

Assessment and rating - procedures

Quality Education and Care Northern Territory –
Approved Northern Territory Early Childhood Education
and Care services

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1. Policy statement

Quality Education and Care Northern Territory (QECNT) as the Northern Territory (NT) Regulatory Authority administers a consistent approach to assessment and rating processes for NT services approved under the National Quality Framework (NQF). One of the Regulatory Authority's responsibilities includes the assessment and rating of education and care services in accordance with section 133 of the National Law.

This process is a key part of the National Quality Framework; services are assessed and rated against the National Quality Standards (NQS) to:

- promote continuous improvement in the provision of quality education and care, section 3(2)(c) of the National Law
- improve knowledge and access to information about the quality of services to help families make informed decisions about their child's education and care, section 3(2)(e) of the National Law.

This policy should be read with the Assessment and Rating Procedures and the First-Tier Review Policy.

2. Definitions

For a list of definitions, refer to the Assessment and rating - policy.

3. Roles and responsibilities

The Director, Quality Education and Care NT is responsible for:

- overseeing the operations of the regulatory authority

The Assistant Director Quality is responsible for:

- developing the schedule for assessment and rating visits
- overseeing authorised officers conducting assessment and rating visits
- training and mentoring authorised officers, including ongoing shadow visits to ensure consistency and reliability of authorised officers
- completing moderation and review of all draft and final reports
- reviewing and making decisions relating to draft feedback received
- support authorised officers to handle matters relating to compliance and quality that occur within an assessment and rating visit.

Authorised officers are responsible for:

- applying a risk-based approach when conducting assessment and rating visits
- writing the draft assessment and rating report
- responding to minor adjustments and draft feedback
- actioning and responding to compliance relating matters that occur during an assessment and rating
- maintaining reliability with authorised officer training, including ACECQA run AO Training.

4. Procedures

4.1. Assessment and rating procedures

4.1.1. Procedure for full assessment and rating

To maintain national consistency of the Assessment and Rating process QECNT administers Guidance as prescribed by ACECQA.

This process is outlined below:

Step 1 – Commencement

- the authorised officer sends the commencement letters to the provider and service
- QECNT sends a commencement letter to the service advising when the visit will occur, this can be within a specified time period
- associated tasks include:
 - create the Assessment and Rating Record (ASR) and chosen relevant activities in the National Quality Agenda Information Technology System (NQA ITS)
 - create a Territory Records Management (TRM) File in the service digital box
 - complete a commencement letter and file this in TRM
 - send commencement letter within a specified timeframe and TRM confirmation of when email was sent:
 - authorised officers should use the templates located in TRM – Letter: 50:F22:12096, Email: 50:D22:86321
 - arrange any relevant travel at least 4 to 6 weeks prior to service visit, consider permits requirements or special arrangements.

Step 2 - Desktop, Quality improvement plan and additional documents review

- review the service Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) and additional documents once received
- complete a desktop review and set up evidence organiser prior to visit
- confirm receipt of QIP and additional documents received email. Authorised officers should refer to the email template in TRM - 50:D22:86320.

Step 3 – Notice of visit

- contact the provider or service. This generally occurs approximately 5 working days prior to the visit
- document the phone calls in the NQA ITS ASR record phone call activity log
- email the service with a confirmed date and any additional details agreed to during the call
- authorised officers should refer to the email template in TRM - 50:D22:86324.

Step 4 – Visit

- the visit is conducted as scheduled by the regulatory authority and in liaison with both the approved provider and service
 - for approximate timings of the visit see 4.1.3: Assessment and Rating visit length below.

Step 5 – After the visit

- written notice of the outcome of the assessment and rating must be given to the approved provider within 60 days of the completion of the assessment visit (section 136 of the National Law).

Step 6 – Draft report

Approximately 3-5 weeks after the visit

- the draft report is sent to the service ideally within 3-6 weeks of report writing and moderation of the report
- it includes a brief email, draft report letter and draft report
- the provider and service have up to 10 working days to respond and to provide feedback to the draft report
- authorised officers should refer to the TRM Box – 50:DBOX22:1825 for all relevant letters and resources.

Step 7 – Review of feedback

2 weeks after draft report is sent

- approved provider feedback is reviewed by an authorised officer and the outcome moderated by the assistant director and director QECNT where relevant prior to completion of the final report.

Step 8 – Final report

Within 14 days of the draft feedback required date

- the final report is sent to the approved provider and service
- if further review is requested the service has 14 days to submit a request for First-Tier review
- refer to First-Tier review policy and procedures.

4.1.2. Procedure for partial re-assessment and re-rating

QECNT will schedule a service for a partial reassessment and re-rating based on any associated risk. Services with higher quality ratings will generally have a longer period between assessment and ratings in recognition of their ability to operate above the NQS. A partial reassessment and re-rating is similar to a full assessment. The only difference is the inclusion of virtual or desktop only assessment and may at times not require a physical visit.

This process is outlined below:

Step 1 – Commencement of partial reassessment and re-rating

During this section authorised officer can determine if a visit is required or if the partial reassessment and re-rating will take place via desktop review and discussion only. This is considered in the commencement letter.

- an authorised officer will review the elements to be re-assessed

- QECNT will provide the service and provider with a commencement letter to assist with a timely receipt of documentation from the service
- associated tasks include:
 - review the full ASR record for the service, this will identify the ratings not being reassessed and re-rated
 - create partial reassessment from the original ASR record in NQAITS
 - create and save identified activities in NQA ITS
 - create a TRM File within the service digital box
 - complete a partial commencement letter and TRM
Authorised officers should refer to the partial reassessment and re-rating commencement letter in TRM – 50: D22:86314
 - send commencement letter within the required timeframe and TRM confirmation of sent email
 - arrange any relevant travel at least 4-6 weeks prior to service visit and consider permit requirements or special arrangements.

Step 2 - Desktop, Quality improvement plan and additional documents review

- review the service Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) and additional documents once received
- complete a desktop review and establish the approach for the desktop assessment or visit
- schedule the visit or desktop assessment in calendar
- confirm receipt of QIP and additional documents and advise the service and provider of the next steps.

Step 3 – Notice of visit (if a visit is to occur)

- contact the provider or service. This general occurs approximately 5 working days prior to the visit
- document the phone calls in the NQA ITS ASR record phone call activity log
- email the service with a confirmed date and any additional details agreed to during the call
- authorised officers should refer to the email template in TRM 50:D22:86324.

Step 4 – Visit and assessment of evidence and documents received as required

- an authorised officer will assess the evidence, often referred to as a desktop review
- further phone calls or virtual discussions may be arranged
- if a visit is required, it is determined by elements to be reassessed and re-rated.

Step 5 – After the visit

- written notice of the outcome of the partial reassessment and re-rating must be given to the approved provider within 60 days of the completion of the assessment visit (section 136 of the National Law).

Step 6 – Draft report

Approximately 3-5 weeks after the visit

- the draft report will contain the partially reassessed aspects only. Aspects that were not reassessed are removed from the partial draft report
- the draft report is sent to the service, ideally within 3-5 weeks of report writing and moderation of the report
- it is expected that providers and services read the partial report in conjunction with the previous assessment and rating report
- it is also expected that providers and services have access to a copy of their previous report, however this can be provided on request
- the authorised officer will send an email, the partial draft report and the partial draft letter. Authorised officers should refer to the TRM document - 50: D23:12571
- the provider and service have up to 10 working days to review and provide feedback to the partial draft report
- the provider can opt out of providing feedback; this should be documented before progressing to the partial final report
- authorised officers should refer to the TRM Box – 50:DBOX22:1825 for all relevant letters and resources.

Step 7 – Review of feedback

2 weeks after draft report is sent

- approved provider feedback is reviewed by an authorised officer and the outcome moderated by the assistant director and director QECNT where relevant prior to completion of the final report.

Step 8 – Final report

Within 14 days of the draft feedback required date

- the final report is sent to the approved provider and service
- the final report will contain the partially reassessed elements only
- a copy of the previous report can be provided to the service on request
- if further review is requested the service has 14 days to submit a request for a First-Tier review
- refer to the First Tier Review policy.

4.1.3. Assessment and rating visit length

A full assessment and rating visit for a centre-based service as recommended by the Guide to the National Quality Framework, Assessment and rating visit length, will be for at least 6 hours.

Due to the exceptional circumstances posed by the NT, the Regulatory Authority conducts assessments and rating over 2 days. The Regulatory Authority considers individual circumstances at its discretion.

The table below explains the minimum duration for full assessment and rating visits in the Northern Territory:

Service Type	Minimum length – unless otherwise agreed
Centre-based services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • centre based services with less than 60 children: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – an authorised officer will visit the service for a minimum of 7 hours over 2 days. • centre based services with 60 or more children: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – an authorised officer will visit the service for a minimum of 10 hours over 2 days. • centre based services with between 80 to 100 or more children in attendance may be assessed with two authorised officers over a minimum period of 10 hours over 2 days. <p>Based on average attendance of children, not approved places.</p>
Family day care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • authorised officers will attend at least 2 educators’ residences and the principal office over a minimum of two days • Family Day Care assessment and rating visits may be completed with 2 authorised officers.
Outside School Hours Care (OSHC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an authorised officer will visit the service for a minimum period of two sessions, of at least 2.5hrs in length, over 2 separate days that the service is in operation for after school care (ASC) or before school care (BSC) • an authorised officer will refer to centre based timeframes in the event that the visit is being conducted during vacation care • services with between 80 to 100 or more children in attendance may be assessed with two authorised officers • assessment and rating visits may be conducted during either before school care, afterschool care or vacation care • if the OSHC operates a BSC the authorised officer may attend the BSC program as part of the assessment and rating visit • if the service operates both ASC and vacation care (VAC) care, assessment and rating can take place in either the ASC or VAC care program • further scheduling will consider the previous assessment and rating outcome, and authorised officers may alternate between assessing ASC and VAC programs in the assessment and rating cycles.

5. Related legislation, policy and procedures

Policy

- Assessment and rating policy
- First-tier review policy

Legislation

- *Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010* sets out the National Law - <https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/education-and-care-services-national-law-act-2010/017>
- *Education and Care Services (National Uniform Legislation) Act 2011* adopts the *Education and Care Services National Law Act 2011* in the NT - <https://legislation.nt.gov.au/Legislation/EDUCATION-AND-CARE-SERVICES-NATIONAL-UNIFORM-LEGISLATION-ACT-2011>
- *Education and Care Services National Regulations* - <https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/sl-2011-0653>
- National Quality Framework
- National Quality Standards

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Acronyms	Full form
NT	Northern Territory
QECNT	Quality Education and Care, Northern Territory
NQF	National Quality Framework
NQS	National Quality Standards
ACECQA	Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority
TRM	Territory Records Management
NQA ITS	National Quality Agenda IT System
QIP	Quality Improvement Plan
ASC	After school care
BSC	Before school care
VAC	Vacation care