?
- How do we handle complaints?
- How do we review our policies and procedures?

The Plan is a dynamic document, and Approved Providers are responsible for ensuring that services regularly update their plan. It informs the assessment visit and must be submitted to the Regulatory Authority prior to the assessment visit and on any occasion as requested by the regulator. Subsequently the updated plan must be made available to the Regulatory Authority on request at any time. Families may also request to see the Plan. Services are recommended to collaborate with children, families, educators, staff, management and other interested parties (for example staff from an agency supporting the inclusion of a child with additional needs).

The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority provides a template for the plan on their website (http://www.acecqa.gov.au/quality-improvement-plan_1) but the template is not a required format. While the Quality Improvement Plan does not determine the rating of an ECEC service it does contribute information for both the service and the Authorised Officers about the focus for improvement and can assist both parties highlight congruence or mismatches between internal planning and external assessments.

3.2.3 Assessment and Rating Process

[See Assessment and rating process: Information Sheet: http://files.acecqa.gov.au/files/Information%20sheets/Assessment%20and%20rating%20process_121108Approved.pdf, Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2011c, 2013c)].

Step 1: Services are notified that their assessment has been scheduled. They have 6 weeks to update their Quality Improvement Plan and submit it to the Regulatory Authority. The Authorised Officer from the Regulatory Authority (see Section 3.2.7 below) will begin analysis of the available information about the service (this includes checking their previous accreditation history, and compliance history).

Step 2: Receipt of the Quality Improvement Plan will be given to the provider and the date of the site visit confirmed. This occurs 6 weeks prior to the visit. Information about what will happen in the course of the site visit will be provided.

Step 3: The site visit then occurs and feedback may be given at that time. The assessment has three important parts to the process. The first is based on observations of practice in relation to the standards, elements and Quality Areas. The second is a discussion with any of the educators in order to clarify observations and expand the Authorised Officer's understanding of the context and practices, and the third is to view any relevant documentation. This may relate to the observations and discussions, and also may relate to any regulatory matters (e.g. policy statements or procedures) Providers can make minor and immediate changes to the service operation to address any concerns identified at the time of the visit. The Authorised Officer doing the site visit will generally be present for both opening and closing of the service, view the entire service, observe typical practice for each group of children or each session, and observe interactions inside and outside. There may be more than one Authorised Officer undertaking the site visit; this depends on the size and complexity of the service or any relevant safety issues.

Step 4: 3 weeks after the site visit the Approved Provider will be sent the draft assessment report and the proposed ratings. The Approved Provider can provide feedback or ask for clarification.

Step 5: Feedback is considered by the Regulatory Authority.

Step 6: 8 weeks after the site visit the report and ratings are finalised. The report is sent to the provider. The provider has 14 days to apply for a review if there are concerns about the report.

3.2.4 Ratings against the National Quality Standard

[See Rating system: Information Sheet: <http://files.acecqa.gov.au/files/Information%20sheets/ACECQA%20Information%20Sheet%20-%20NQF%20Rating%20System.pdf>].

The frequency of the assessment is underpinned by the principle of earned autonomy and depends on the assessment results; the higher the ratings awarded, the less frequent assessments need to be. The Regulatory Authority can, however, assess a service at any time and Approved Providers can apply

to be assessed once in every 2 year period. There are 5 levels of rating. One of the four ratings below is assigned to an ECEC service as a result of the assessment visit:

- Exceeding National Quality Standard
- Meeting National Quality Standard
- Working Towards National Quality Standard
- Significant Improvement Required.

Services are rated in each Quality Area, and are also given an overall rating. If any of the Quality Area receives a rating below the national standard, then their overall rating will also be at this lowest level. Services awarded a *significant improvement* rating are required to make immediate improvements. New services are given a *Provisional – Not Yet Assessed* rating.

3.2.5 The review process

There are two parts to the review process: first and second tier reviews.

First tier review

See Information Sheet:

<http://files.acecqa.gov.au/files/Information%20sheets/Information%20Sheet%20-%20First%20Tier%20Review.pdf>

If the Approved Provider of a service is not satisfied with the assessment report and rating, they can, within 14 days, request a review. This is a ‘point in time’ review – i.e. a review undertaken using the observations and information available at the time of the original assessment. New information cannot be included in this review. There is no fee associated with this review. A reviewer will be appointed (someone who was not involved in the original assessment) who will have access to all documentation and information. The reviewer will be familiar with the National Quality Framework, National Quality Standard, the assessment and rating process and the relevant legislation. Reviews are undertaken within 30 days of the lodgment of the request.

Second tier review

See Information Sheet:

http://files.acecqa.gov.au/files/Quals/Information%20SheetSecondTierReview_v7July2013.pdf

An application for a second tier review can be lodged with the Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority within 14 days of receipt of the first tier review decision if the Approved Provider believes that the Regulatory Authority:

- Did not follow the appropriate processes in determining the rating level
- Did not take adequately into account special circumstances or facts existing at the time of the assessment.

Second tier reviews require an application fee. The application requires a statement on the grounds for which the review is requested, and the Quality Areas to which those grounds relate. Approved providers must not include additional information that was not available at the time of the initial assessment.

The review process requires a Rating Review Panel to conduct a further review, often via teleconference and to consider evidence from the approved provider and the Regulatory Authority. Panel members are selected because of their expertise in early learning and development practice or research, and/or their expertise in assessment for quality or their knowledge and/of best practice regulation. The panel will consist of three members and must have at least one member who has expertise in early childhood education and care (or school aged education and care if the review is for School Age Care). A pool of panel members is available, all of whom have received training in education and care service quality assessment and principles of good administrative decision-making. A decision from the panel must be available within 60 days and cannot be appealed except through legal channels or through the Education and Care Services Ombudsman (<http://www.necsombudsmanprivacy.edu.au/>).

Regulatory Authorities are able to reassess and re-rate an approved service at any time (National Law: Sections 138–140, National Regulations: Regulations 66–67).

3.2.6 The Excellent Rating

The *Excellent* rating is awarded to an ECEC service upon application only through the ACECQA. Approved Providers with a service rated *Exceeding the National Quality Standard* overall can choose to apply (see Appendix 8). The purpose of the *Excellent* rating is to:

- celebrate excellence in the delivery of education and care
- engage and involve families and the community in the profession's discussion about quality and what is important in education and care
- learn from and be inspired by examples of highly accomplished practice, innovation and creativity in education and care
- promote and reinforce the value of education and care and the people who work in the sector
- recognise providers and educators who are champions of quality improvement.

The ACECQA began developing criteria for the *Excellence* Rating in 2011 (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2012) and the criteria for this rating as at 2014 are available on the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority website ([http://files.acecqa.gov.au/files/Quals/2014/20140326GuidelinesForApplicants-Excellentrating - v6.pdf](http://files.acecqa.gov.au/files/Quals/2014/20140326GuidelinesForApplicants-Excellentrating-v6.pdf)). A working party drafted criteria and released the draft for public consultation, which ran until March 2012. The survey gained 471 responses. The criteria were revised and a second round of consultation took place in July 2012. The final criteria were released at the end of 2012. There is a fee

associated with the application which varies across service type (Family Day Care vs. centre-based care) and service size (for example, for centre-based care a service of less than 25 places pays \$204 [€135] as does a Family Day Care provider with less than 6 educators. A centre-based service of 80 or over or a Family Day Care provider with more than 20 educators is charged \$612 [€405]). The current draft Productivity Commission review recommends that the Excellence rating be discontinued (Productivity Commission, 2014) but the final recommendations have yet to be delivered (as of September 2014).

3.2.7 Supporting quality assessments

Authorised Officers employed by State and Territory regulatory authorities (National Law: Section 195-197, 204-208, 210, 212, National Regulations: Regulation 187) monitor and enforce compliance with the National Law and National Regulations. They have a range of powers including (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2011a, p. 120):

- Enter and inspect education and care service premises (including unapproved premises under a search warrant)
- Obtain information, documents and evidence
- Inspect and copy documents
- Require a person to provide evidence of their age, name and address.

The Authorised Officer may use these powers to (p. 121):

- Monitor compliance with the National Law
- Conduct a rating assessment or
- Obtain information requested by the Regulatory Authority.

Authorised Officers undertake visits to services (announced, unannounced, random, targeted, campaign and regular assessment and rating visits) in order to assess and rate services under the National Quality Standard, and at any other time in order to undertake spot-checks.

The ACECQA is responsible for determining the qualifications of Authorised Officers [Section 225(1)(o) and Section 195(5) in the National Law]. The current approved qualifications (<http://files.acecqa.gov.au/files/-Quals/1NQF%20qualifications%20requirements%20for%20Authorised%20Officers-1.pdf>) require:

- formal qualifications e.g. early childhood education and care teaching, primary teaching, other teaching, child care, nursing, other human welfare studies, behavioural science and other early childhood education and care related qualifications (k). By January 2014 more than 50% of Authorised Officers are required to have early childhood education and care qualifications at diploma, degree or higher levels
- appropriate training in the National Quality Framework including the National Law, Regulations and the National Quality Standard

- appropriate training in record keeping, investigation, decision making and report writing
- knowledge, expertise, professional values, integrity and the ability to develop respectful relationships
- if they are undertaking assessments, they need to have skills, experience and qualifications to enable them to make informed pedagogical judgments.

State and Territory regulatory authorities have their own criteria for Authorised Officers that need to be considered along with these national requirements. Each Regulatory Authority provides that information. Qualifications and the consistency of judgments are reviewed regularly and the Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority is due to report to the Ministerial Council in 2014 on these.

3.3 Theoretical and empirical basis of the established quality standards

The development of the National Quality Framework was informed by international research about best practice in early childhood education and care, and the importance of quality early childhood education and care experiences in shaping long term outcomes. The work undertaken for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development *Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2006)* in particular was used to shape thinking as the standard was developed. For example, the following recommendations were primary considerations (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2006, p. 4):

1. *To attend to the social contexts of early childhood development*
2. *To place wellbeing, early development and learning at the core of ECEC work while respecting the child’s agency and natural learning strategies*
3. *To create the governance structures necessary for system accountability and quality assurance*
4. *To develop with the stakeholders broad guidelines and curricular standards for all ECEC services*²⁴
5. *To encourage family and community involvement in ECEC services*²⁵
6. *To aspire to ECEC systems that support broad learning, participation and democracy.*

The development of the content and the processes for the National Quality Framework was based on the belief that while there are common overarching principles and standards, quality will look different in different contexts.

24 Indicates Points 5-6 removed from quote as they were not relevant.

25 Indicates Points 8-9 removed from the quote as they were not relevant.

In the early planning documents, it was clear that different jurisdictions needed to organise how best to achieve the desired outcomes. The National Early Childhood Development Strategy argued:

Transforming the way Australia support young children and their families will take time and resources. It requires a flexible approach that enables continual learning and responsiveness to emerging issues, and that takes into account the different needs, proprieties and available resources in each jurisdiction. In this respect the strategy provides a roadmap to 2020 that will be added to and adjusted over time (Council of Australian Governments, 2009, p. 22).

This flexibility is recognised in the National Quality Standard. For example, whilst Quality Area 1 requires that an approved early learning framework is to be used, and the *Early Years Learning Framework* was developed to serve this purpose, some states had already developed their own learning frameworks and the use of these frameworks is permitted in the regulations. These included (Council of Australian Governments, 2011, p. 10):

- Australian Capital Territory: Every Chance to Learn – Curriculum framework for ACT schools preschool to Year 10
- Tasmania: the Tasmanian Curriculum, the Department of Education of Tasmania, 2008
- Victoria: the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework
- Western Australia: the Curriculum Framework for Kindergarten to Year 12 Education in Western Australia.
- These frameworks differ from the Early Years Learning Framework in a range of ways. One (Victoria) includes children aged birth – to eight years and supports multidisciplinary teams, while others are aimed at supporting programmes for children in the year before primary school where preschools are mainly seen as part of the schooling sector.

The Guide to the National Quality Standard (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2011c) also emphasises that quality will look different in different contexts, and that it is important that early childhood education and care practitioners are able to reflect on the intent of the standards and elements and how these are actioned in their service. For example, in the instructions the following point is made (our emphasis):

*... a guide to practice for each element, which describes how the element **might be put into practice** at the service and how the element may be assessed. This consists of guidance applicable to all service types and children of all ages, followed by any specific guidance identified for the service type or age of the children (p. 16).*

The instructions in the Guide explain:

The examples of practice provided are not exhaustive. Each approved service is unique and the ways in which the elements and standards are met will be deter-

mined by the service context, including the service environment; the needs, interests and abilities of the children attending the service; and the needs of families and the wider community. A service may determine that it is able to meet the standards and elements in ways other than those included in the examples (p. 17).

Thus there is a requirement for EC professionals to interpret the National Quality Standard in ways relevant to their context and for the implementation process to recognize that flexibility.

3.4 Implementing the National Quality Framework and the National Quality Standard

In the 2008/09 budget \$22.2 million was committed over 4 years to introduce the new National Quality Framework. The Council of Australian Governments set up a working group (Productivity Agenda Working Group) to oversee the work needed to progress towards a National Quality Agenda. This working group brought together a range of senior officials from all government departments to form the Early Childhood Development Subgroup and an Expert Advisory Panel on Quality Early Childhood Education and Care was also formed (Early Childhood Development Steering Committee, 2009a). A discussion paper was developed in August 2008 (Productivity Agenda Working Group Early Childhood Development Subgroup, 2008) and circulated to form the basis of the first wave of public consultations undertaken in August and September of 2008. This first wave of public consultations consisted of (<http://mychild.gov.au/documents/docs/Qualityfactsheet.pdf>):

- 48 open public fora around Australia, in each of the capital cities and a range of regional centres. These were attended by about 2500 people from a range of early childhood education and care service types;
- 35 focus groups involving families and service providers, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, migrants and refugees and people with disabilities;
- 35 in-depth interviews with stakeholders and people unable to attend other consultation events (including those in isolated areas).

A call for submissions was launched and about 400 written submissions were received. This information was all given to the Early Childhood Development Subgroup along with input from the Expert Advisory Panel. Following this, a number of options were presented in the Regulation Impact Statement (Early Childhood Development Steering Committee, 2009b) and further public input was sought. The Regulatory Impact Statement outlined why it was considered necessary to improve quality, what changes were being considered, assessed the relative costs and benefits of each of the options and outlined the consultation process. This further consultation included:

- Public forums in each capital city and a number of regional centres in July 2009
- Written submissions
- Online survey.

Supporting the work of the Early Childhood Development Subgroup were a number of working groups dealing with developing the legislation requirements, the assessment instruments and assessment and rating processes, and the operational aspects of the system. Membership included representatives from all jurisdictions.

The project to develop the first ever Australian national early years learning framework commenced as one of the earliest initiatives within the National Quality Framework. The development and trialling of the learning framework was put out to tender. The tender was won by a Charles Sturt University-led Consortium (the Consortium²⁶) (Sumsion et al., 2009). The Consortium met regularly with the Early Years Learning Framework Working Party which consisted of representatives from all relevant federal, State and Territory government departments, with the framework being finalised by a smaller group of Consortium members and working party representatives. This Working Party in turn reported to the Early Childhood Development Sub-group ensuring that there were many layers of approval necessary to progress the Early Years Learning Framework. The development took part in 4 stages:

- A literature review of early childhood education and care curriculum and frameworks (Wilks, Nyland, Chancellor, & Elliot, 2008)
- A commissioned background research paper suggesting possible directions for the Early Years Learning Framework (Edwards, Fler, & Nuttall, 2008)
- A discussion paper bringing the information together was released for national consultation (Productivity Agenda Working Group Early Childhood Development Subgroup, 2008)
- Tenders were called for in August 2008 for the following 2 stages in the development of the Early Years Learning Framework. The recommended version of the framework was required to be submitted in May 2009.

26 The Charles Sturt University-led Consortium consisted of a mix of early childhood education and care academics, service providers, practitioners and consultants from around Australia. The members were: Jennifer Sumsion, Sally Barnes, Sandra Cheesman, Linda Harrison, Anne Kennedy, Anne Stonehouse, Leonie Arthur, Donna Berthelsen, Carol Burgess, Kaye Colmer, Jenni Connor, Robyn Dolby, Lyn Fasoli, Miriam Giugni, Joy Goodfellow, Sue Grieshaber, Christine Johnston, Marie Lewis, Tom Lowrie, Felicity McArdle, Carmel Maloney, Michelle Ortlipp Marina Papic, Frances Press, Mel Smith, Jane Torr, Rebecca Watson, Peter Whiteman and Christine Woodrow.

Consultations as part of Stage 4 were undertaken nationally from October 2008 to April 2009 in most States and Territories. There was a national symposium held for key stakeholders, capital city consultations with a small number of regional consultations in Victoria, online submissions, and online forum (the latter established and managed by the Federal Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations). A 6 week trial was undertaken in 27 early childhood education and care services between February and April 2009. The final, approved version of the framework was launched in July 2009 for immediate use.

3.4.1 Alignment with pedagogy

ECEC services had two years to become acquainted with the Early Years Learning Framework prior to commencing processes related to the National Quality Standard. For many services this provided opportunities to think in new ways about children's learning and for the National Quality Standard to be designed with pedagogy as a priority. Quality Area 1 of the National Quality Standard requires that:

- Standard 1.1: An approved learning Framework informs the development of a curriculum that enhances each child's learning and development.

This standard is broken down into 6 elements:

- Element 1.1.1: Curriculum decision making contributes to each child's learning and development outcomes in relation to their identity, connection with community, wellbeing, confidence as learners and effectiveness as communicators.
- Element 1.1.2: Each child's current knowledge, ideas, culture, abilities and interests are the foundation of the programme²⁷.
- Element 1.1.3: The programme, including routines, is organised in ways that maximise opportunities for each child's learning.
- Element 1.1.4: The documentation about each child's program and progress is available to families.
- Element 1.1.5: Every child is supported to participate in the programme.
- Element 1.1.6: Each child's agency is promoted, enabling them to make choices and decisions and to influence events and their world.

Quality Area 1 is not the only aspect of the National Quality Standard that relates to pedagogy. Other standards and elements point to particular practices that are included in the Early Years Learning Framework. For example Quality Area 2: *Children's health and safety* requires an approach to ensuring standards are met that focuses on promoting wellbeing and supporting growing competence, confidence and independence (Australian Children's

²⁷ In Australian early childhood, a programme refers to the plans made to engage children in a range of learning opportunities throughout the day, using routines and activities as appropriate.

Education and Care Quality Authority, 2011c). Quality Area 3: *Physical environment* emphasises the role of the environment in facilitating children's learning. Quality Area 4: *Staffing Arrangements* emphasises the importance of ongoing learning and improvement for staff. Quality Area 5: *Relationships with children* focuses on the importance of relationships for children's learning. Quality Area 6: *Collaborative partnerships with families and communities* emphasises the holistic nature of children's learning: the importance of valuing context. Finally Quality Area 7: *Leadership and service management* identifies the importance of policies, procedures, records, shared values, in creating a positive learning environment.

3.5 Assessment and Rating Instrument

3.5.1 The Instrument

An assessment and rating instrument which was developed under the auspices of the Early Childhood Development Working Group is available for free download under a Creative Commons Licence

(files.acecqa.gov.au/files/Assessment%20and%20Rating/1NQS_Assessment%20and%20Rating%20Instrument_120522_%20FINAL-1.pdf).

The instrument is used by Authorised Officers in preparation for the assessment visit, to record evidence derived from observations, discussions and service documentation during the visit, and to finalise the report after the visit. Services can also use the instrument to prepare for the visit. A completed version is sent to services as part of the final rating report. The instrument presents each element and a description of what that element looks like for each of the ratings. This is not a standardised instrument. However, the validity of the instrument was tested through an evaluation process.

The Instrument is used to rate all the Quality Areas with both structural and process variables included in it. The following examples show two elements within their particular standard and their descriptors according to each rating level as outlined in the Assessment and Rating Instrument.

Further examples are shown in Appendix 9. Staffing Arrangements, a standard component of structural quality, are addressed in Quality Area 4. Standard 4.1 refers in particular to the relevant sections of the National Law and National Regulations.

Whilst staffing is normally considered a wholly structural element of quality, there are components of staffing (such as staff values and performance) that fit more closely to process elements of quality. However, these will be addressed here. The process elements of staffing (for example staff values) are addressed in Standard 4.2. Another key area of structural quality relates to leadership and management. This is addressed in Quality Area 7, which covers governance, training, staff turn-over, pedagogical leadership and staff clearances. Issues of process quality are also addressed in the Quality Areas and Standards. Whilst these are shared across all Quality Areas, there are

several that particularly focus on process issues. One of these is Quality Area 6: *Collaborative partnerships with families and communities* and another is Quality Area 5: *Relationships with children*.

Table 6: An example of the descriptors used for assessing and rating of a curriculum element of quality (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2013e, p. 8)

Rating	Quality Area 1: Educational Programme and Practice Standard 1.1: An approved learning framework informs the development of a curriculum that enhances each child's learning and development
Element 1.1.1	
Working Towards National Quality Standard	Curriculum decision-making sometimes supports children's learning and development outcomes.
Meeting National Quality Standard	Curriculum decision-making contributes to each child's learning and development outcomes in relation to their identity, connection with community, wellbeing, confidence as learners and effectiveness as communicators.
Exceeding National Quality Standard	Curriculum decision-making maximises each child's learning and development opportunities.

3.5.2 Instrument development

The National Quality Standard Assessment and Rating Instrument itself was developed through the following process (Rothman et al., 2012):

- Meetings with the (federal) Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations²⁸, the Assessment Process Team (which included representatives from each State and Territory and the previous regulatory body the National Child Care Accreditation Council). These meetings reviewed processes under the previous national accreditation process, and the learning gained from these, as well as identifying the aims and objectives of the proposed new process.

²⁸ On 18 September 2013 the Department of Education and the Department of Employment was created out of the former Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

- The Australian Council of Educational Research produced a paper addressing the issues, particularly those of validity, reliability, objectivity, feasibility and usability.
- Alternative quality rating systems were investigated, including the ECERS-R (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2005) and the CLASS (Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008), both of which have been used in Australian research.
- A pilot version of the instrument was tested in June 2010 by 21 Long Day Care Centres.
- Following an analysis of that data, a further 189 services were assessed with a revised version.
- The present form of the instrument is derived from this work.

The current instrument can be found at

<http://files.acecqa.gov.au/files/Assessment%20and%20Rating/2014/20140711%20Assessment%20and%20Rating%20Template%20for%20ACECQA%20website.pdf>.

Table 7: An example of the descriptors used for assessing and rating of a structural element of quality - Physical environment (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2013e, p. 18)

Rating	Quality Area 3: Physical environment Standard 3.1: The design and location of the premises is appropriate for the operation of a service.
Element 3.1.1	
Working Towards National Quality Standard	The service is working towards ensuring outdoor and indoor spaces, buildings, furniture, equipment, facilities and resources are suitable for their purpose. This does not pose an unacceptable risk to the safety, health or wellbeing of any child or children being educated and cared for by the service.
Meeting National Quality Standard	Outdoor and indoor spaces, buildings, furniture, equipment, facilities and resources are suitable for their purpose.
Exceeding National Quality Standard	All outdoor and indoor spaces, buildings, furniture, equipment, facilities and resources provide a stimulating learning and care environment for children.

3.5.3 Validation

The Australian Council for Educational Research was commissioned by the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (Rothman et al., 2012) to undertake an evaluation of the assessment and rating process, focusing in the validity and reliability of the assessment and rating process. It aimed to determine if the Assessment and Rating Instrument provided consistent and replicable measures, if the judgments made by different authorised officers were consistent and if there was valid differentiation between the different levels. The evaluation was carried out at the early stage of implementation of the assessment and rating process and collected data about 491 ECEC across all jurisdictions. This was not a random sample because it was made up of those services that had already been through the assessment and rating process. The study used assessment and rating data from draft and final reports, online surveys and focus groups with services and Authorised Officers and discussions with Regulatory Authority staff. Focus groups were held in each capital city across Australia with those from regional and rural areas participating in person or by telephone.

The report of the study describes the methodology thus (Rothman et al., 2012, p. i):

...it was determined that the most appropriate form of validity is factorial validity, which is used to establish the validity of latent – or unobserved – constructs, such as ‘quality’. Factorial validity focuses on whether items that constitute a sub-construct (smaller areas of quality in education and care services) are in fact correlated and can be distinguished from other subconstructs, as well as whether the sub-constructs contribute to the overall construct measured by the instrument. Reliability was assessed by examining the internal consistency of the Instrument. This included an analysis of the variation in ratings given to a service on all elements and standards, across the entire Instrument and within each Quality Area. Another type of validity, face validity, was explored through the questionnaires and focus groups, and the analysis of the language used in the final reports. Participating services and authorised officers completed online questionnaires about the process and attended focus groups to discuss the process. The information gained from these sources supplement the quantitative analyses of the ratings, providing commentary for the interpretation of the data analysis. In addition, a sample of final reports was examined to determine if the language used by authorised officers to describe the services’ practices supported their decisions about the ratings.

The evaluation determined that:

- The process is valid and reliable
- The instrument has high internal reliability and is fit for purpose
- Report writing needs further work – Authorised Officers and Regulatory Authorities acknowledge improvement in this but still require further professional development
- There are meaningful differences between 3 rating levels (“Working Towards”, “Meeting” and “Exceeding”. “Significant Improvement required”

could not be tested because the number of services obtaining this rating was too small)

- The process did not appear to change over time but the assessors grew in confidence
- 47% of all services in the sample were rated as “Meeting” or “Exceeding National Quality Standard”
- Ratings were distributed in the following manner:
 - 40% of Long Day Care services were rated as Meeting or Exceeding National Quality Standard
 - 50% of preschools services were rated as Meeting or Exceeding National Quality Standard
 - Nearly 75% of School Age Care services were rated as Working Towards National Quality Standard
 - 40% of Family Day Care were rated as Meeting or Exceeding National Quality Standard
- Quality varied across the different standards:
 - Quality Areas 1 (Educational Programme and practice) and 3 (Physical environment) were more likely to be rated at Working Towards National Quality Standard
 - Within Quality Area 1, which is divided into 18 standards 1.1 (An approved learning framework informs the development of a curriculum that enhances each child’s learning and development), (Educators and co-ordinators are focused, active and reflective in designing and delivering the program for each child) were more frequently rated as Working Towards National Quality Standard
 - Within Quality Area 3, standard 3.3 (*The service takes an active role in caring for its environment and contributes to a sustainable Future*) were more frequently rated as Working Towards National Quality Standard.

3.5.4 Qualifications Assessment of ECEC staff

The Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority are also responsible for qualifications assessment (<http://acecqa.gov.au/Early-childhood-teaching-qualifications>). A person who holds a qualification identified by The Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority as appropriate can operate as an early childhood teacher: a searchable list of approved qualifications is available on their website. In addition applicants can apply to have their qualifications assessed online. Students in early childhood approved courses may be counted as having the equivalent of a Diploma qualification if they have completed 30% of their degree and are actively working towards full completion (see: <http://acecqa.gov.au/Early-childhood-teaching-qualifications#sthash.9giChdI7.dpuf> and http://files.acecqa.gov.au/files/Newsletters/2013_ACECQAIssue16_FINAL.pdf). Qualification requirements are set out in part 4.4 of the National Regulations.

Higher education and other training providers can apply for their courses to be recognised. Courses are assessed in relation to age focus of the qualifica-

tion, the number of days and scope of the professional practicum experience, curriculum coverage, and any links to teachers registration. (<http://www.-acecqa.gov.au/Approval-of-early-childhood-education-Programmes>)

3.6 Summary

In Part 3 the components of the assessment and rating system were discussed in detail including explanation of the approvals required to operate a service, the components of the quality improvement plan, the steps in the assessment and rating process, and the peer review process. A clarification of the Excellent rating was also provided. The procedures and processes undertaken nationally to implement the National Quality Framework and the National Quality Standard (including consultation processes) were described, and an explanation of the development of the assessment and rating instrument and its validation was provided. Assurance about assessment of qualifications was provided by clarifying the role of the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority in this process. Since the National Quality Framework took effect from 1 January 2012, there has been some time for research and consultation to be undertaken concerning the introduction and implementation of the National Quality Framework (the Early Years Learning Framework has been available since 2009). Part 4 considers recent developments and scholarly debates concerning the National Quality Framework.

4 SOME SCHOLARLY DEBATES ON THE NATIONAL QUALITY FRAMEWORK

Quality has been an ongoing concern in ECEC and was one of the reasons the National Early Childhood Development Strategy was introduced. Part 4 contemplates the issue of quality in relation to international standards and fees. It also considers the cost of ECEC, shifts resulting from the change of government (September, 2013), and matters related to the professionalization of ECEC.

4.1 Does quality in Australia match up to quality internationally?

Often in Australia it is claimed that the overall quality of our early childhood services is good, and at least comparable with the best in the world. A recent study (Tayler, Cleveland, Thorpe, Ishimine, & Cloney, 2013) compared scores on the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) (Pianta et al., 2008) and three subscales of the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-R: Space and furnishings, Personal Care Routines and Activities - Harms et al., 2005) in order to examine this claim. Early childhood services participating in the study were randomly sampled from groups stratified by location (metropolitan, regional, rural, remote) service type and socio-economic status. Within the selected services a class was selected that had more than 5 children aged between 3-4 years. All children and families in the selected classes were invited to participate and the sample then consisted of 146 rooms from Long Day Care centres, 79 from kindergarten/preschools and 59 from Family Day Care schemes. The data showed that the average quality score from the ECERS-R was lower in Long Day Care centres and Family Day Care compared to kindergarten/preschool programmes. The international comparison showed that quality in the classroom organisation and instructional support categories in the ECERS-R was higher in Australian kindergarten/preschools than in the United States comparators. However in the non-academic domain of emotional support the scores were similar. The Australian data was collected in 2010 before one could expect any changes arising from the national quality agenda. To date there is no more recent data published to determine the impact of the changes on internationally standardised tests of quality such as the CLASS and ECERS-R. The latest update on this research can be accessed at http://education.unimelb.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/857452/E4Kids_Research_-_Bulletin_Issue5.pdf.

4.2 Relationship between quality and fees

There is an ongoing debate as to the cost of quality improvements for services and for parents. For example, the Child Care Alliance, a national association for Long Day Care Centres, argue that many mothers across Australia do not return to work because of the high costs of care (see <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/childcare-costs-keep-nsw-mums-out-of-the-workforce/story-fni0cx12-1226682492393>). Mission Australia, a national non-government social welfare agency, argues that if subsidies for child care were reduced 37% of the families they surveyed would reduce their work hours and 23% would no longer work at all (see <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-02-04/childcare-rebate-warning-over-childcare-subsidies/5236342>). Quality improvement measures identified in the National Quality Standards (such as improved staff qualifications) are seen as the drivers of increased costs to parents. For example in the online Drum on 12 June 2012 Tudge and Frydenberg wrote (<http://www.abc.net.au/unleashed/4071022.html>):

Two measures have driven costs up. Under her “National Quality Framework”, Gillard [Australia’s Prime Minister at the time] has mandated childcare centres to reduce their staff/child ratios for very young children from one staff member for every five children, to one staff member for every four. She has also introduced higher qualification requirements for all childcare staff. One does not need to be a financial wizard to realise that such policies would make the costs of operating childcare centres more expensive, and hence would push childcare fees up as costs were recovered.

Others argue that it is not the quality improvements that cause a cost problem but the cap imposed on parental eligibility for subsidy (see <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/quality-reforms-not-to-blame-for-childcare-costs/story-fn59niix-1226816611289#>). In a recent report Early Childhood Australia (2013) used the data from the government child care portal (mychild.gov.au) and Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority ratings of services to determine if higher quality ratings were associated with higher fees for parents. The analysis only included Long Day Care providers from NSW and ACT who had been assessed under the National Quality Framework (64 centres). As fees are different for different age groups, the study only assessed fees for 4 year old children. Fees ranged from \$50 to \$125 per day. They found no relationship between fees and services’ quality ratings (see Table 8) suggesting that the arguments around the cost of quality improvement to parents are not relevant. While anecdotal cases witnessed by the writers would seem to reinforce this conclusion, it may be problematic because of the limited size of the sample, the different starting points for services in each jurisdiction because of differences in previous regulatory requirements, and the additional subsidies that may have been attracted by ECEC services who were offering preschool education for children in the year prior to primary school.

Table 8: The relationship between fee level and quality rating (Table copied from Early Childhood Australia, 2013, p. 3)

National Quality Standard Assessment Rating	Fee Level					
	\$56-70	\$71-85	\$86-100	\$101-115	\$116-130	
Exceeding National Quality Standard	20%	30%	30%	10%	10%	100%
Meeting National Quality Standard	18%	46%	36%	0%	0%	100%
Working Towards National Quality Standard	29%	34%	24%	10%	3%	100%

4.3 The cost of early childhood care and education

In a report (commissioned by Early Childhood Australia²⁹ and Goodstart Early Learning Inc³⁰) released very recently, Brennan and Adamson (2014) argued there is a pressing need to reform aspects of early childhood provisioning and financing. They point out that:

The current combination of a capped, means-tested subsidy (Child Care Benefit) with a non-means-tested rebate (Child Care Rebate) covering 50 per cent of out-of-pocket expenses up to \$15,000 of expenses per child is not only confusing for parents, its distributional impacts push and pull in different directions. CCB delivers maximum assistance to lower income families while CCR, being tied to actual fees paid, delivers the greatest benefits to families who pay the most for child care – families at the higher end of the income scale (p. 2).

Issues debated are those related to fees and participation. Does eliminating fees to parents increase participation and/or increase women’s participation in the workforce? The report examines the international evidence.

The authors propose the best option at present is to offer a single, income-tested subsidy. The maximum rate of this would be calculated based on the real costs of delivering a high quality service with the base rate between 35-50% of these costs. Assessment of reasonable costs should not penalise

29 “Early Childhood Australia is the peak early childhood advocacy organisation, acting in the interests of young children, their families and those in the early childhood field” (from http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/about_us.html)

30 Goodstart Early Learning is “... owned by four of Australia’s most trusted charitable organisations, The Benevolent Society, Mission Australia, the Brotherhood of St Laurence and Social Ventures Australia, Goodstart operates as a not-for-profit. This means all surplus generated is invested back into our early learning initiatives, for the benefit of every child” (from <http://www.goodstart.org.au/about-goodstart/goodstart-early-learning>)

those services that operate with higher qualified staff or a better staff:child ratio than the required minimum.

In the interests of optimising early childhood development and education, a universal system would provide access for children whose parents are not workforce participants, though for a limited number of hours (p. 4).

Historically in Australia the provision of Long Day Care has been linked to work-related needs of parents, rather than being an entitlement for all children. The Review of Child Care and Early Learning currently being undertaken by the Productivity Commission under the direction of the new government (Productivity Commission, 2014) might, under other political circumstances be seen as an opportunity to progress new ways of providing subsidized early learning for a wider group of children, rather than reinforcing one set of needs only. However, the current right wing swing creates a focus on early childhood services as support for working parents rather than a focus on the rights of the child and/or social justice. The introduction of subsidized universal access to preschool education from 2010 was a progressive national step but this subsidy has only been provided for 4 year olds and is seen as vulnerable because it is governed by a one-year agreement between the Australian Governments and States and Territories (National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education 2013) (http://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/education/early_childhood_education/early_childhood_education.pdf).

This failure to recognize the importance of early childhood services for children under 3 years of age is reflected in the current review of early childhood services (Productivity Commission, 2014) which proposes that children under 3 do not need education services and their needs can be met by staff with minimal qualifications (a Certificate III – equivalent in general to a 6 months post-secondary school qualification).

4.4 Changes arising from a change of government

Early childhood policy in Australia (and elsewhere) appears to be particularly susceptible to changes in government ideology. The international literature promoting the importance of early childhood certainly influenced the (then) Australian Labour Government's push to focus on improving early childhood services in order to better support Australia's international competitiveness. The current Coalition government appear to believe such reforms are unsustainable (Karvelas, 2011) and this belief is likely to impact significantly on the reforms if Australia is to follow the pattern set by both the UK (Butler, 2013) and New Zealand (Te One, 2013) following the election of their respective conservative governments.

Since the introduction of the National Quality Standard there have been many diverse opinions expressed about its focus, ranging from the perceived burden of additional administration and costs of higher staffing and qualification standards, to overwhelming support for improved quality. The

current Australian Government has flagged several issues that it wishes to address, including refining or removing some of the operational matters relating to staff and qualifications approval processes. Recently all jurisdictions agreed to changes to the regulations giving greater flexibility for centre-based services to meet some of the staffing requirements, and amending some structural requirements for Family Day Care (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2014).

Any changes that reflect lowering of qualification standards are open to criticism and provoke a dilemma in relation to supply of services as opposed to quality. In turn they may serve to raise suspicions about the government's intentions and increase perceptions about lack of commitment to raising standards. A decision of the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority Board in 2013 independent of government can be seen to reinforce this view.

One example of these changes is the amended criteria for qualifications. Originally the National Quality Framework defined an early childhood teacher as a person who held an approved early childhood teaching qualification. Recent amendments now include those with primary teaching qualifications (<http://acecqa.gov.au/Early-childhood-teaching-qualifications>) as recognised early childhood teachers:

In September 2013, ACECQA determined that a person who holds ALL of the following will be recognised as equivalent to an early childhood teacher

- a primary teaching qualification that includes at least a focus on children aged 5 to 8 years old (e.g. a qualification with a focus on children aged 3 to 8 or 5 to 12) AND
- teacher registration in Australia (or accreditation in New South Wales) AND
- an approved education and care diploma or higher qualification (e.g. approved graduate diploma) published on ACECQA's qualification lists.

This transitional measure will be reviewed in 2016. However, opposition has been expressed. For example, Margetts (2014) argues:

This is really only the tip of the iceberg and there are more insidious changes brought about by the previous and current federal governments that threaten the quality of early childhood/childcare delivery, and have the potential to undermine the 2009 reforms to early childhood (p. 2).

The literature on the link between qualifications and quality consistently refers to appropriate qualifications. Margetts and others believe that primary teaching qualifications are not appropriate and an acceptance of these (even in the short term) significantly impacts on the quality improvement agenda.

4.5 Route to professionalisation in centre-based and home-based ECE

There is considerable debate as to the most effective path to follow to improve professionalisation. One path involves agencies, such as governments and their contractors creating an accepted discourse, followed by implementation and monitoring to ensure practice follows the identified standards. One could argue this is the path followed in Australia with the development of the National Law and the National Quality Framework. These identify an official position on what an early childhood educator is and does. Such an approach can tend to make dominant discourse appear “incontestable” (Cumming, Sumsion, & Wong, 2013, p. 224) and encourage professionals to focus on interpretation of, and adherence to, the ‘rules’. This quality assurance approach is drawn from business (Ishimine, Tayler, & Thorpe, 2009), requires a shared understanding of quality, and assumes that quality both is the same in any setting across the country, and is measurable.

The alternative approach could be characterised as a bottom-up progress where the social constructions of those involved in the field collaboratively shape an agreed discourse (Simpson, 2010). In the Nordic countries this is seen in the co-construction of learning between each individual educator and child dyad (Karila, 2012). Highly trained early childhood pedagogues are expected to have the knowledge and skills to enact high quality practice in each unique context. This is not the process currently operating in Australia where compliance to the “rules” appears to be the strongest focus (Sims, Forrest, Semann, & Slattery, forthcoming).

Family Day Care is sometimes viewed as ‘less professional’ than centre-based care. For example Lyons (2012) argues that it is not appropriate for Family Day Care educators to be included in the early childhood workforce as their work is too close to that of mothers to be easily separable, and this association “... diminishes the status of Long Day Care workers and their labour” (p. 125). Certainly there is a long standing belief that the work of Family Day Care Educators is more focused on caring than is the work of centre-based educators (Cook, Davis, Williamson, Harrison, & Sims, 2013). Yet in Australia the National Quality Framework includes Family Day Care educators and they are expected to demonstrate practice that meets the same standards as centre-based educators. The first Family Day Care Scheme in Australia to be awarded an Excellent Rating was announced in January 2014 (Wynnum Family Day Care) indicating that it is certainly possible for Family Day Care schemes to do so (<http://www.acecqa.gov.au/australia-s-first-family-day-care-service-rated-excellent>).

4.6 Summary

Part 4 considered issues of quality, cost, the 2013 national government change and professionalization of ECEC. Comparisons of quality internationally are not possible yet because insufficient time has elapsed for research to be published following the changes brought about by the National Quality Framework. There are ongoing debates about the relationship between quality and fees (one study concluded there was none), and about paths to professionalization. Part 4 suggests that changes in policy are susceptible to changes in government, and subsequently, government ideology, which often produces further change. The matters highlighted in Part 4 have been reflected in the international ECEC literature for some time, which indicates concern in other countries and jurisdictions beside Australia. Part 5 provides up to date information about assessment and rating data based on implementation of the National Quality Standard.

5 REPORTING AND EARLY TRENDS IN QUALITY ASSESSMENTS AND RATINGS

The aim of Part 5 is to explain in more detail the processes undertaken in using the assessment and rating instrument and the outcomes to date of these assessments. Data are gathered for the purpose of supporting quality improvement and as part of this, assigning a rating in each of the Quality Areas and an overall rating for each service. The results are publicly available on the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority website so parents, educators and any other interested parties such as policy makers can access them. The outcomes are reported by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority in its quarterly reports. (See Part 2.4.2 for how the National Quality Standard aims to support quality improvement and a list of the seven Quality Areas that comprise the standard; Part 3.2.2 for details of the quality improvement plan; Part 3.2.3 for the steps in the assessment and rating process; Part 3.2.4 for ratings; Part 3.2.5 for the review process; Part 3.2.7 for information about authorized officers who undertake the assessments; Part 3.4.1 and Appendix 6 for a description of the seven Quality Areas that are assessed, and Part 3.4.1 for identification of the standard and elements of Quality Area 1 as it relates to pedagogy). Part 5 provides data about assessment using the National Quality Standard up to 31 March 2014. It also details matters related to the daily operation of the National Quality Standard such as supervisor certificates and waivers; as well as information about national auditing arrangements.

5.1 Reporting Obligations

The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority is obliged to keep and publish data about the assessment and regulation of ECEC services. The State and Territory regulatory agencies undertake data collection about their areas of responsibility as required by ACECQA's Board. In addition to its annual report the ACECQA publishes quarterly snapshots (summary reports of national progress) beginning in 2013 (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2013a, 2013f, 2013g, 2014; Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2014). These snapshots report on the services assessed and rated against the National Quality Standard.

5.2 ECEC service assessment and rating data

The most recent ACECQA Quarterly Snapshot was published in May 2014 with data to 31 March 2014.

5.2.1 Service ratings

Across Australia there are 13,597 centre-based services which make up 95% of all services under the jurisdiction of the National Quality Standard. There are 761 Family Day Care services. By March 2014, 35% of ECEC services across Australia had received a quality rating. The proportion of approved services varies across the States/Territories. The lowest proportion of services rated in Western Australia (15% of all eligible services) and South Australia (19% of all eligible services) are the lowest. The National Law only came into effect in Western Australia in August 2012 and South Australia needed to set up a new Regulatory Authority to undertake assessments. In the Northern Territory, 50% of all eligible services have received a quality rating. In the other States and Territories the proportion rates are: Australian Capital Territory = 39%, New South Wales = 42%, Queensland = 33%, Tasmania = 35% and Victoria = 38%. Nationally 36% of centre-based services have a rating and 27% of Family Day Care services.

Of those services rated, 61% were rated at *Meeting* or *Exceeding* the National Quality Standard. Services are required to be rated at *Exceeding* in two areas and *Meeting* in the other areas to be awarded the overall rating of *Exceeding* National Quality Standard. The areas in which services are most likely to achieve *Exceeding* or *Meeting* National Quality Standard are:

- Quality Area 4 - Staffing arrangements
- Quality Area 5 - Relationships with children
- Quality Area 6 – Collaborative partnerships with families and communities.

Table 9: Numbers of services receiving each rating level by jurisdiction (Copied from Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2014, pp. 11, Table 17)

	Significant improvement needed	Working towards NQS	Meeting NQS	Exceeding NQS	Excellent	Total
ACT	0	78	23	24	0	125
NSW	2	992	672	367	2	2035
NT	0	89	7	11	0	107
QLD	1	274	274	336	5	890
SA	1	76	48	87	4	216
TAS	0	51	13	15	0	79
VIC	1	349	703	426	0	1479
WA	3	83	34	34	0	154
TOTAL	8	199	1774	1300	11	5085
% of Quality Ratings	0%	39%	35%	26%	0%	100%

A service receives a *Working Towards* rating if this level is given in any of the 7 Quality Areas, even if the other areas might be rated as *Exceeding*. Approximately 35% of services awarded the *Working Towards* are actually *Meeting*

or *Exceeding* in 5 of the 7 Quality Areas and around 81% in more than half of the 18 standards. Around 39% of centre-based services received a *Working Towards* rating, 35% received a *Meeting* the National Quality Standard rating and 26% were rated as *Exceeding* the National Quality Standard. For Family Day Care services the percentages are: *Working Towards* = 45%, *Meeting* = 28% and *Exceeding* = 26%.

If a service is rated at below the National Quality Standard in any one area the overall rating reflects this low standard (<http://files.acecqa.gov.au/files/Information%20sheets/ACECQA%20Information%20Sheet-%20-%20NQF%20Rating%20System.pdf>).

Significant Improvement required ratings were given to:

- 2 services in Quality Area 1
- 8 services in Quality Area 2
- 4 services in Quality Area 3
- 3 services in Quality Area 4
- 2 services in Quality Area 5
- 0 services in Quality Area 6
- 3 services in Quality Area 7.

There is no clear pattern indicating that the socio-economic disadvantage/advantage of an area impacts on the likelihood of achieving *Meeting* or *Exceeding* ratings. A number of services struggle to meet the sustainability requirements included in Quality Area 3 and as a result, the recent Productivity Commission Draft report (Productivity Commission, 2014) recommends these be abolished.

Around 25% of very remote services have been rated (compared to 33% of metropolitan and 45% of inner regional services). Of the very remote services rated, 51% were awarded *working towards* compared to 40% in major cities but the data is still too incomplete to draw any conclusions.

5.2.2 Supervisor Certificates

There have been 78,649 supervisor certificates issued (see Ch. 3.2 of this paper). Most of these (98.6%) have gone to individuals. Supervisor certificates are issued to those who are eligible to be in day-to-day charge of an approved service. It is also possible to obtain a Prescribed Class Certificate (1.4% of certificates issued). These are issued to those who are in charge of a site in which the approved early education and care service is one component of the services operating (for example a principal of a primary school that also offers an education and care service).

5.2.3 Approved Providers

There were 8886 approved providers by 31 March 2014 and 7258 of these

were operating services³¹. Of these providers 83% operate one service only, 16% 2-24 services and 1% more than 24 services.

5.2.4 Waivers

A small proportion (6.1%) of services is operating with waivers. 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 for two types of waivers. Providers apply to the Regulatory Authority in their state or territory for consideration of a waiver. Waivers come in two forms:

- *Service waivers*: these have no expiry date. Services are required to comply with the conditions identified in the waiver and this does not impact on the rating for the National Quality Standard. Most of these (82.3%) may reflect an ongoing issue that cannot be fixed, but may be met by other means. Service waivers are granted if the service can demonstrate genuine difficulty in meeting the requirements of the National Quality Framework, children's safety, health and well-being is not compromised or at risk and a plan is in place for the service to meet the requirements by the time the waiver is due to expire.
- *Temporary Waivers*: these apply for up to 12 months and again do not impact on the service's rating against the National Quality Standard. Most of these (95.8%) are for services struggling to meet staffing requirements (most often the case in regional and remote services). In order to obtain a temporary waiver services need to demonstrate the reasons they are unable to comply with the regulation/element, details and evidence of any attempts to comply and measures being taken to protect children's wellbeing and safety. For example, due to the transitional regulation (regulation 347 of the National Regulations) that requires more qualified educators than the National Law, the majority of waivers in Tasmania in 2013 are expected to reduce by the end of 2013 (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2013f).
- A waiver can only be issued if children's safety, health and well-being is not compromised or at risk. Individual results for rated services, providers and certified supervisors are available online at <http://acecqa.gov.au/national-registers>.

31 There is no data reported to identify why providers might be approved but not operating services. Many approved providers operate one service only thus high staff turn-over in the sector might account for this discrepancy.

5.3 National auditing arrangements

The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority has developed a number of processes to continually self evaluate. For example a range of committees or working groups have been established:

- *Quality and Consistency Committee* - membership from the organisation itself, State and Territory regulatory authorities and the Australian Government. The committee provides a platform to ensure the National Quality Framework is implemented consistently across Australia
- *National Consistency Action Plan* has been developed which outlines how all parties to the legislation will work together to achieve the aims in a consistent manner
- *Communications Working Group* is tasked with promoting consistency in communications released about the National Quality Framework
- *Implementation Working Group* is responsible for identifying, prioritizing and resolving implementation issues
- *IT System Data Validation Working Group* developed a mechanism to ensure state, territory and national authorities are able to manage the integrity and consistency of data.
- *Training Working Group* advises on the training needed for staff in Regulatory Authorities.

All of these groups are established with collaborative membership and report to the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority Board and contribute to evaluating trends and needs in the administration of the National Quality Framework across jurisdictions as part of monitoring and promoting national consistency.

The first audit was on conditions placed on approvals undertaken in early 2013 and reported findings to the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (SCSEEC) in June 2013. This information is not yet available publically. Other national audits include a review of the administration of waivers granted to ensure these are nationally consistent (not available publically). In 2012-13 another audit examined the administrative burden imposed on services under the National Quality Framework. This included a cost assessment of the major administrative obligations and a survey of perceptions of administrative burden (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2013h). This report identified that those who had completed the assessment process were less likely to report the process as being burdensome. Services rated the transition to the new assessment process as most challenging and that both documenting educational programmes and assessing children's learning were the most burdensome elements of the National Quality Standard.

5.4 Summary

From available assessment data, 39% of services were rated as *Working towards* National Quality Standard; 35% as *Meeting* National Quality Standard and 26% as *Exceeding* National Quality Standard. There were eight services nationally that required *Significant Improvement* and 11 that were rated as *Excellent* (percentages are not available as they were less than one percent). The number of very remote services that have been assessed (25%) is less than the number of metropolitan (33%) and inner regional services (45%). Interestingly, 26% of Centre based and 26% of Family Day Care services were rated as Exceeding National Quality Standard. Quality Areas 4, 5 and 6 (Staffing arrangements Relationships with children, and Partnerships with families and communities, respectively) were those in which services were most likely to achieve *Exceeding* or *Meeting* National Quality Standard. Quality Areas 1, 2, 3 and 7 (Educational programme and practice; Children's health and safety; Physical environment and Quality; Leadership and service management, respectively) were those where services were less likely to achieve *Exceeding* or *Meeting* National Quality Standard.

6 EVALUATIONS: PRELIMINARY, IN PROGRESS, AND PROPOSED

In Part 6 we discuss recent developments in evaluations, reviews and research related to the National Quality Framework. Like governments globally, both the previous and the current Coalition government are interested in the return on investment in ECEC and have measures in place to undertake this work. Research programmes and reviews also contribute to this agenda.

6.1 Impact of the National Quality Framework

Implementation of the National Quality Framework is in its infancy, having been officially initiated on 1 January 2012. Combined with changes of governments across the nation, and with all but two State and Territory jurisdictions aligned politically with the Coalition Australian Government (elected September, 2013), there is growing activity in monitoring its impact, reviewing and realigning, and researching aspects of the National Quality Framework. It could be expected that this activity will raise new issues and louder debates that will give rise to further research and evaluation initiatives. In addition to some focused research projects under way, the national early childhood research environment provides periodic and longitudinal data and information that can assist researchers wishing to focus on the policy agenda and quality improvement.

The ACECQA established a Research Advisory Committee (RAC) who met for the first time in April 2013 (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2013b). The Committee agreed on the following two research questions (p. 47):

- Is the NQF delivering improved outcomes³² to children?
- To what extent is the design of the regulatory model helping to deliver these outcomes?

The RAC is currently developing research partnerships to pursue this research agenda. There are as yet no publically available outcomes from this agenda.

32 ACECQA do not identify what they mean by "outcomes for children".

6.2 Evaluations

As many ECEC services have yet to undergo assessments, very few reports of early evaluation studies are available. Most of the available information comes from required annual self reporting and government commissioned evaluation studies (Sumsion et al., in press).

6.2.1 Baseline evaluation of the Early Years Learning Framework

A government commissioned study was undertaken by Monash University aimed at establishing a baseline of existing practice related to the Early Years Learning Framework (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), 2011). The project had two parts:

- A qualitative study to establish a baseline of existing practice in early childhood education, where the Early Years Learning Framework is yet to be or is in the very early stages of being adopted.
- A quantitative study that gained a picture of the overall adoption of the Early Years Learning Framework across relevant early childhood education and care settings, from a representative sample of educators involved in the planning and delivery of early childhood education.

In the study, day-long field visits were made to 20 different early childhood programmes (preschool, Long Day Care and Family Day Care) across all States/Territories. Data was collected through surveys and staff interviews. Results indicated that many staff were driven by maturational theories of child development and were unaware of many other theories and approaches upon which the Early Years Learning Framework was based. Whilst educators were showing use of reflection, they had difficulties finding time and space to reflect effectively. Services were working towards understanding the Early Years Learning Framework but were lacking in relevant professional development opportunities. There was strong evidence that staff were using play-based pedagogies but family involvement in the service tended to be controlled by the educators.

The purpose of the quantitative part of the study (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), 2012; Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), Fler, Shah, & Peers, no date) was to survey early childhood professionals who were working during the recent (2011-2012) phase of implementation and roll-out of the Early Years Learning Framework to determine levels of usage and attitudes towards the management of this implementation process for their daily routine. A number of additional questions were asked of respondents including level and field of qualification, years of service, language background, age, and access to professional development specifically associated with the new Early Years Learning Framework, which provides a rich source of important data as the basis for future policy and reform of the sector. An important tool used to collect data was the Concerns-Based

Adoption Model (C-BAM) which is both a survey instrument and a conceptual framework for interpreting data. C-BAM was selected to gather data that can be used to both describe *and* explain how early childhood staff in Australia were progressing in relation to the use of the Early Years Learning Framework. This part of the project collected data from 1495 services of all types across all States/Territories (an overall response rate of 51%). The key findings of the evaluation were:

- At this phase of the implementation of the Early Years Learning Framework, Australian early childhood educators are interested, but inexperienced users of the Early Years Learning Framework
- Early childhood educators are generally positively oriented towards the Early Years Learning Framework
- Educators in Long Day Care centres have the highest Early Years Learning Framework information needs
- Levels of awareness of the Early Years Learning Framework heightened in outer and very remote regions for Family Day Care educators
- Educators in remote regions have the greatest need for information about the Early Years Learning Framework.

6.2.2 Goodstart Early Learning

Goodstart Early Learning, Australia's largest ECEC provider, commissioned an evaluation of their services' engagement with the National Quality Framework. The evaluation was led by project team member Prof Jennifer Sumsion (Sumsion et al., 2013). Project team member Gerardine (Gerry) Mulhearn was also a member of the evaluation team. The evaluation report is unpublished and the following material is used with permission of Goodstart Early Learning and additional information is not yet publically available nor able to be included in this report. Eleven Goodstart Early Learning Centres across New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory that had been assessed were purposively selected to take part in the study. Participants were the Centre Directors and the Early Learning Consultants supporting those centres. Data collection consisted of individual case studies constructed from site visits, focused and unfocused conversations and artefacts; a meeting of participants and the research team; and reflective questions for the Early Learning Consultants.

Early childhood educators [working directly with children] considered that the assessment and ratings process was more demanding than that which they had previously experienced. They also reported that Goodstart Early Learning was supporting them with a bank of innovative ideas and strategies. Some services reported concerns related to lack of understanding of the new system, and of the organisational strategies put in place by Goodstart Early Learning aimed at helping them engage with the National Quality Standard. A clear role for pedagogical leadership and the need for professional development related to the National Quality Standard were identified.

6.3 Research Projects

We are aware of two studies recently funded by the Australian Research Council as follows. These projects commenced in 2013. Data collection is still in its early stages. Hence, we could only report briefly on project intent and more detailed information including methodology is not yet available for public circulation. Both of these projects focus specifically on the Early Years Learning Framework. It can be expected that they will provide useful findings in that play and play-based learning, and continuity of learning between ECEC and primary school seem to be highly controversial topics.

ARC-funded Study 1: Education meets play

This three year study of how the new national learning framework for children zero to five years influences educators' practice is being undertaken by Sumsion, McArdle, Shield and Grieshaber. The main question is investigated through addressing the following sub-questions (Sumsion et al., in press, p. 10):

- How do educators bring together free play and play-based learning?
- How do educators provide for play-based learning in their daily work with children and what intentional pedagogical approaches do they use?
- How does professional networking operate within the context of a new and compulsory curriculum document and specifically, how do educators seek and give advice on new ways of understanding and enacting play-based learning?
- What are the most significant changes educators have enacted in their practices, as a result of new understandings about play-based learning?

This study takes a critical sociological frame and addresses the questions using a mixed method approach.

ARC-funded Study 2: Continuity and change in curriculum and pedagogies as children start school

This is a study undertaken by Professors Sue Dockett and Robert Perry from Charles Sturt University. The study aims to look at the impact of both the Early Years Learning Framework and the Australian Curriculum on transition to school.

Another study, not funded by the ARC is as follows:

Early childhood educators and change

Working with infants and toddlers is sometimes perceived as less prestigious than working with 3-5 year old children, and there is often a perception that this work should resemble a scaled down preschool programme. In such a context it is not unreasonable to assume that those working with infants and toddlers may have difficulty grappling with some of the changes associated with the National Quality Framework. In their study about infant and toddler educators working in two high quality services, Fleet and Farrell (in press) found that the educators were able to reflect on the changes in the practice arising from their work with the Early Years Learning Framework

and that they shared concerns associated with greater accountability and more paperwork are evident across the sector (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2013h).

Research undertaken by Parent organisations

Research undertaken parent organisations can also be useful in identifying parents' perspectives on the changes experienced by the sector. The recent Productivity Commission report (Productivity Commission, 2014) emphasised the need to reduce costs for parents as a key element underpinning some of the recommendations made. Interestingly, research undertaken by The ParentHood (<http://www.theparenthood.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/The-Parenthood-media-release-Stunning-results-from-Australia-largest-parent-survey.pdf>) suggests that parents would be willing to carry increased costs as long as they were sure their children were receiving a good quality service.

6.4 National early childhood research programmes

There are national research programmes that can, in the interim, be used to help determine the impact of policy change on the lives of young children. The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth has published two report cards on the well-being of young Australians (Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, 2008, 2013) using publicly available data. The most recent report card (2013) shows that Australian children are not performing well in reading, writing and numeracy compared to other OECD countries, and that, although most young children attend an early childhood program in the year before they begin school, the participation rate is still below that of most OECD countries.

In contrast, in the latest of the annual Prime Minister's Reports specifically addressing the Closing the Gap agenda (Australian Government, 2013a), it is reported that:

The target for early childhood education will be met this year. Ninety one per cent of Indigenous children living in remote areas were enrolled in preschool Programmes in the year before full-time school in 2011. This data indicates the target of a 95 per cent enrolment rate will be met this year (p. 14).

Enrolment figures are not necessarily indicative of attendance.

6.4.1 The Australian Early Childhood Development Index

The Australian Early Childhood Development Census³³ (<http://www.rch.org.au/aedi/>) (Australian Government, 2013b) is a population measure of children's development taken in the year in which children begin school.

33 This has very recently changed its name. It was previously the Australian Early Childhood Development Index.

The assessment of physical health and wellbeing, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills, and communication skills and general knowledge is carried out by each child's teacher. Results from the AEDC can be downloaded from the website, at the level of specific communities, or more generally at state level. Nationwide reports were prepared in 2009 and 2012 (Australian Government, 2013b; Centre for Community Child Health & Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, 2009).

In the 2012 survey, data on 96.5% of children who were attending their first year of full-time schooling in 2012 was provided. Of these children:

- 22% were developmentally vulnerable on one or more of the AEDI domains and 10.8% on two or more
- Indigenous children are twice as likely to be developmentally vulnerable compared with non-Indigenous children
- Girls are less likely to be developmentally vulnerable than boys, although outcomes for boys had improved compared to the 2009 report
- Less children overall are developmentally vulnerable in 2012 compared to 2009 with the exception of the physical health and wellbeing domain where percentages of vulnerable children did not change (9.3%).

The data is raising lots of questions for schools, communities, ECEC services and parents. It is not clear why for example the levels of vulnerabilities in the physical health and wellbeing domain have not changed overall. Aspects of this domain include physical readiness for the school day, physical independence and gross and fine motor skills. A child who is developmentally vulnerable in this domain is more likely to:

- Have at least sometimes come to school unprepared with regard to appropriate clothing, being tired or hungry
- Have difficulties in developing handedness, independence and co-ordination
- Have difficulty with fine and gross motor skills, poor overall energy levels and physical co-ordination.

6.4.2 Growing up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children

The Australian Government is currently funding a longitudinal study tracking the growth and development of Australian children [called the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC)] (<http://www.growing-upinaustralia.gov.au/>). The study is ongoing and consists of two cohorts of children who, when the study began in 2004, were 3-19 months of age and 4-5 years of age.

The study aims to examine the impact of Australia's unique social and cultural environment on children born in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The study has a broad, multi-disciplinary base, and examines policy-relevant questions about children's and adolescents' development and wellbeing. It addresses a range of research questions about parenting, family relation-

ships, childhood education, non-parental child care and health. By tracking children over time, the study will be able to determine the individual, family, and broader social and environmental factors that are associated with consistency and change in developmental trajectories. The study will further understanding of child and adolescent development, inform social policy debate, and will be used to identify opportunities for early intervention and prevention strategies in policy areas concerning children and families.

Information about methodology and data collection can be accessed via the main LSAC website (<http://www.growingupinaustralia.gov.au/>). Research reports from LSAC include:

- early childhood care and education (Harrison et al., 2009)
- wellbeing of infants and children (Wake et al., 2008)
- parent and child wellbeing and the impact of employment (Strazdins et al., 2011)
- employment and families with young children (Baxter, Gray, Alexander, Strazdins, & Bittman, 2007)
- parenting and families (Zubrick, Smith, Nicholson, Sanson, & Jackiewicz, 2008).

In addition, researchers can have access to the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children data. In one example (Sims & Phan, 2013), outcomes in cognitive development were found to have improved for children 3-19 months of age who reached the ages of 8-9 in 2011-12 compared to the children in the older cohort who were aged 8-9 in 2007-8. These children experienced a very different policy environment in their early childhood years, which may have had an impact on their schooling outcomes.

6.5 National Reviews

6.5.1 Regulatory Burden and the National Quality Framework

At the end of 2013 the ACECQA published their review of the regulatory burden of the National Quality Framework (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2013h). The review consists of both a longitudinal perception survey of 5400 service providers, and a Standard Cost Model (SCM) assessment undertaken with 32 providers across two jurisdictions. Data from the survey demonstrated that 78% of providers were very supportive (42 %) or supportive (36 %) of the National Quality Framework, and those who had actually been through the assessment process were more likely to be supportive than those who had not. Those who had been rated were also more likely to see the process as less burdensome. There is no data on the regulatory burden prior to the introduction of the National Quality Standards to make comparisons, however, a number of participants in the research believe that the administrative burden is less under the national law than it was under previous licensing and accreditation systems (33% strongly, and 32% somewhat agree) but there are specific groups of service providers

who believe the burden is greater under the new system. These groups are community managed and not-for-profit providers, centre-based providers, providers whose service/s formerly operated under just a state or territory licensing and standards regulatory system, and providers in NSW (section 6.3). In contrast those providers who were under the jurisdiction of the previous National Child Care Accreditation Council believed the burden is less under the new system. For many, the greatest burden was associated with transitioning to the new system, which suggests that the burden may be reduced as time goes by. The areas service providers found most burdensome were Quality Improvement Plans, documenting children's learning (Family Day Care providers also identified this area) and quality assessment and ratings visits. The estimated cost associated with administration related to educational programming is presented in Appendix 10. This cost was associated with the time it took staff to address the requirements. The paperwork associated with applying for supervisor certificates was also identified as problematic, along with paperwork delays and inconsistency in application outcomes. Clearer information about administrative obligations (for example the level of detail required in policies and procedures) was identified as necessary.

The initial report of the 2013 review aimed to address service provider experiences of regulatory burden. A subsequent report (not yet available) will recommend strategies for addressing this burden.

6.5.2 Inquiry into future options for childcare and early childhood learning

The current Coalition government has committed to review a range of aspects of the system. Changes are likely to arise from these reviews. The Productivity Commission is currently undertaking a public inquiry into child care and early learning with the following terms of reference (<http://www.pc.gov.au/projects/inquiry/childcare>):

- the contribution of childcare to workforce participation and child development
- current and future need for childcare in Australia, particularly given changes in work patterns, early learning needs, childcare affordability and government assistance
- the capacity of the childcare system to ensure a satisfactory transition to schools, in particular for vulnerable or at risk children
- alternative models of care, including those overseas, which could be considered for trial in Australia
- options - within existing funding parameters - for improving the accessibility, flexibility and affordability of childcare for families with diverse circumstances
- the impacts of regulatory changes, including the implementation of the National Quality Framework, on the childcare sector over the past decade.

The Productivity Commission produced an issues paper to guide submissions (Productivity Commission, 2013) which closed on 3 February 2014. Early Childhood Australia, the peak advocacy body for early childhood made numerous recommendations to the Inquiry (Early Childhood Australia, 2014) and these are identified in Appendix 11. The draft report is now available (Productivity Commission, 2014) and the deadlines for responses to the issues raised in the report closed on 6 September. Recommendations made in the review are extensive, covering a wide range of issues related to funding, quality assurance, accessibility, flexibility, affordability, children with special needs, universal access, Outside School Hours Care, workforce participation, and support for evaluation and programme assessment. The report recommends a separation between care and education, with care providers needing lower level qualifications, particularly for children under three years of age. Many of the recommendations aroused considerable consternation in the early childhood community as demonstrated in:

- the blog run by Early Childhood Australia <https://www.facebook.com/earlychildhoodaustralia/posts/722036521167284>;
- parents' group <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/parents-group-slams-productivity-commission-proposal-for-meanstested-child-care/storyfn59niix1226974852540?nk=515726b93e3a556e6766b3358f0483e4>
- and providers <http://www.goodstart.org.au/about-goodstart/productivity-commission>.

6.5.3 Parliamentary Inquiries

In addition to the above reviews, two Parliamentary Senate Inquiries were announced in December 2013, both of which are due to report in June 2014. The first relates to the future of child care (http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Education_and_Employment/The_immediate_future_of_the_childcare_sector_in_Australia) and includes issues related to administrative burden, cost and access, impact on children and short-term strategies to increase parental employment. This report was released in July 2014 (Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment, 2014b). One of the recommendations this report makes is that the National Partnerships guaranteeing universal access for 4 year old children put in place by the previous Labour Government be continued.

The second Inquiry looks at the delivery of quality and affordable early childhood education and care services, including:

- outcomes for children in early childhood education and care services, and impacting factors
- a progress report into the implementation of the National Quality Framework, including targets met and those working toward;
- parents' experiences of the outcomes of the National Quality Framework;

- impacts of the announced government amendments to the National Quality Framework, and the outcomes for children and early childhood education and care services
- any other related matters.

(http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Education_and_Employment/The_delivery_of_quality_and_affordable_early_childhood_education_and_care_services). This report was also released in July 2014 (Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment, 2014a) and recommends that the government continue with the implementation of the NQF as outlined by the Council of Australian Governments and that the rating system be maintained.

6.5.4 Review of Budget-based Services

Another area facing changes is the Indigenous early childhood education and care sector. Aboriginal Child and Family Centres (38 in total) were set up in targeted disadvantaged areas by the previous Labor Government under the National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development in 2009. Along with these services is a range of specialist Aboriginal children's services presently funded under special arrangements in the Budget-based Funding (BBF) program³⁴. The funding for all these services expires in June 2014. A review of the BBF program was initiated by the previous Australian Government during 2013. While the review has not been finalised the current proposal is for these programmes to transfer to the standard funding model for child care (Child Care Benefit) however this would significantly impair their ability to deliver services that address both child and family issues (Brennan, 2013). Currently these services are out of the scope of the National Quality Framework, although there is anecdotal evidence that some have chosen to participate in the assessment process.

The draft Productivity Commission report (Productivity Commission, 2014) identifies that "...services funded under the Budget Based Funded Program are not all ECEC focused and there is a lack of transition pathways for services to become viable and be brought within the mainstream ECEC funding arrangements" (p. 49). Despite this the report recommends that these services be included under the National Quality Framework umbrella.

6.5.5 Scheduled review of the National Quality Framework

The implementation plan for the National Quality Framework outlined in the National Partnership Agreement on the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care builds in two reviews, one in 2014

34 BBF services focus on supporting non mainstream services in rural, remote and Indigenous communities. There are currently 343 services funded through the programme of which 83% are Indigenous, and more than half of which are in the Northern Territory and Queensland (Productivity Commission, 2014).

and a second in 2019. The purpose of the 2014 Review is to assess the extent to which the objectives and outcomes of the National Partnership Agreement on the National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care have been achieved. In particular the Review will examine whether the National Quality Framework has improved the efficiency and cost effectiveness of regulation of services and reduced the regulatory burden for providers and Regulatory Authorities. The Review will examine the effectiveness of the assessment and rating process and governance arrangements for the National Quality Framework including the role of the ACECQA. The announcement in May 2014 about the forthcoming review (<http://www.woolcott.com.au/NQFreview/about.html>) stated:

Since the National Quality Framework came into effect in 2012, all governments have been working together to examine its implementation and operation and to take steps to address issues that are causing administrative burden for services. The 2014 Review provides a timely opportunity to take a closer look at how the National Quality Framework is operating, and to consider whether further changes should be made to ensure its objectives can be achieved in the most practical and effective way.

The review will conduct face-to-face public consultation sessions and accept online comments and submissions. It will also draw upon the feedback provided to the Productivity Commission inquiry (See Part 6.5.2) and directly seek information from State and Territory regulatory authorities or the Australian Government.

6.5.6 PricewaterhouseCoopers economic review

Recently, PricewaterhouseCoopers released a document (September 2014) called *Putting a value on early childhood education and care in Australia* (Price Waterhouse Coopers, 2014). They used a Computable General Equilibrium (CGE) model that enables whole of economy, long run, dynamic impacts to be measured. They provided estimates of the possible impact and value of three scenarios about the Australian economy: increased female labour force participation; increased productivity from children's participation in quality ECEC, and increased participation of children from vulnerable or disadvantaged backgrounds in ECEC. The modelling was designed to include educational and productivity benefits that accrue based on children's participation. The modelling was based on international research which can be problematic when applied to the different conditions in Australia. They found the following:

1. \$6.billion in benefits to GDP of increased female workforce participation cumulative to 2050³⁵

35 For the modeling they used Quebec government, Canada as an example of the introduction of universal access to low-fee full time child care in 1997 - using results available by 2008.

2. up to \$10.3 billion in benefits to GDP for children receiving a quality education and care program cumulative to 2050³⁶
3. \$13.3 billion benefits to GDP of increased participation of vulnerable children cumulative to 2050³⁷

The report argues that, in the current climate of uncertainty in the sector:

An approach that focuses solely on workforce participation fails to place children at the centre of our considerations and risks underestimating the contribution of ECEC to the Australian economy (p. i).

6.5.7 Summary

Because implementation of the National Quality Framework began 1 January 2012, the impact is difficult to ascertain accurately at this point. A number of evaluations, research projects, national early childhood research programmes and national reviews are either underway or recently completed. A scheduled review of the National Quality Framework will occur in 2014 to determine if (amongst other things) the National Quality Framework has improved efficiency and cost effectiveness and reduced the regulatory burden for providers and Regulatory Authorities; and to review the effectiveness of the assessment and rating process.

The national early childhood Reform Agenda has been a very intensive exercise for policy makers, program managers, support agencies, families and educators. Significant gains have been achieved towards the nation's recognition of the importance of the early years for individuals and society and the provision of quality ECEC services. Changes in government have initiated reviews that are pointing to further reforms that are regarded as being retrograde steps. The results of those reviews are not yet known. What is certain is that a close eye must be kept on progress and the implications of any new changes must be evaluated and new opportunities for research must be seized.

36 For the modeling they used the EEPSE (Effective provision of pre-school, primary and secondary education) (UK) key findings.

37 For the modeling they used High/Scope Perry preschool study findings.

APPENDIX 1: Australia's Political Context

Australia is a liberal democracy that follows British and North American models (http://www.dfat.gov.au/facts/sys_gov.html). The Commonwealth of Australia was created in 1901 with the federation of former British colonies (entities that are now the 6 States) through the development of a national constitution. Land not claimed by these 6 States is called a Territory. There are two Territories on the Australian mainland that provide early childhood care and education and so are relevant to this report. Commonwealth government law gives Territories the right to have their own parliament and make their own laws whereas these rights were allocated to the states as part of the national constitution. This national constitution can only be amended with approval of the electorate: a national majority of voters plus a majority of electors in a majority of states (at least 4 of 6).

The Federal Government is based on a two chamber model: the House of Representative and the Senate. Executive government is conducted here and policy decisions are made in Cabinet meetings. Senior members of the Government make up the Cabinet (known as the Front Bench) but their decisions have no legal force. The Federal Executive Council, consisting of the Governor-General, the Prime Minister and Ministers, is the formal body which makes decisions made by the Cabinet legal. Government is formed by the political party that holds the majority in the House of Representatives. The House of Representatives currently has 150 members elected by preferential voting. Elections must be held three years after the first meeting of a new federal parliament. In contrast Senate seats are held for 6 years and in an ordinary general election only half the senate members face the voters. Senate seats are decided through proportional representation. A Governor-General is appointed to represent Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain.

The Federal Government is responsible for foreign relations, trade, defence and immigration. State and Territory Governments are responsible for all those matters that are not assigned to the Commonwealth and each State has a Governor who represents the Queen. The High Court decides on disputes between the Commonwealth and the States. All citizens over 18 years of age must vote in Federal and State elections.

State parliaments must operate within the bounds of the national and their own State constitutions and cannot make legislation in conflict with the federal constitution. Both Federal and State governments co-operate in a range of areas including education, transport, health and law enforcement. The Federal Government levies income tax and there is always debate between the States as to how that income is distributed. Local governments are created by State or Territory legislation.

At its 2007 National Conference, the Australian Labor Party laid the foundation for significant reform in a range of areas, one of which was early childhood education and care. Its election platform (Australian Labor Party, 2007) included a commitment to a universal right for all 4 year olds to access early learning programmes that were flexible and delivered in a range of settings. There was a commitment to improve the quality of early educa-

tion and care programmes, to ensure these were delivered by well trained and resourced early childhood education and care professionals working with a nationally consistent early years learning framework (a pedagogical framework) with specific emphases on bridging the gap between care and learning and on targeting support to those who are most disadvantaged. The platform proposed that providing these services was the responsibility of all levels of government and pledged to work with the States and Territories to develop an integrated system of early education and care.

APPENDIX 2: Fact Sheets

Fact Sheet 1 - What assistance does the Australian Government give me for the cost of my child care?

(<http://docs.education.gov.au/node/3170>)

Fact Sheet 2 - What is Child Care Benefit (CCB)?

(<http://docs.education.gov.au/node/3190>)

Fact Sheet 3 - What is approved child care for the purposes of Child Care Benefit (CCB)?

(<http://docs.education.gov.au/node/3192>)

Fact Sheet 4 - What are the different types of approved child care for the purposes of Child

(<http://docs.education.gov.au/node/3194>)

Fact Sheet 5 - What is registered child care?

(<http://docs.education.gov.au/node/3198>)

Fact Sheet 6 - How much Child Care Benefit (CCB) can I get?

(<http://docs.education.gov.au/node/3200>)

Fact Sheet 7 - What is the work, training, study test?

(<http://docs.education.gov.au/node/3202>)

Fact Sheet 8 - What are my responsibilities for receiving Child Care Benefit (CCB)? (<http://docs.education.gov.au/node/3204>)

Fact Sheet 9 - Absences from child care - Child Care Benefit (CCB) and Child Care Rebate (CCR) (<http://docs.education.gov.au/node/3206>)

Fact Sheet 10 - What is the Child Care Rebate (CCR)?

(<http://docs.education.gov.au/node/3172>)

Fact Sheet 11 - Is there extra help I can get with my child care cost?

(<http://docs.education.gov.au/node/3174>)

Fact Sheet 12 - What is Jobs, Education and Training (JET) child care fee assistance? (<http://docs.education.gov.au/node/3176>)

Fact Sheet 12A - Jobs, Education and Training (JET) Child Care fee assistance for families using child care and participating in the Building Australia's Future Workforce: Support for Jobless Families and Helping Young Parents trials (<http://docs.education.gov.au/node/30621>)

Fact Sheet 13 - What child care services are available in regional, remote and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities?

(<http://docs.education.gov.au/node/3178>)

Fact Sheet 14 - Is there any extra assistance for my child with additional needs?

(<http://docs.education.gov.au/node/3180>)

Fact Sheet 15 - Choosing the right child care for your family

(<http://docs.education.gov.au/node/29716>)

Fact Sheet 16 - Will my child be given priority for child care services?

(<http://docs.education.gov.au/node/3182>)

Fact Sheet 17 - Where can I find a child care service that meets my needs?

(<http://docs.education.gov.au/node/3184>)

Fact Sheet 18 - Where do I go for more information on child care?

(<http://docs.education.gov.au/node/3186>)

Fact Sheet 19 - Absences from child care due to a local emergency - Child

Care Benefit (CCB) and Child Care Rebate (CCR)
(<http://docs.education.gov.au/node/3188>)

APPENDIX 3: Services Excluded from the National Quality Framework

Those services that do not fall under the jurisdiction of the National Law are as follows. These services are unlikely to do so in the foreseeable future (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2011a, p. 11):

- a school providing full-time education to children, including children in the year before Grade 1, but not including a preschool program delivered in a school or a preschool that is registered as a school (as these are within scope)
- a preschool program delivered in a school if the program is delivered in a class or classes where a full-time education programme is also being delivered to school children and the programme is delivered to fewer than six children in the school (a composite class)
- a personal arrangement
- a service principally conducted to provide instruction in a particular activity (for example, a language class or ballet class)
- a service providing education and care to patients in a hospital or patients of a medical or therapeutic care service provided under a child protection law of a participating jurisdiction.

There are other services currently excluded from the National Regulations. These services may be brought under the Framework in the future (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2011a, p. 12):

- disability services defined under State or Territory law, and early childhood education and care intervention services for children with additional needs
- education and care in a child's home
- education and care in a residence, other than as part of a Family day care service
- occasional care services (for example, offered at short notice or on a casual basis)
- education and care provided by a hotel or resort to children of short-term guests at the hotel or resort
- education and care that is provided on an ad hoc basis to children of a guest, visitor or patron where the person who is responsible for the children is readily available at all times
- education and care where it is primarily provided or shared by parents or family members
- education and care provided at a secondary school to a child of a student attending the school, where the parent retains responsibility for the child
- mobile services
- services that provide education and care for no more than four weeks per calendar year during school holidays

- transition to school programmes provided by a school to orient children to that school
- budget based funded services, other than where they receive Child Care Benefit
- playschools licensed in the Australian Capital Territory
- stand-alone services in Queensland
- playcentres in South Australia
- services licensed as Centre-based Class 4 or 5 services under the Child Care Act 2001 in Tasmania
- licensed limited hours or short-term services in Queensland or Victoria
- government-funded services under the Children and Community Services Act 2004 of Western Australia.

APPENDIX 4: Roles and Responsibilities of Federal and State Governments in the National Partnership Agreement On Universal Access To Early Childhood Education

(copied from Council of Australian Governments, 2013, pp. 4-5)

PART 3 — ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF EACH PARTY

To realise the objectives and commitments in this Agreement, each Party has specific roles and responsibilities, as outlined below.

Role of the Commonwealth

The Commonwealth agrees to be accountable for the following roles and responsibilities:

- providing a financial contribution to assist the States to maintain Universal Access and achieve the agreed performance benchmarks;
- monitoring and assessing the performance in the delivery of services under this Agreement;
- compiling and publishing the annual National Report as set out in clause 28; and
- coordinating the development of Implementation Plans in partnership with the States.

Role of the States and Territories

The States agree to be accountable for the following roles and responsibilities:

- developing Implementation Plans in partnership with the Commonwealth, including strategies to support access and participation by vulnerable and disadvantaged children;
- delivering on outcomes and outputs agreed in the State Implementation Plan;
- reporting on the delivery of outcomes and outputs as set out in Part 4 – Performance Monitoring and Reporting; and
- implementing quality early childhood education programs.

Shared roles and responsibilities

The Commonwealth and the States share the following roles and responsibilities:

- participating in consultations between the Parties as appropriate regarding the implementation of this Agreement;

- removing barriers to participation in an early education program, including ensuring cost is not a barrier³⁸ (especially for vulnerable and disadvantaged children, including those in remote locations) and provision is in a form that meets the needs of families under this agreement;
- negotiating new or revised Schedules, including Implementation Plans, to this Agreement;
- conducting the review of this Agreement;
- continuing to collaborate on data development and collection to improve transparency and reporting of outputs and outcomes on early childhood education;
- agreeing a definition of vulnerable and disadvantaged children for monitoring purposes in Implementation Plans; and collaborating to develop a nationally agreed definition of vulnerable and disadvantaged children over time; and
- further developing, implementing and reporting Agreement performance in line with the Early Childhood Education and Care National Minimum Data Set.

The Parties will meet the requirements of Schedule E, Clause 26 of the IGA FFR by ensuring that prior agreement is reached on the nature and content of any events, announcements, promotional material or publicity relating to activities under an Implementation Plan, and that the roles of both Parties will be acknowledged and recognised appropriately.

³⁸ Ensuring cost is not a barrier means making sure that the cost of using services does not prevent families from accessing those services.

APPENDIX 5: Legislation that applies in each Jurisdiction

State/Territory	Date of Enactment	Web address
Victoria	12 October 2010	http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/Domino/Web_Notes/LDMS/PubStatbook.nsf/51dea49770555ea6ca256da4001b90cd/b73164fe5da2112dca2577ba0014d9ed!OpenDocument
New South Wales	29 November 2010	http://www.legislation.nsw.gov.au/sessionalview/sessional/act/2010-104.pdf
Australian Capital Territory	25 October 2011	http://www.legislation.act.gov.au/a/2011-42/default.asp
Queensland	16 November 2011	https://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/LEGISLTN/ACTS/2011/11AC038.pdf
Northern Territory	21 November 2011	http://notes.nt.gov.au/dcm/legislat/Acts.nsf/5504d78eee675d6e6925649e001bb652/95724bfed2b632c96925792e007cb5c1?OpenDocument
South Australia	23 November 2011	http://www.legislation.sa.gov.au/LZ/C/A/EDUCATION%20AND%20EARLY%20CHILDHOOD%20SERVICES%20%28REGISTRATION%20AND%20STANDARDS%29%20ACT%202011.aspx
Tasmania	23 November 2011	http://www.thelaw.tas.gov.au/tocview/index.w3p;cond=;doc_id=48%2B%2B2011%2BAT%40EN%2B20120522120000;histon=;prompt=;rec=;term=
Western Australia	20 June 2012	http://www.slp.wa.gov.au/legislation/statutes.nsf/main_mrtitle_12929_homepage.html

APPENDIX 6: The National Quality Standard

Copied from

<http://www.legislation.nsw.gov.au/maintop/view/inforce/subordleg+653+2011+cd+0+N>

Notes

The National Quality Standard is used to assess education and care services to determine rating levels under Part 5 of the Law.

The Regulatory Authority may suspend a service approval if an education and care service is rated under Part 5 of the Law as not meeting the National Quality Standard, there has been no improvement in that rating and a service waiver or temporary waiver does not apply – see section 70(d) of the Law.

Quality Area – Educational programme and practice

The educational programme and practice is stimulating, engaging and enhances children's learning and development. In services for children over preschool age the programme nurtures the development of life skills and complements children's experiences, opportunities and relationships at school, at home and in the community.

Standard 1.1

An Approved Learning Framework informs the development of a curriculum that enhances each child's learning and development.

Element 1.1.1

Curriculum decision making contributes to each child's learning and development outcomes in relation to their identity, connection with community, wellbeing, confidence as learners and effectiveness as communicators.

Element 1.1.2

Each child's current knowledge, ideas, culture, abilities and interests are the foundation of the programme.

Element 1.1.3

The programme, including routines, is organised in ways that maximise opportunities for each child's learning.

Element 1.1.4

The documentation about each child's programme and progress is available to families.

Element 1.1.5

Every child is supported to participate in the programme.

Element 1.1.6

Each child's agency is promoted, enabling them to make choices and decisions and influence events and their world.

Standard 1.2

Educators and co-ordinators are focused, active and reflective in designing and delivering the programme for each child.

Element 1.2.1

Each child's learning and development is assessed as part of an ongoing

cycle of planning, documentation and evaluation.

Element 1.2.2

Educators respond to children's ideas and play and use intentional teaching to scaffold and extend each child's learning.

Element 1.2.3

Critical reflection on children's learning and development, both as individuals and in groups, is regularly used to implement the programme.

For the purposes of Quality Area 1

- agency involves being able to make choices and decisions, to influence events and to have an impact on one's world;
- intentional teaching involves educators being deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful in their decisions and actions. Intentional teaching is the opposite of teaching by rote or continuing with traditions simply because things have "always" been done that way;
- scaffold means the educators' decisions and actions that build on children's existing knowledge and skills to enhance their learning.

Quality Area 2 – Children's health and safety

Every child's health and wellbeing is safeguarded and promoted.

Standard 2.1

Each child's health is promoted.

Element 2.1.1

Each child's health needs are supported.

Element 2.1.2

Each child's comfort is provided for and there are appropriate opportunities to meet each child's need for sleep, rest and relaxation.

Element 2.1.3

Effective hygiene practices are promoted and implemented.

Element 2.1.4

Steps are taken to control the spread of infectious diseases and to manage injuries and illness, in accordance with recognised guidelines.

Standard 2.2

Healthy eating and physical activity are embedded in the programme for children.

Element 2.2.1

Healthy eating is promoted and food and drinks provided by the service are nutritious and appropriate for each child.

Element 2.2.2

Physical activity is promoted through planned and spontaneous experiences and is appropriate for each child.

Standard 2.3

Each child is protected.

Element 2.3.1

Children are adequately supervised at all times.

Element 2.3.2

Every reasonable precaution is taken to protect children from harm and any hazard likely to cause injury.

Element 2.3.3

Plans to effectively manage incidents and emergencies are developed in consultation with relevant authorities, practised and implemented.

Element 2.3.4

Educators, co-ordinators and staff members are aware of their roles and responsibilities to respond to every child at risk of abuse or neglect.

Quality Area 3 – Physical environment

The physical environment is safe, suitable and provides a rich and diverse range of experiences which promote children's learning and development.

Standard 3.1

The design and location of the premises is appropriate for the operation of a service.

Element 3.1.1

Outdoor and indoor spaces, buildings, furniture, equipment, facilities and resources are suitable for their purpose.

Element 3.1.2

Premises, furniture and equipment are safe, clean and well maintained.

Element 3.1.3

Facilities are designed or adapted to ensure access and participation by every child in the service and to allow flexible use, and interaction between indoor and outdoor space.

Standard 3.2

The environment is inclusive, promotes competence, independent exploration and learning through play.

Element 3.2.1

Outdoor and indoor spaces are designed and organised to engage every child in quality experiences in both built and natural environments.

Element 3.2.2

Resources, materials and equipment are sufficient in number, organised in ways that ensure appropriate and effective implementation of the programme and allow for multiple uses.

Standard 3.3

The service takes an active role in caring for its environment and contributes to a sustainable future.

Element 3.3.1

Sustainable practices are embedded in service operations.

Element 3.3.2

Children are supported to become environmentally responsible and show respect for the environment.

Quality Area 4 – Staffing arrangements

Staffing arrangements create a safe and predictable environment for children and support warm, respectful relationships. Qualified and experienced

educators and co-ordinators encourage children's active engagement in the learning programme. Positive relationships among educators, co-ordinators and staff members contribute to an environment where children feel emotionally safe, secure and happy.

Standard 4.1

Staffing arrangements enhance children's learning and development and ensure their safety and wellbeing.

Element 4.1.1

Educator-to-child ratios and qualification requirements are maintained at all times.

Standard 4.2

Educators, co-ordinators and staff members are respectful and ethical.

Element 4.2.1

Professional standards guide practice, interactions and relationships.

Element 4.2.2

Educators, co-ordinators and staff members work collaboratively and affirm, challenge, support and learn from each other to further develop their skills, to improve practice and relationships.

Element 4.2.3

Interactions convey mutual respect, equity and recognition of each other's strengths and skills.

Quality Area 5 – Relationships with children

Relationships that are responsive, respectful and promote children's sense of security and belonging free them to explore the environment and engage in learning.

Standard 5.1

Respectful and equitable relationships are developed and maintained with each child.

Element 5.1.1

Interactions with each child are warm, responsive and build trusting relationships.

Element 5.1.2

Every child is able to engage with educators in meaningful, open interactions that support the acquisition of skills for life and learning.

Element 5.1.3

Each child is supported to feel secure, confident and included.

Standard 5.2

Each child is supported to build and maintain sensitive and responsive relationships with other children and adults.

Element 5.2.1

Every child is supported to work with, learn from and help others through collaborative learning opportunities.

Element 5.2.2

Each child is supported to manage their own behaviour, respond appropri-

ately to the behaviour of others and communicate effectively to resolve conflicts.

Element 5.2.3

The dignity and rights of every child are maintained at all times.

Quality Area 6 – Collaborative partnerships with families and communities

Collaborative relationships with families are fundamental to achieve quality outcomes for children. Community partnerships that focus on active communication, consultation and collaboration also contribute to children's learning and wellbeing.

Standard 6.1

Respectful, supportive relationships with families are developed and maintained.

Element 6.1.1

There is an effective enrolment and orientation process for families.

Element 6.1.2

Families have opportunities to be involved in the service and contribute to service decisions.

Element 6.1.3

Current information about the service is available to families.

Standard 6.2

Families are supported in their parenting role and their values and beliefs about child rearing are respected.

Element 6.2.1

The expertise of families is recognised and they share in decision making about their child's learning and wellbeing.

Element 6.2.2

Current information is available to families about community services and resources to support parenting and family wellbeing.

Standard 6.3

The service collaborates with other organisations and service providers to enhance children's learning and wellbeing.

Element 6.3.1

Links with relevant community and support agencies are established and maintained.

Element 6.3.2

Continuity of learning and transitions for each child are supported by sharing relevant information and clarifying responsibilities.

Element 6.3.3

Access to inclusion and support assistance is facilitated.

Element 6.3.4

The service builds relationships and engages with their local community.

Quality Area 7 – Leadership and service management

Effective leadership contributes to sustained quality relationships and environments that facilitate children's learning and development. Well docu-

mented policies and practices that are developed and regularly evaluated in partnership with educators, co-ordinators, staff members and families contribute to the ethical management of the service. There is a focus on continuous improvement.

Standard 7.1

Effective leadership promotes a positive organisational culture and builds a professional learning community.

Element 7.1.1

Appropriate governance arrangements are in place to manage the service.

Element 7.1.2

The induction of educators, co-ordinators and staff members is comprehensive.

Element 7.1.3

Every effort is made to promote continuity of educators and co-ordinators at the service.

Element 7.1.4

Provision is made to ensure a suitably qualified and experienced educator or coordinator leads the development of the curriculum and ensures the establishment of clear goals and expectations for teaching and learning.

Element 7.1.5

Adults working with children and those engaged in management of the service or residing on the premises are fit and proper.

Standard 7.2

There is a commitment to continuous improvement.

Element 7.2.1

A statement of philosophy is developed and guides all aspects of the service's operations.

Element 7.2.2

The performance of educators, co-ordinators and staff members is evaluated and individual development plans are in place to support performance improvement.

Element 7.2.3

An effective self-assessment and quality improvement process is in place.

Standard 7.3

Administrative systems enable the effective management of a quality service.

Element 7.3.1

Records and information are stored appropriately to ensure confidentiality, are available from the service and are maintained in accordance with legislative requirements.

Element 7.3.2

Administrative systems are established and maintained to ensure the effective operation of the service.

Element 7.3.3

The Regulatory Authority is notified of any relevant changes to the operation of the service, of serious incidents and any complaints which allege a

breach of legislation.

Element 7.3.4

Processes are in place to ensure that all grievances and complaints are addressed, investigated fairly and documented in a timely manner.

Element 7.3.5

Service practices are based on effectively documented policies and procedures that are available at the service and reviewed regularly.

APPENDIX 7: Learning Outcomes from The Early Years Learning Framework

Learning Outcome	Elements
OUTCOME 1: CHILDREN HAVE A STRONG SENSE OF IDENTITY	<p>Children feel safe, secure, and supported</p> <p>Children develop their emerging autonomy, interdependence, resilience and sense of agency</p> <p>Children develop knowledgeable and confident self identities</p> <p>Children learn to interact in relation to others with care, empathy and respect</p>
OUTCOME 2: CHILDREN ARE CONNECTED WITH AND CONTRIBUTE TO THEIR WORLD	<p>Children develop a sense of belonging to groups and communities and an understanding of the reciprocal rights and responsibilities necessary for active community participation</p> <p>Children respond to diversity with respect</p> <p>Children become aware of fairness</p> <p>Children become socially responsible and show respect for the environment</p>
OUTCOME 3: CHILDREN HAVE A STRONG SENSE OF WELLBEING	<p>Children become strong in their social and emotional wellbeing</p> <p>Children take increasing responsibility for their own health and physical wellbeing</p>
OUTCOME 4: CHILDREN ARE CONFIDENT AND INVOLVED LEARNERS	<p>Children develop dispositions for learning such as curiosity, cooperation, confidence, creativity, commitment, enthusiasm, persistence, imagination and reflexivity</p> <p>Children develop a range of skills and processes such as problem solving, enquiry, experimentation, hypothesising, researching and investigating</p> <p>Children transfer and adapt what they have learned from one context to another</p> <p>Children resource their own learning through connecting with people, place, technologies and natural and processed materials</p>
OUTCOME 5: CHILDREN ARE EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATORS	<p>Children interact verbally and non-verbally with others for a range of purposes</p> <p>Children engage with a range of texts and gain meaning from these texts</p> <p>Children express ideas and make meaning using a range of media</p> <p>Children begin to understand how symbols and pattern systems work</p> <p>Children use information and communication technologies to access information, investigate ideas and represent their thinking</p>

APPENDIX 8: Criteria for the Excellence Rating

Copied from

<http://files.acecqa.gov.au/files/Excellent%20Rating/20130430%20Excellent%20rating%20-%20purpose%20and%20criteria.pdf> (10 December 2013)

The service exemplifies and promotes exceptional education and care that improves outcomes for children and families across at least three of the following themes:

- Collaborative partnerships with professional, community or research organisations
- Commitment to children that respects, reflects and celebrates culture and diversity, including place of origin
- Inclusive partnerships with children and families
- Positive workplace culture and organisational values
- Practice and environments that enhance children's learning and growth
- Sustained commitment to professional development and support of educators.

The application will nominate at least three excellence themes, explain how each is supported and promoted through the service's practice, and demonstrate how those practices improve outcomes for the participating children and families.

The service demonstrates leadership that contributes to the development of a community, a local area, or the wider education and care sector. Leadership is about guiding, influencing and inspiring change. Leadership can be bold and far reaching, or subtle and local, and still be influential. Leadership occurs in many ways and takes different paths, from local networks to new technologies.

A service aspiring to an Excellent rating can be a leader in its community and/or the wider education and care sector. The application will show how the service takes the initiative to develop and model exceptional practice that improves outcomes for children and families, and is willingly shared to inspire and educate others.

The service demonstrates commitment to sustained Excellent practice through continuous improvement and comprehensive forward planning

A service aspiring to an Excellent rating is not only exceptional across several practice themes; it embraces the responsibility of maintaining excellence and pursuing opportunities for further improvement. The application will show how the service will sustain exceptional practice and leadership, and continue to improve outcomes for children and families, over the three year rating period.

APPENDIX 9: Examples of Descriptors Used For Assessing and Rating

An example of the descriptors used for assessing and rating of a structural element of quality - staff ratios and qualifications (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2013e, p. 24):

Rating	Quality Area 4: Staffing Arrangements Standard 4.1: Staffing arrangements enhance children's learning and development and ensure their safety and wellbeing.
Element 4.1.1	
Working Towards National Quality Standard	The service is working towards ensuring educator-to-child ratios and qualification requirements are maintained at all times. This does not pose an unacceptable risk to the safety, health or wellbeing of any child or children being educated and cared for by the service.
Meeting National Quality Standard	Educator-to-child ratios and qualification requirements are maintained at all times.
Exceeding National Quality Standard	Educator-to-child ratios and qualification requirements are maintained at all times, and the organisation of educators contributes to a high quality learning and care environment for children.

An example of the descriptors used for assessing and rating of staff quality (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2013e, p. 26):

Rating	Quality Area 4: Staffing Arrangements Standard 4.2: Educators, co-ordinators and staff members are respectful and ethical.
Element 4.2.1	
Working Towards National Quality Standard	Professional standards are sometimes evident.
Meeting National Quality Standard	Professional standards guide practice, interactions and relationships.
Exceeding National Quality Standard	Professional standards are embedded in practice, interactions and relationships and this promotes positive relationships, and a safe and predictable environment both for children and adults.

An example of the descriptors used for assessing and rating of a structural element of quality – governance (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2013e, p. 38):

Rating	Quality Area 7: Leadership and service management Standard 7.1: Effective leadership promotes a positive organisational culture and builds a professional learning community.
Element 7.1.1	
Working Towards National Quality Standard	The service is working towards ensuring appropriate governance arrangements are in place to manage the service. This does not pose an unacceptable risk to the safety, health or wellbeing of any child or children being educated and cared for by the service.
Meeting National Quality Standard	Appropriate governance arrangements are in place to manage the service.
Exceeding National Quality Standard	Well-established governance arrangements, which are regularly reviewed, contribute to the effective management of the service.

An example of the descriptors used for assessing and rating of process elements of quality – partnerships and relationships (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2013e, pp. 30, 34):

Rating	Quality Area 5: Relationships with children Standard 5.1: Respectful and equitable relationships are developed and maintained with each child.
Element 5.1.1	
Working Towards National Quality Standard	Interactions with children are usually warm, respectful and sometimes responsive and build trust.
Meeting National Quality Standard	Interactions with each child are warm, responsive and build trusting relationships.
Exceeding National Quality Standard	Interactions with each child are consistently warm, responsive and build trusting relationships that promote children's sense of security and belonging.
	Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities Standard 6.1: Respectful supportive relationships with families are developed and maintained.
Element 6.1.2	
Working Towards National Quality Standard	Families have some opportunities to be involved in service decisions.
Meeting National Quality Standard	Families have opportunities to be involved in the service and contribute to service decisions.
Exceeding National Quality Standard	Families are offered a range of opportunities to be actively involved and are encouraged to significantly contribute to service decisions.

APPENDIX 10: Estimated Average Hours and Costs for Administration Related to Educational Programmes

(copied from Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2013h, p. 17 of Appendix D)

	Initial design of NQF-compliant educational programme (per service, once off)		Documenting of programme and reflections (Per room, per annum)		Documenting assessments of children's learning (Per child, per annum)	
	Hours	\$	Hours	\$	Hours	\$
Jurisdiction						
QLD	110.9	2,931	155.5	4853	30.9	964
VIC	231.3	6,108	233.1	7274	15.1	471
Sector						
CB	109.1	2,883	230.9	7205	16.2	506
FDC	235.0	6,204	134.1	4184	33.9	1,057
Provider size						
Small	66.7	1,764	221.1	6897	34.5	1,078
Medium	91.2	2,412	139.8	4360	20.4	636
Large	307.5	8,118	208.0	6491	6.7	208
All services	151.0	3,990	198.6	6197.8	22.1	689.8

APPENDIX 11: Early Childhood Australia's Recommendations to the Productivity Commission Inquiry 2014

(Early Childhood Australia, 2014, pp. 82 - 84)

- 1) *The best interests of children are put at the centre of the early childhood education and care system.*
- 2) *Reforms and ongoing improvements to the ECEC system are informed by the views of children, as well as their families, with support from the National Children's Commissioner.*
- 3) *The vision for early childhood education continues to be that 'all children have the best start in life to create a better future for themselves and for the nation'.*
- 4) *That an outcomes framework be developed for the ECEC system to measure the impact of higher quality programmes at the individual and system level.*
- 5) *Maintain a national commitment to quality ECEC, acknowledging the strong research evidence for determinants of quality including:*
 - a. *the qualifications required of staff*
 - b. *numbers of qualified staff*
 - c. *staff to child ratios*
 - d. *requirements regarding group size, health, safety and physical space.*
- 6) *Develop best practice guidance to drive improvements in physical learning environments for early childhood education and outside school hours care.*
- 7) *Increase public education on the determinants of quality in ECEC to assist family decision-making and support better informed social discourse.*
- 8) *Continue workforce development initiatives where they are still needed and proving effective and consider listing the Early Childhood Diploma qualification on the Skilled Occupation List.*
- 9) *That regional early childhood networks be established across Australia to enhance leadership and development opportunities in collaboration with other services.*
- 10) *Support the continued implementation and refinement of the National Quality Framework (NQF) to provide certainty to the sector and ensure ongoing quality improvement.*
- 11) *Maintain support for the sector to implement the National Quality Standard (NQS) through sector development, workforce development and professional development initiatives.*
- 12) *Undertake thorough research to quantify the cost of quality and other cost drivers, ensuring that any strategies to reduce cost would actually have an impact on fees.*
- 13) *Ambitious targets should be agreed at COAG to improve access to ECEC for children, specifically to:*
 - a. *meet the current universal preschool access targets in the short term*
 - b. *set a target for 90 per cent of children aged between three years and school age attending ECEC for at least 30 hours per week for the medium to long term.*

- 14) *Establish a new data collection system to monitor participation against agreed targets.*
- 15) *Invest in further evaluation and development of integrated service models for communities affected by social and economic disadvantage.*
- 16) *That the Productivity Commission look carefully at the proposals for investment reform outlined in Professor Brennan's report on early childhood education and care financing³⁹, including the proposed model for a single (early learning) subsidy to replace CCB and CCR that is progressive in targeting more support to low and middle income families while continuing to provide some support to all families using quality assured services.*
- 17) *Significant reform is needed to the way in which the federal government invests in early childhood education and care in order to:*
 - a. *simplify the system for parents and reduce up-front out-of-pocket expenses*
 - b. *reduce or discourage price inflation and improve transparency*
 - c. *remove structural problems in the current system where possible*
 - d. *adopt an appropriate model for indexation that ensures investment keeps pace with real costs*
- 18) *Review the Special Child Care Benefit to make sure it is meeting its original objectives to support children at risk.*
- 19) *Early childhood education and care warrants continued government investment to support quality in service delivery and affordability for families.*
- 20) *All forms of early childhood education and care that are eligible for government support or subsidy should be incorporated into the National Quality Framework (including in-home care, preschool, kindergarten, mobile services and multipurpose/integrated services) to ensure the investment contributes to positive outcomes for children.*
- 21) *Review policy interaction and relative priorities for investment across paid parental leave, family payments and ECEC.*
- 22) *Address supply issues in ECEC, through:*
 - a. *federal government data collection and analysis to provide accurate information on demand trends, ultimately through the development of predictive models*
 - b. *State government commitment to increasing the delivery of outside school hours care in appropriate facilities on school grounds*
 - c. *local government planning and problem solving*
 - d. *capital investment to support not-for-profit operators to set up new services and/or expand existing services in areas of high or predicted unmet need, through free or low interest loans or greater access to publicly owned facilities (Local/ State or Federal government owned facilities).*
- 23) *Maintain and expand support for increased flexibility through:*
 - a. *flexibility trials in long day care and family day care*
 - b. *exemptions to minimum opening hours under CCB approval requirements for services in regional areas where demand is variable across the week, month or year.*
- 24) *Continue to invest in integrated services and service coordination to better address the needs of families and communities affected by disadvantage.*
- 25) *Invest long-term in services operated by Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander*

39 This report can be found at <http://www.snaicc.org.au/uploads/rsfil/03244.pdf> (Brennan, 2013)

communities and build their capacity to meet the NQS while providing holistic, integrated services to families and children.

- 26) *Build the capacity of the early childhood education and care system to be responsive to the needs of children with a disability, through:*
- a. increasing the Inclusion Support Subsidy which takes into account the decline in the rate of the ISS over time (in real terms) and the cost of employing an educator*
 - b. extending the Teenagers with a Disability Outside School Hours Care programme (funded through DSS).*

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