



Australian Children's  
Education & Care  
Quality Authority

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# Guide to the National Quality Framework

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**Guide to the National Quality Framework**

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# The National Quality Framework

In December 2009, all Australian governments, through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), agreed to a partnership to establish a National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care ('National Quality Framework') for most long day care, preschool/ kindergarten, family day care and outside school hours care services in Australia.

The Australian Government and state and territory governments recognise the importance of increasing their focus on the early years to ensure the wellbeing of children throughout their lives and to lift the productivity of our nation as a whole. The drive for change is based on clear evidence that the early years of a child's life are very important for their present and future health, development and wellbeing.

The National Quality Framework aims to raise quality and drive continuous improvement and consistency in children's education and care services through:

- the Education and Care Services National Law and the Education and Care Services National Regulations ('National Law and National Regulations')
- the National Quality Standard
- a national quality rating and assessment process
- streamlined regulatory arrangements
- a new national body jointly governed by the Australian Government and state and territory governments—the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA)—to oversee the new system.

The National Quality Framework started on 1 January 2012 and key requirements are being phased in over time. Requirements such as qualification, educator-to-child ratios and other key staffing arrangements are being phased in between 2012 and 2020.

The new system replaces previous state and territory licensing and national quality assurance processes.

*The objectives of the National Quality Framework are:*

- *to ensure the safety, health and wellbeing of children attending education and care services*
- *to improve the educational and developmental outcomes for children attending education and care services*
- *to promote continuous improvement in the provision of quality education and care services*
- *to establish a system of national integration and shared responsibility between participating jurisdictions and the Commonwealth in the administration of the National Quality Framework*
- *to improve public knowledge, and access to information, about the quality of education and care services*
- *to reduce the regulatory and administrative burden for education and care services by enabling information to be shared between participating jurisdictions and the Commonwealth.*

The National Quality Framework includes:

- a **national legislative framework** that consists of:
  - the Education and Care Services National Law ('National Law')
  - the Education and Care Services National Regulations ('National Regulations')
- a **National Quality Standard** consisting of seven Quality Areas:
  - Educational program and practice
  - Children's health and safety
  - Physical environment
  - Staffing arrangements
  - Relationships with children
  - Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
  - Leadership and service management.
- a **national quality rating and assessment** process through which services are assessed against the National Quality Standard by regulatory authorities and provided with a quality rating
- a **regulatory authority in each state and territory** has primary responsibility for the approval, monitoring and quality assessment of services in their jurisdiction in accordance with the national legislative framework and in relation to the National Quality Standard
- a **national body—ACECQA**—which oversees the new system and guides its implementation in a nationally consistent way.

The National Law, the National Regulations and the National Quality Standard (which is located in a schedule to the National Regulations) are the key legislative documents that establish the National Quality Framework.

A central focus of the National Quality Framework is on outcomes for children. This is why all education and care services must provide a program that is based on an **approved learning framework**, which considers the developmental needs, interests and experiences of each child and takes into account the individual differences of each child.

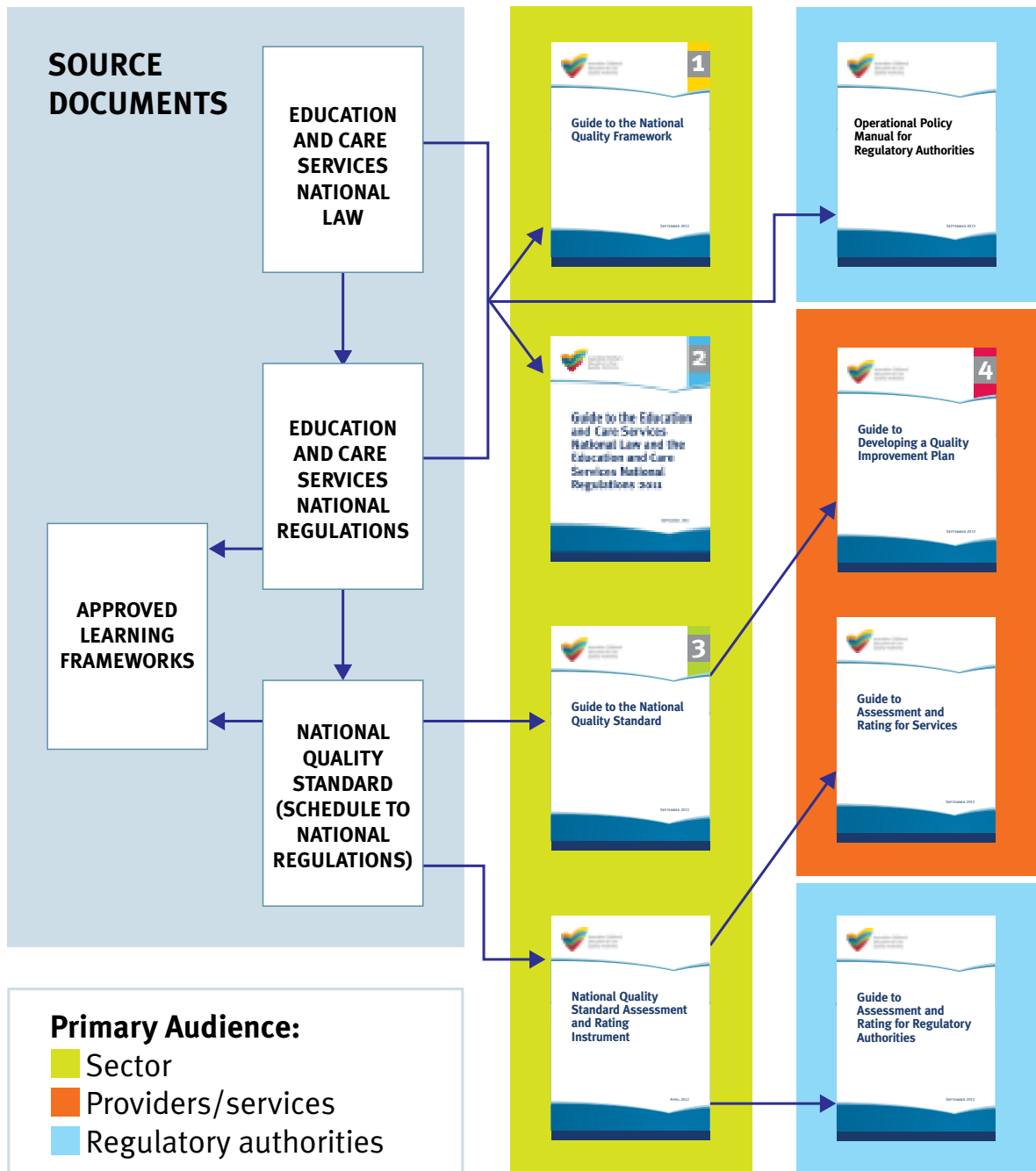
The approved learning frameworks have been developed to guide educators in developing quality programs that support children's learning.

To assist services to meet the requirements of the National Quality Framework, a range of supporting guides and resources are available.

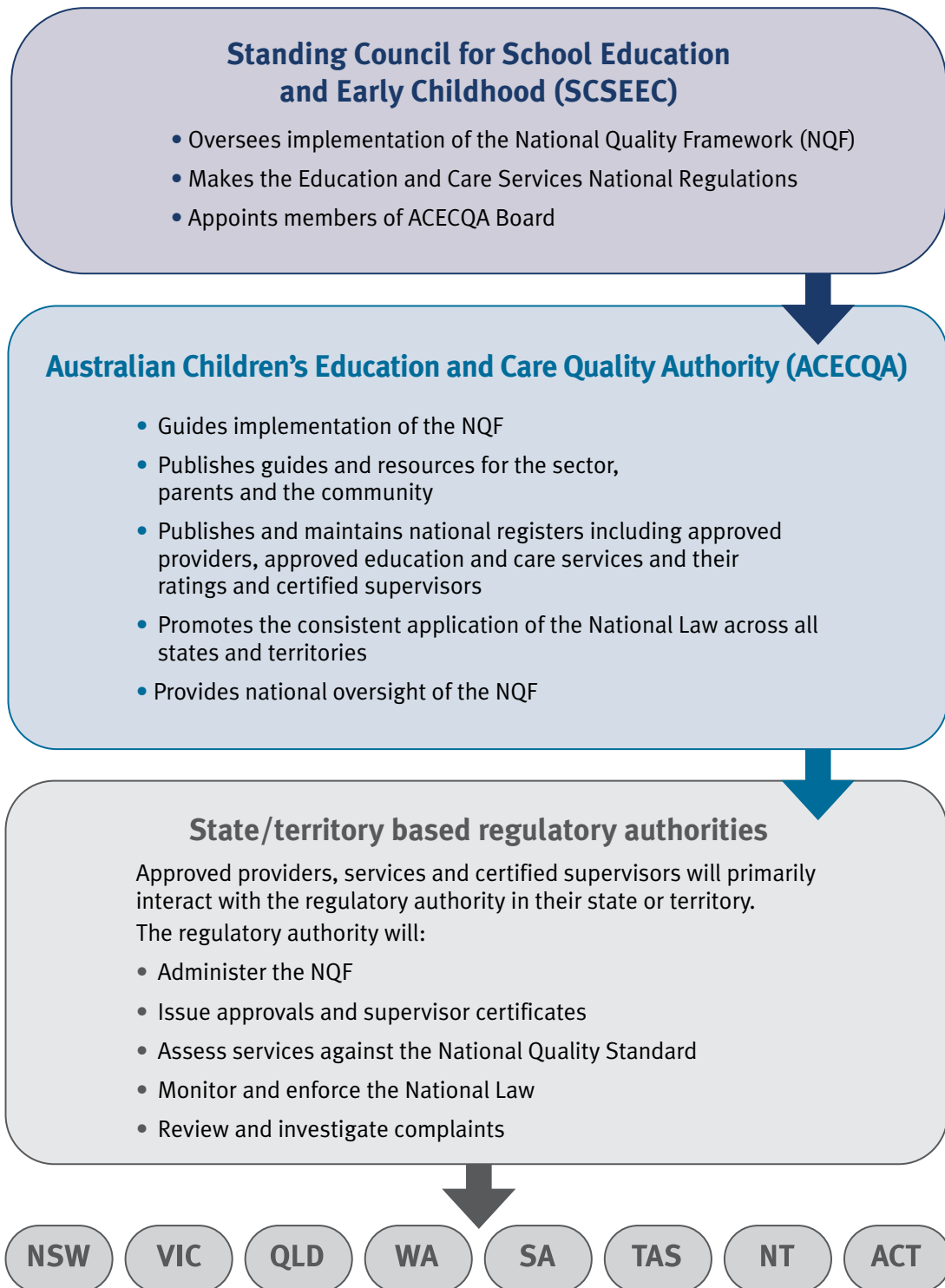
Diagram 1 on the following page provides a map of how the elements of the National Quality Framework including the resource documents fit together.

Diagram 2 demonstrates the governance arrangements in place under the National Quality Framework.

**Diagram 1: Map of the National Quality Framework Source and Support documents**



**Diagram 2: Governance Arrangements**





## The National Law

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The National Quality Framework was established under an applied law system comprising the National Law and National Regulations. It applies to most long day care, family day care, outside schools hours care services and preschools (or kindergartens) in Australia.

A national applied law is a way of establishing national laws so that a host jurisdiction (in this case, Victoria) passes a law (the *Education and Care Service National Law Act 2010* (Vic.)) and other jurisdictions adopt that law or pass corresponding legislation.

The purpose of the National Law is to create a jointly governed uniform national approach to the regulation and quality assessment of education and care services.

The National Law sets out:

- approval processes for the operation of education and care services
- the rating and assessment process
- key operational requirements
- compliance, monitoring and enforcements powers
- review of decisions by regulatory authorities
- the functions and powers of the Standing Council
- the functions and powers of ACECQA—the national body that oversees the system
- the functions and powers of regulatory authorities in each jurisdiction
- a nationally consistent freedom of information and privacy framework that applies to ACECQA and regulatory authorities
- requirements regarding publication of information, including registers
- key transitional arrangements.

People in the sector should familiarise themselves with the National Law.

Copies of the *Education and Care Service National Law Act 2010* (Vic.) can be downloaded from the [Victorian Legislation and Parliamentary Documents](#) website or purchased from Information Victoria by calling 1300 366 356 or Anstat Pty Ltd by calling (03) 9278 1133.

Services should also familiarise themselves with relevant state or territory laws that adopt the National Law (whether by reference or corresponding legislation).

# The National Regulations

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The National Regulations set out:

- application processes for:
  - provider approval
  - service approval
  - supervisor certificates
- the process for the rating and assessment of education and care services against the National Quality Standard, including the rating levels
- minimum operational requirements organised around each of the seven Quality Areas of the National Quality Standard
- application process for review of decisions
- arrangements to move existing services into the National Quality Framework.

The National Regulations set out a number of transitional and savings provisions applying to particular states and territories to support a smooth transition for services to the new system.

The National Regulations also set out the range of transaction and administrative fees applicable to an education and care service.

Under the National Regulations it is a requirement that an approved provider of an education and care service ensure that a copy of each of the National Law and National Regulations is accessible (whether in hardcopy or electronically) at the education and care service premises at all times.

Copies of the National Regulations can be downloaded from Victorian Legislation and Parliamentary Documents website or accessed through the ACECQA website at [www.acecqa.gov.au](http://www.acecqa.gov.au).

# The National Quality Standard

The National Quality Standard is a schedule to the National Regulations.

The National Quality Standard sets a new national benchmark for the quality of education and care services. It also gives services and families a better understanding of a quality service. This enables families to make informed decisions about the services providing education and care to their child.

The National Quality Standard brings together seven key Quality Areas that are important to outcomes for children. These are:

<b>QA1</b>	Educational program and practice
<b>QA2</b>	Children's health and safety
<b>QA3</b>	Physical environment
<b>QA4</b>	Staffing arrangements
<b>QA5</b>	Relationships with children
<b>QA6</b>	Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
<b>QA7</b>	Leadership and service management

The National Quality Standard allows each service to adopt approaches that are most appropriate to the children being educated and cared for at that service.

## Approved learning frameworks

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*Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* ('Early Years Learning Framework') and *My Time, Our Place: Framework for School Age Care in Australia* ('Framework for School Age Care') outline practices to support and promote children's learning.

The aim of the Early Years Learning Framework is to extend and enrich children's learning from birth to five years and through the transition to school. It assists services to provide young children with opportunities to maximise their potential and develop a foundation for future success in learning.

The aim of the Framework for School Age Care is to extend and enrich the wellbeing and development of school age children in education and care settings. It assists services to provide children in school age care with opportunities to engage in leisure and play-based experiences.

Copies of the Early Years Learning Framework and the Framework for School Age Care are available from the ACECQA website ([www.acecqa.gov.au](http://www.acecqa.gov.au)) as well as a range of other resources for educators and families.

Other approved learning frameworks under the National Quality Framework include:

- 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.*

Information on and copies of jurisdictional specific approved learning frameworks can be obtained from the relevant state or territory education department.

## Guide to the National Law and National Regulations

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The Guide to the National Law and National Regulations is designed to help the sector understand the National Law and National Regulations. It also provides examples of how regulatory requirements may be met.

The guide does not replace the National Law and National Regulations and is provided solely for guidance and assistance. The guide does not constitute legal advice.

The guide is available for downloading from the ACECQA website [www.acecqa.gov.au](http://www.acecqa.gov.au).

## Guide to the National Quality Standard

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The Guide to the National Quality Standard is a resource for the sector that outlines each of the seven Quality Areas in the National Quality Standard.

The guide includes:

- a statement for each Quality Area, providing the context and rationale, as well as a list of the Standards and Elements within the Quality Area
- a list of the relevant sections of the National Law and National Regulations that apply to the Quality Area
- a description of each Standard and an explanation of how it contributes to quality education and care for children
- reflective questions for the service to consider for each Standard
- a guide to practice for each Element that 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
- suggestions for further reading that may support further understanding of the Quality Area, summarised at the end of Quality Area 7.

# Guide to Developing a Quality Improvement Plan

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All services must prepare a Quality Improvement Plan that:

- includes an assessment of the quality of the practices of the service against the National Quality Standard and the National Regulations
- identifies areas of strength
- identifies any areas that the provider considers may require improvement
- includes a statement of philosophy of the service.

The Quality Improvement Plan must be:

- updated at least annually
- available at the service
- submitted to the regulatory authority on request.

The guide includes information about:

- how to undertake a self-assessment
- how to complete and submit a Quality Improvement Plan
- the Quality Areas, Standards and Elements that are assessed.

While the guide sets out a template for a Quality Improvement Plan, services are free to develop or use existing quality improvement documents, provided they meet the requirements outlined above.

## Information sheets

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A range of information sheets to assist services are available on the ACECQA website.