

# Assessment and rating - policy

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

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## 1. Policy

This policy ensures that 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 in accordance with 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. Business Need

The Assessment and Rating Policy and its associated procedures have been developed to provide clear information on the scheduling of services for assessment and rating and the assessment and rating process. They also reflect the requirements of the [Education and Care Services National Law \(National Uniform Legislation\) Act 2011](#), the [Education and Care Services National Regulations](#) the [ACECQA Guide to the National Quality Framework](#) and the [National Quality Standards](#).

This policy ensures that:

- authorised officers follow consistent procedures when scheduling services for assessment and rating
- authorised officers follow consistent procedures when conducting a first assessment and rating, partial re-assessment and rating and full reassessment
- the regulatory authority clearly defines how assessment and rating visits are scheduled
- the regulatory authority articulates the guiding principles applied when scheduling assessment and rating visits.

The NQF applies to all service types, centre-based, long day care, outside school hours care and preschool, and family day care, including approved family day care residences and their principal office. QECNT assesses services against the National Quality Standards and gives a rating against each of the seven quality areas and an overall rating based on these results. The quality ratings are published on the national registers on the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority's (ACECQA) website and on the Starting Blocks website.

QECNT must assess and rate all NT approved education and care services in accordance with section 135 of the National Law. This includes conducting reassessments, or partial re-assessments, in accordance with section 138 of the National Law. Approved providers can apply for reassessments and re-ratings of their service in accordance with section 139 of the National Law.

There are no legislative requirements regarding the scheduling of assessment and rating visits, the selection of services or how often a service is rated or re-rated within a specified period.

### 3. Definitions

Term	Definition
ACECQA	Refers to the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority. ACECQA works with all governments to provide guidance, resources and service to support the sector to improve outcome for children.
Approved provider	Means the one who holds the provider approval for a service. This can be an individual, a body corporate, an eligible association, a partnership or an entity such as a local council. The approved provider can have service approvals for multiple services in one, or multiple jurisdictions.
Assessment and rating	Means the assessment and rating of services assessed by the regulatory authority against the National Quality Standard. Services are given a rating for each of the 7 quality areas and an overall rating an assessment, re-assessment or partial re-assessment of an approved education and care service.
Authorised officer	Means a person employed by the Regulatory Authority to provide services as defined in the Education and Care Services National Law. An authorised officer is known as a Senior QECNT Assessing Consultant or Compliance Advisor in the Northern Territory.
Centre based service	Means an education and care service other than a family day care service. For the purpose of the National Law, this includes most centre based services including long day care, outside school hours care and preschool.
Desktop assessment	Means reviewing information provided by the approved provided, online and via documented methods as part of an assessment and rating process. This process normally applies to the partial reassessment process. In some instances, a physical visit may not be required.
Desktop review	Means gaining an understanding of the service before a visit by conducting an analysis of the service's documents. Documents provided could be the service's QIP, assessment history and compliance history.
Excellent rating	Refers to the highest overall rating awarded under the NQS assessment and rating process. This level of rating is awarded by ACECQA.
Family Day Care	Means an approved education and care service that is a family day care. Operating from two or more residences and a principal office.
Minor adjustment	Means providing the approved provider an opportunity to make minor changes to the assessment and rating report before the final rating is granted. Minor adjustments do not pose a risk to the safety, health and wellbeing of children and are not considered non-compliances against the law and regulations.

National Law	Refers to the <i>Education and Care Services (National Uniform Legislation) Act 2011</i> which sets a national standard for children’s education and are across Australia.
National Quality Agenda IT System	The National Quality Agenda IT System, a national database system used by the Regulatory Authority and providers and services to submit online applications and notifications that are approved (or seeking approval) under the National Quality Framework.
National Quality Framework	Is a national benchmark for early childhood education and care and outside school hours care services in Australia. Services are assessed and rated by their regulatory authority against the National Quality Standard and given a rating for each of the 7 quality areas and an overall rating based on these results.
National Quality Standard	Means the National Quality Standard prescribed by the National Regulations.
National Regulations	Refers to the Education and Care Service National Regulations. They outline the legal obligations of approved providers, nominated supervisors, and educators and explain the powers and functions of the state and territory regulatory authorities and ACECQA.
Partial reassessment and re-rating	Means reassessing and re-rating only an aspect or an element of the service. This can include individual quality areas or specific elements or standards.
Person with Management or control	Means a person or partner or executive committee or body cooperate responsible for managing the education and care service's delivery. This may be a person or group of people responsible alone or with others.
Quality Improvement Plan	Is a document created by the approved provider to help services self-assess performance in delivery quality education and care and to plan for future improvements.
Reassessment	Means the process of re-rating a service or any aspect or element of the service. A reassessment refers to a full assessment and rating or a reassessment of all 7 quality areas.
Territory Records Management	Territory Records Management is the government official electronic document and records management system.

## 4. Scope

This policy applies to approved providers and services regulated under the National Quality Framework in the Northern Territory. It supports the regulatory authority in conducting all forms of assessment and rating in accordance with Part 5 of the National Law.

This policy also supports the regulatory authority’s risk-based approach to scheduling approved services for assessment and rating.

## 5. 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 draft reports
- supporting authorised officers in the management of compliance and quality related concerns during 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.

## 6. Guidelines

### 6.1. Assessment and rating scheduling

The assessment and rating schedule is developed at least one term ahead to help plan assessment and rating visits.

The schedule is determined by the following factors:

- recent compliance activity, visits, complaints and investigations that demonstrate the need for an assessment and rating visit
- the NQA ITS automatic risk rating because of actions taken at the service
- previous rating, if relevant
- location and size of service, that it is either regional or remote, large or small
- holidays including school holidays for services that only operate during school terms
- any relevant prescribed national or jurisdictional targets that apply.

Other factors may be considered and applied where relevant.

## 6.2. Timing of Assessment and Rating

### 6.2.1. New services

New services are scheduled for an assessment and rating no earlier than 12 months from the time they commenced operations.

Prior to being rated, new services must display a rating of 'provisional - not yet assessed' in accordance with Section 133(2) of the National Law.

### 6.2.2. Services with a rating

Services with an existing rating must be scheduled for a reassessment and rating which is determined by:

- the number of working towards quality areas and elements
- changes within the service, for example change of provider, management and staff
- length of time since the last assessment and rating
- additional information that the regulatory authority deems relevant.

The recommended assessment and rating timetable for services with a rating:

Rating	Re-assessment time frame
<b>Working Towards</b>	18 months to 2 years
<b>Meeting</b>	2.5 to 3 years
<b>Exceeding and Excellent</b>	3 to 4 years

The above table is consistent with national timeframes and provides recommendations for when assessments and ratings should occur. In most cases, these timeframes are difficult to adhere to due to other factors that must be considered and which influence the scheduling of assessments and ratings.

## 6.3. Assessment and rating types

### 6.3.1. Full assessment and rating

Services are assessed by the regulatory authority on their performance against the NQS which has 7 quality areas. Services are given a rating against each quality area and an overall rating.

Refer to the Assessment and rating procedures for a detailed process.

### 6.3.2. Partial reassessment and re-rating

The regulatory authority can schedule a partial reassessments and re-ratings for services with an existing rating. These can be conducted for a limited number of elements, standards or specific quality areas.

An approved provider can also request a reassessment, re-rating, or a partial reassessment and re-rating, however, no more than once in a two-year period, section 139 of the National Law. It is up to the regulatory authority to conduct more if required.

Preferred times for partial re-assessments are:

- no earlier than 6 months after the previous published assessment and rating
- no later than 3 years after a previous full assessment and rating
- if requested by the approved provider but no more than once in any 2 year period.

Refer to the Assessment and rating procedures for a detailed process.

## 6.4. Partial reassessment and re-rating types

Partial reassessments and re-ratings can only be done on services fully assessed and rated under the current NQS. Services not assessed and rated under the previous NQS, 2012 version, cannot be partially reassessed.

The 3 approaches to partial reassessment and re-rating processes within the NT as per section 138 and 139 of the National Law are:

- regulatory authority scheduled - partial reassessment and re-rating
- regulatory authority instigated - partial assessment and re-rating
- service requested - partial reassessment and re-rating.

### 6.4.1. Regulatory authority scheduled - partial reassessment and re-rating

This visit is included in the annual assessment and rating schedule. The regulatory authority determines the number of elements, standards and/or quality areas to be reassessed using:

- information obtained during or from previous assessment and ratings
- information obtained in monitoring inspections
- information obtained in investigations
- the service's history of compliance
- any other relevant prescribed information.

### 6.4.2. Regulatory authority instigated - partial reassessment and re-rating

The regulatory authority instigates a partial reassessment and re-rating based on the service's previous assessment and rating. The visit takes place within 6 to 12 months of the full assessment and rating cycle on a limited number of elements determining a new overall rating. A visit is determined by considering:

- elements met or not met from the previous full assessment and rating cycle
- changes made to the service after the previous full assessment and rating and their impact
- discussions had at the previous assessment and rating indicating the service willingness to undergo a partial reassessment.

### 6.4.3. Service requested - partial reassessment and re-rating

Approved providers can apply for reassessment and re-rating as per section 139 of the National Law. Applications are accepted through the NQA ITS and can only be made once in every two (2) year period. The Regulatory authority can accept more applications within the specified timeframe, at their discretion.



For an application to be considered it must:

- be in writing
- include the prescribed information
- include payment of the prescribed fee.

Refer to the Assessment and rating procedures for a detailed process.

## 6.5. Duration of an Assessment and rating visit

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), should be for at least six (6) hours.

Due to the exceptional circumstances within the NT, the Regulatory Authority may conduct assessment and ratings over one or two days. The Regulatory Authority can consider individual circumstances at its discretion.

Refer to the assessment and rating procedures to access the Northern Territory Assessment and Rating Visit Length - table.

## 6.6. Assessment and rating reports

As part of the assessment and rating process, the authorised officer who conducted the visit will record the service quality against the NQS in an assessment and rating report. The report will include the determination the regulatory authority has made on the rating of each of the 7 quality areas and overall rating for the service, section 136 of the National Law.

It is noted that the final report must be completed and provided to the service within 60 days from the date of the visit in accordance with section 136 of the National Law.

### 6.6.1. Full assessment and rating reports

A full assessment and rating report is provided to the approved provider with a determination on each element, standard and quality area.

The reports are as follows:

#### 6.6.1.1. Draft report

A draft report is provided to the approved provider completed within 3 to 6 weeks from the assessment and rating visit, by the authorised officer who conducted the visit. The draft is reviewed by the Assistant Director Quality prior to it being sent to the approved provider for review and feedback.

#### 6.6.1.2. Feedback on draft report

The approved provider has 10 working days to provide feedback on any factual inaccuracies and provide additional evidence to support feedback received. Feedback on the draft report is documented and acknowledged in the final report, ensuring the provider is aware of any changes that are made. The regulatory authority does not provide a second draft.

### 6.6.1.3. Final report

The final report is provided to the provider once all feedback to the draft report has been considered. The report is approved by the Assistant Director Quality and reviewed by the Director QECNT where required. The final report is sent to the approved provider with a Final report letter which is signed by the Director QECNT.

The final report and the notice of rating must be completed within 60 days of the assessment and rating visit, section 136 of the National Law. It provides the outcome of the assessment and rating, including the opportunity for further review, within 14 days of the final report's date. This is known as the First tier review. Details on how to apply for this review are included in the Final report letter.

Refer to the First-tier review policy.

### 6.6.2. Partial reassessment and re-rating reports

A partial reassessment and re-rating report is a shorter report which focuses on the reassessment of a small number of elements and where relevant can include a number of standards, quality areas or both.

The reports follow the same format as a full assessment and rating report, however, focusing only on aspects or elements that were reassessed and re-rated.

The final report and the notice of rating must be completed within 60 days of the assessment and rating visit, see section 136 of the National Law.

## 7. Related policy, legislation and documents

### Policy

- First-tier review policy
- Assessment and rating procedures

### 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