

THE NATIONAL QUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE: STAFFING REQUIREMENTS

Research shows that a child's experience in their first five years sets the course for the rest of their life.

In recognition of this, the Australian Government, in partnership with all state and territory governments, is making important changes to early childhood education and care in Australia. This will ensure that Australian children get the best possible start.

This is being done through the introduction of a National Quality Framework.

The framework will put in place a new National Quality Standard to ensure high quality and consistent early childhood education and care across Australia. For more information on the new National Quality Standard, see the full standard online at deewr.gov.au/earlychildhood.

These changes will help providers to improve their services in the areas that impact on a child's development and empower families to make informed choices about which service is best for their child.

Why do we need a National Quality Framework?

The National Quality Framework will put in place national standards to ensure high quality and consistent early childhood education and care across Australia.

This important reform will deliver a higher standard of care for children in the critical areas of education, health and safety and will provide clearer and comprehensive information for families so they can choose the best services for their child.

We know that the first five years of a child's life shapes their future—their health, learning and social development—and we want to make sure that their future is bright.

Early childhood experts and professionals maintain that quality is critical when it comes to early childhood education and care.

At the moment quality standards across early childhood education and care services vary across Australia and there is often limited information available to help families choose the best service for their children.

The National Quality Framework will require all providers to improve services in the areas that impact on a child's development and safety and to provide families with quality information to help them make informed choices about services.

Changes will be made in key areas

The National Quality Framework will set a new National Quality Standard for early childhood education and care providers in Australia.

The National Quality Standard will improve quality through:

- improved staff-to-child ratios to ensure each child gets more individual care and attention
- new staff qualification requirements to ensure staff have the skills to help children learn and develop

- a new quality rating system to ensure Australian families have access to transparent information relating to the quality of early childhood education and care services
- the establishment of a new National Body to ensure early childhood education and care is of a high quality.

The new National Quality Framework will cover long day care, family day care, outside school hours care and preschools.

More staff to look after children

One of the key changes under the new National Quality Standard is that each staff member will have fewer children to look after.

This means that each child will get more individual care and attention, and when children have more time to learn from adults they develop more quickly.

The staff-to-child ratios, listed below, will be put in place across Australia.

	Age group	Staff-to-child ratio	Timeframe for compliance
Long Day Care and Preschool	Birth to 24 months	1 staff member to 4 children	1 January 2012
	25 to 35 months	1 staff member to 5 children	1 January 2016
	36 months to school age	1 staff member to 11 children	1 January 2016
	Mixed age groups	A proportional formula will be applied based on the above ratios	1 January 2012
Family Day Care	Mixed age groups of children	1 staff member to 7 children with a maximum of four children not yet attending school	1 January 2014
Outside School Hours Care	The National Quality Standard and ratings system will also apply to Outside School Hours Care but at this stage no changes to staff-to-child ratios or staff qualifications are proposed.		

The new framework will be in place by 1 January 2012, with changes to staff-to-child ratios and qualifications being phased in over a number of years.

More highly qualified staff

Another key change under the National Quality Standard is the introduction of new requirements for early childhood education and care services to have more highly qualified staff.

The following qualification requirements for staff will apply.

By 1 January 2014:

- An early childhood teacher will need to be in attendance all of the time when long day care and preschool services are being provided to 25 children or more.
- An early childhood teacher will need to be in attendance some of the time when long day care and preschool services are being provided to less than 25 children.
- Within each long day care centre or preschool, half of all staff will need to have (or to be actively working towards) a diploma-level early childhood education and care qualification or above, and the remaining staff will all be required to have (or be actively working towards) a Certificate III level early childhood education and care qualification, or equivalent.
- All family day care coordinators will need to have (or to be actively working towards) a diploma-level early childhood education and care qualification or above.
- All family day carers will be required to have (or be actively working towards) a Certificate III level early childhood education and care qualification, or equivalent.

By 1 January 2020:

- A second early childhood teacher, or another suitably qualified leader, will need to be in attendance all of the time when long day care and preschool services are being provided to more than 80 children.
- A second early childhood teacher, or another suitably qualified leader, will need to be in attendance at least half of the time when long day care and preschool services are being provided to 60 children or more.

Improving staff qualifications is important as the research shows that staff with higher qualifications are usually better able to get improved outcomes for children. More highly qualified staff means greater understanding of health and safety issues and that staff are more able to lead activities that inspire youngsters and help them learn and develop.

When will the changes happen?

The changes will be put in place in a step by step approach. This will give early childhood education and care providers across Australia time to get ready and adjust to the new requirements, particularly those relating to staff-to-child ratios and qualifications.

The first changes start in July 2010 during a transition phase where services will begin to undergo assessment against the new National Quality Standard. From 1 January 2012, all services will be assessed against the new National Quality Standard.

The new National Quality Framework will be in place by 1 January 2012, with changes to staff-to-child ratios and qualifications being phased in over a number of years.

What support will there be for staff to undertake further study or upgrade their qualifications?

The new requirements present an exciting opportunity for early childhood workers to work with their employers to consider the most effective qualifications pathway that suits their needs over the next four years. That could be either by undertaking a new qualification or upgrading their existing qualifications to meet the new requirements that come into effect on 1 January 2014.

Services and their staff will need to work in partnership to determine the most appropriate way of supporting early childhood workers who are undertaking study for their qualifications.

A range of products, such as toolkits and guidelines, will be developed to support services and staff in understanding the requirements of the new National Quality Framework and how their businesses can adapt to them.

The Australian Government is already investing in initiatives that will provide support to the early childhood workforce, such as:

- the HECS-HELP benefit for early childhood teachers
- the TAFE fee waiver that removes TAFE fees for child care diplomas and advanced diplomas from 2009
- the funding of additional early childhood education university places for early childhood teachers, starting with 500 places in 2009 and rising to 1500 continuing places by 2011
- \$970 million provided to the states and territories to assist in the universal provision of preschool education for children in the year before school.

The *Early Years Development Workforce Strategy*, to be considered by the Council of Australian Governments in 2010, will consider ways for all governments and the sector to support the development and retention of a qualified workforce. A review will also be undertaken at the beginning of 2013 on progress toward meeting the qualification requirements that come into force from 1 January 2014.

Where can I find out more?

For more information on these changes you can:

Call: **1800 181 088**

Email: **ECECQualityReformEnquiries@deewr.gov.au**

Visit: **mychild.gov.au**