



How are you preparing for **the NQF?**

As the 2012 start date of the National Quality Framework draws closer, children's services should be making preparations within their service. What preparations are required and where do you start? This issue of *Central* is devoted to exploring what different services are doing - maybe in one of the stories contained in this issue, you will find some tips or tricks as to what you should be doing now.

AT CHILDREN'S SERVICES CENTRAL, through our professional development courses and through our helpline, we come into contact with many services who are questioning what they should be doing now to ensure their service is prepared for the National Quality Framework.

We are also contacted by services who are confused about how to prepare when so many of the documents are still in draft form.

How should you prepare?

There are some preparation suggestions in this article. How each service prepares will be as unique as the service, but we suggest the following as a start.

Read

At an absolute minimum, you need to read:

- the Draft Education and Care Services National Regulations;
- Draft Guide to the National Quality Standard;
- the Draft Assessment and Ratings Instrument;
- Draft Self-Assessment and Quality Improvement Planning Document.

Implement

You need to implement the Learning Framework relevant to you – *Belonging, Being and Becoming* or the newly ratified *My Time, Our Place, Framework for School Age Care*. In the trial assessment processes, services

Continued on back page

★ ROUNDUP

QUALITY ASSURANCE

The National Childcare Accreditation Council has advised that for NSW all Validation Visits and Moderation have been completed, and all Accreditation Decisions released. The NCAC will continue to 'Spot Check' services until the end of the year. All services registered with NCAC are eligible for a Spot Check. Remember that Spot Checks are unannounced and services are randomly selected to receive one.

ASSESSMENT AND RATING PROCESS

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations has announced that they are finalising the National Regulations and the Board of the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority. The Department has also released a new fact sheet on the Assessment and Ratings Process, containing the following important points:

- All existing services will be given at least four months at the beginning of next year to develop and submit their Quality Improvement Plan (QIP). During this development time, no assessment visits will occur.
- The first assessment visits to services are expected to commence in mid June 2012.
- From mid-March, services selected for assessment and rating will receive advice that the process has started. Services will then have six weeks to submit their QIP and the assessment visit will occur six weeks after this submission. The draft assessment and rating will be provided to the service three weeks later and services will have 10 days to provide feedback. When the service receives a final rating, they have 14 days to appeal.
- All services will be scheduled for an assessment during 2012–2014.
- The first services to be assessed will be long day care, OOSH services and family day care schemes who are not yet accredited or who were due for accreditation in 2012.

For more information, see: <http://bit.ly/nqfinfo12>

Children's Services Central is the Professional Support Co-ordinator in New South Wales and is an initiative funded by the Australian Government under the Inclusion and Professional Support Program. Children's Services Central is managed by a consortium of key organisations that resource and support the sectors of children's services in New South Wales. Feedback and enquiries should initially be directed to the Professional Support Co-ordinator in your region. Further information can be sought by contacting the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

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FUNDING FOR TEACHERS

The much-anticipated details about the Teacher Costs Contribution Scheme have been announced by the NSW Government. They have announced that it will be a non-recurrent scheme for one year only in 2011/2012. The amounts for the one-off payments are up to \$6,000 for a three-year university qualified early childhood teacher, up to \$8,000 for a four-year university qualified ECT, and an additional \$1,000 per ECT for services in designated remote areas. The Scheme is available to licensed providers of centre-based and mobile children's services that employ a qualified ECT. The payment will be available for all eligible ECTs, regardless of the ages of the children to whom they are providing education and care. Payments are limited to a maximum number of teachers based on the number of ECTs required by a service under the *Children's Services Regulation 2004*, according to the number of licensed places. Services with fewer than 30 children that employ an ECT will be eligible for a payment for up to one ECT.

NSW Government-funded preschool providers do not have to make a separate application. All other providers will be sent an invitation to apply through an online process.

Payments to eligible services will be made retrospectively for the 2010/11 financial year from December 2011. For more information, go to: <http://bit.ly/tccscheme>

FUNDING REVIEW

NSW Minister for Education, Adrian Piccoli, has established an independent review of NSW early childhood education funding, saying, 'policy decisions by the previous government created a funding system which is inequitable for families and unnecessarily complex and bureaucratic for service providers. Although more than \$220 million from the State and Federal governments is allocated to early childhood education in New South Wales this year, we lag behind other states and territories in both participation rates and affordability'.

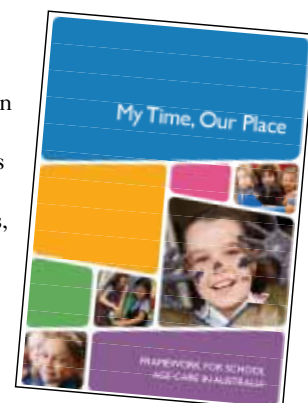
The review is being conducted by Professor Deborah Brennan from the Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW. Submissions to the review must be made by 30 September. For more information, go to: <https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/about-us/news-at-det/announcements>



MY TIME, OUR PLACE

The Framework for School Aged Care, *My Time, Our Place – Framework for School Age Care in Australia* was endorsed by

the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) in July. The Framework will be incorporated in the National Quality Standard. The Framework for School Age Care builds on the Early Years Learning Framework and extends the principles, practice and outcomes to accommodate the contexts and age range of the children and young people who attend school age care settings.



NQF round-up:

Services share their preparation tips

With less than five months until the National Quality Framework (NQF) officially begins, how are you preparing at your service? *Central* talks to practitioners across the state from preschools, long day care, family day care and OOSH services about their preparations for 1 January 2012.

A SUBURBAN PRESCHOOL

NQF preparation group

Networking with fellow directors via a local NQF Preparation Working Group has helped prepare Jeni Hind, director of Miranda Kindergarten – a community-based preschool in Sydney’s Sutherland Shire.

‘As directors and teachers we are quite isolated in our jobs, so one of the best things I did was join the NQF Preparation Working Group training.

An NQF Preparation Working Group allows directors and managers of services within a region to come together to swap stories and share their preparation for the NQF. I am now part of a local Working Group.

The Working Group in our area is run by CEO of Community Child Care, Leanne Gibbs, but I understand there are several being run across NSW. Networking with other directors and teachers has made the task ahead so much easier, whereas sitting in your office and reading through it alone can be overwhelming.

I left the last Working Group feeling very positive about our preparation and that our time line is achievable. Leanne is so enthusiastic and positive about the process.

There is now a Wiki that has grown from the Group which is a really time-effective way of sharing information. It’s not like a phone call – I can look at it anytime.

At first, my staff were overwhelmed but I have made an effort to talk about it positively. The NQF is a great thing for early childhood and we should be excited by it.

Initially, it was a lot of information to get my head around. More documentation is incredibly time-consuming and most directors feel time poor, however, with the help

of the hub, I now feel it is achievable.

I have 20 educators to inform and keep in the NQF loop. Staff have copies of the NQF fact sheets and every time any announcements or emails come through from Community Child Care, I forward these on.

We are working through the NQF’s Quality Areas/ Standards in our staff meetings. I ask them to talk about each Standard amongst themselves and to think about how we implement it at our preschool. I take notes then collate this as documentation to go into our Draft Assessment and Quality Improvement Plan.

It has encouraged each staff member to think about our philosophy and why we do things the way we do. I want every staff member to be involved regardless of how qualified they are or how many days they work. Everyone needs to understand the Standards. It needs to be a cohesive team effort so that someone can walk into the centre and can ask any staff member anything about NQF. They should know as much as I do. It’s probably not the case just yet... but it will be by the end of the year.

I will be linking our preschool’s policies to reflect the NQF and have also displayed photos around the centre of children and staff engaged in activities that relate to the Outcomes of the NQF. It reminds staff to reflect and think about why and how we do things. It also introduces the NQF and the EYLF to parents. We have been providing information to parents via our newsletter but they are really not interested at this stage. I am sure they will be once the rating system comes out.’

‘With the help of the Group, I now feel the timeline is achievable’

A RURAL LONG DAY CARE

Consultant and online workshop

A visiting consultant and online NQF workshops have equipped staff, says Brenda Johnson, director of Hay Early Learning – a community-based rural long day care centre.

‘We had an in-service last week with Ian Alchin from CCSA (Community Connections Solutions Australia) who did a presentation on the National Quality Framework. He asked staff lots of questions, as if he was an assessor, and got us to step back and think about why we do the things we do, especially in regards to intentional teaching. When we get



Director, Brenda Johnson (second from left) and staff at Hay Early Learning in south western NSW.

'We need to stay motivated and pick up the pace.'

assessed, we will be asked these questions.

The NQF is still in its draft form but Ian indicated that not much would change. It's August now, and the NQF comes in at start of January.

There is a program called Child Care Centre Desktop [a privately-operated online resource], that we became involved in during its pilot program earlier this year. They run regular webinars that focus on each Quality Area, which the staff attend.

I have all the 7 Standards on display in the staffroom for staff to read through and after Ian's visit, we plan to

tackle one Quality Area at each staff meeting and work our way through them. At the moment we are doing monthly meetings but we need to pick up the pace, as there are not enough months left in the year!

It's important that we do it as a team. Ian really pushed that point. He said: 'Brenda is not the only one who will be asked questions. It's not just up to Brenda to be on top of everything.'

Addressing apathy within a team can be a problem. But everyone has to be involved and has to play their role – casuals, full-timers and even committee members.

We are past mid-year. With all the changes and what we are learning, I would love to be able to shut for one day and have a staff development day focussing on NQF but unfortunately, this is not likely to happen.'

A SYDNEY PRESCHOOL

An in-house workshop

Hosting a one-day NQF workshop for staff has assisted Louise Murfet, director Jacaranda Preschool – a community-based preschool in the Sydney suburb of Caringbah.

'I had done all the free training, webinars and as much reading on the National Quality Framework as I could. I am also participating in the NQF Preparation Working Group.

At first we tried looking at the NQF during staff meetings but people were tired and it was too much to take in. Having a pupil-free day was just too expensive, so we decided to bring in casuals and dedicate five hours to an in-house workshop. The workshop was for core staff

(teachers and childcare workers only, not trainees and special needs workers – at this stage).

I started by asking staff how they felt about the NQF so we addressed any concerns up front and could move on. I then did a timeline and went right back to the COAG decision running through the reasons why it is happening. I went to the draft format and used this as a format for breaking down each element. Once we had broken down the Standards, we then discussed what [staff] could do individually and in groups and what I could do as a director.

One of the things they wanted was for me to collate information for them into one document. So I broke it all down and reorganised it so they had the Standard, the Element and then space for comments next to this – so it was all in the one place and they weren't flicking backwards and forwards. This will prove useful when writing our Quality Improvement Plan.

In our first workshop, we looked at Quality Area 2. We all went away for an hour and worked on the Elements of that Standard. We looked at our strengths and needs to meet the Standard. It's a bit like a SWOT analysis (Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunities/Threats).

For Quality Area 7 (Leadership and Management), I plan to workshop this with the Management Committee – it is their area of expertise – and then pass notes onto the rest of the team.

We are trying to learn/memorise the principles. I have hung these on the bathroom door and in the kitchen. We spot-check and test each other everyday. I have also put a piece of paper up on kitchen wall so people can pop down their thoughts as they are going through their day.

Our workshop worked really well. Staff were much more motivated and had more energy during the workshop rather than at the end of a working day. We will have a second workshop this week where we will tackle the next Quality Area.'

'I asked staff how they felt about the NQF so we addressed concerns up front and could move on.'



Director, Louise Murfet and children at Jacaranda Preschool.

A RURAL LONG DAY CARE

Meetings and NQF poster displays

Regular meetings and poster displays are helping staff to learn the Outcomes, says Pam Lancaster, teacher at Playmates Cottage Child Care Centre – a community-based long day care centre in Dubbo.

‘We’ve been looking at the National Quality Framework and where the Early Years Learning Framework sits inside that for a while now. We are working through the National Quality Standard focussing on one Quality Area at a time. We’ve been tackling the Quality Areas in order. At our last staff meeting, we worked on Area 5. We looked at our strengths and weaknesses and as we came across things that we needed to develop or grow, we worked out a plan and we dated it to keep ourselves accountable. Our director is keeping a record of this process so that we have

documentation of our journey. We were due to submit our Self-Study report next year.

We try to be really inclusive so that everyone on staff is familiar with the changes and NQF terminology. We all own the whole process – even our casuals. They are an important part of our team and we couldn’t have our staff meetings without them. We have had a staff meeting in the evenings especially for casuals so we can bring them up-to-speed with the NQF and other changes.

Our director has attended introductory training on the NQF, as it has been offered in our area, and I am joining a local working group of directors and teachers that is yet to start. This has been organised by Children’s Services Central. We will be supporting each other and working with facilitators initially to establish our needs in regards to the NQF.

A couple of ways that we have been introducing or exploring some of the language include displaying the Outcomes around the rooms and coming up with an acronym or a single word to help us memorise them. We’ve been trying to evaluate our environment according to the Outcomes. We have also been displaying the Outcomes in the staff room with space nearby for people to write their thoughts.

I have been adding words like ‘scaffolding’, which might not be a word everyone is familiar with. We held back and let staff consider this word and share their thoughts. I noticed after a few days that no one had responded. So to trigger a discussion, I wrote a comment about what ‘scaffolding’ means in the building industry and encouraged staff to transfer that thought to what they do when they work with children.

A lot of centres are already doing a really good job and I think it is important to recognise this.

Don’t be overwhelmed by the fact that changes are coming.’

‘We’ve been displaying the Outcomes in the staff room with space for people to write their thoughts.’



Children at work and at play at Playmates Cottage in Dubbo, where the NQF is a priority.

FAMILY DAY CARE SCHEME

An NQF pilot service

Monthly home visits and participating in a trial of the Assessment and Rating program means educators are well-versed in all things NQF, says Jennifer Green, coordinator of Shellharbour/Kiama Family Day Care.

‘We kick-started our journey with the EYLF about a year ago and all our educators are now using that Framework with confidence. We’ve been asking how they would like to be introduced to the National Quality Framework and the feedback is that they like small snippets of information.

With Family Day Care you have such a range of educators at varying levels of knowledge and experience. You have to individualise and think how you present one piece of information from one educator to another.

The majority of our carers have a Certificate III or are in the process of achieving it. They have had access to the Quality Areas for some time and are now developing an understanding of the Standards (NQS). They all have hard and soft copies of the NQF fact sheets. I have also collated and am developing a series of information sheets of all the Quality Areas for use during home visits.

The sheets will include self-assessment/reflection and how the Quality Area, Standard and Elements may look in everyday practice. In our policy reviews, we are also starting to link Quality Areas to the relevant policies.

Our home visits are once a month. Over the next few months, we will be focussing on a different aspect of the NQF. Educators have access to updated information via

email and internet links so they are not left in the dark.

Last year, we were part of the NQF phase two Assessment and Rating program. Our service went through the second phase of pilot. We had early access to *The Educator’s Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework*.

The guide was helpful in the layout as it showed what assessors would typically be observing and documenting. The staff and educators felt the visit reflected the process as with past validation visits.

We all seemed less stressed and continued to focus on our quality practices and interactions instead of collecting paper documentation as many of us have done with past validation visits.

After our experience with the pilot program and our training and implementation of the EYLF into everyday practice, the staff and educators are confident that they can continue the challenge of implementing the changes that come with the NQF.

We have found that acknowledging and giving educators and staff feedback provides positive praise and reassurance.

The plan is to continue slowly going through the different Standards and discuss any differences between the new system and the old one as they arise.’

‘After the pilot program and our training, educators are confident that they can continue the challenge of implementing the changes that come with the NQF.’



Shellharbour/Kiama Family Day Care staff. From left: Vanessa Johnson (play session leader), Beth Hely (child development officer), Jennifer Green (coordinator) and Leanne Thomson (administration officer).

My time, our place

We're kick-starting the process with *My Time Our Place*, says Dimmity Miller, Director of Children's Services (OOSH and Vacation Care) at Port Macquarie Neighbourhood Centre.

'We're focussing first and foremost on the *My Time, Our Place* Framework for School Age Care in Australia and have a staff meeting scheduled this week. However, until we get the National Quality Framework out of draft format and have concrete documents to work with, then it is a case of "wait and see". I don't want to get staff all geared up for it and then have it change.

We're looking at the outcomes in *My Time, Our Place* first and hopefully that will flow into working with the NQF's Quality Assessment and Ratings system once it's finalised and we know exactly what we are working with.

AN OOSH SERVICE

We still don't have an answer for what the qualifications for OOSH are going to be, let alone ratios or assessment. It is all uncharted waters for OOSH.

In terms of training, I recently did a Network of Community Activities 'Leading the Framework' course and attended a CCSA workshop on leading successful change in the NQF.

I also attended some team leadership training through Children's Services Central. Next week we're going to the 'Making your OOSH Service NQF-Ready', which is OOSH-specific and being run by Network through Children's Services Central in Lismore.

At this stage it is about getting training and starting discussions about *My Time, Our Place*.'

REGIONAL FDC NETWORK

An NQF group

A group of family day care schemes have joined hands to tackle the NQF together, explains Tracey Sweetman from Port Stephens Family Day Care and Patty Sams from Maitland FDC.

'Because the National Quality Framework can appear overwhelming to undertake alone at a scheme level, we opted for a 'collaborative' approach, embracing the skills and knowledge of our staff within the region.

The Newcastle, Hunter, Manning Family Day Care Regional Network consists of the following family day care schemes: Maitland, Newcastle, Port Stephens, Samaritans, Cessnock, Singleton, Dungog, Taree, Great Lakes, Gloucester and Upper Hunter.

Our schemes were assisted by Port Stephens Council's Business Excellence Co-ordinator and Learning and Development Coordinator to use business principles to map our way forward.

Seven groups were formed – one group for each Quality Standard with a designated responsible officer. These groups worked collaboratively through their assigned Quality Area and identified what we were already doing and where any gaps existed.

This process was very effective and provided the information required to develop a Regional Plan, which lays the foundation for individual schemes to implement with their own service and develop their Quality Improvement Plans in preparation for 1 January 2012.

Throughout the process, we have continued to consult and involve the educators, ensuring they remain valued participants.

The importance of this approach is to ensure we continue to offer the families and children quality outcomes that meet the EYLF, which is embedded in the NQF.'

'Because the National Quality Framework can appear overwhelming to undertake alone at a scheme level, we opted for a "collaborative" approach.'

A SYDNEY LONG DAY CARE

'We'll wait and see'

We're waiting to see the finer details once the draft format is ratified, says Nesha O'Neil, licensee of Norwest Child Care and Top Ryde Early Learning Centres – two private long day care centres in Sydney.

'We have decided to take a softly-softly approach with the National Quality Framework. We don't want to get down into the finer details of the NQF and then have it all change as it is still in draft format and hasn't yet been ratified.

Last time round, we got 100 per cent High Quality in all of the areas for our Accreditation review. We are continuing to operate at high quality. Some of the more senior staff have looked through the draft NQF but there is not a whole lot that is different. If you are operating at high quality there is not a lot that we have to do differently – no matter what the final draft is.

We have used the time to overhaul our programming. By the time we got through Accreditation last time, we could tick every single box but this took a significant amount of documentation and paperwork. We have thrown everything out, and started again, looking at international best practice and seeing how we can apply it in terms of our program and once a ratified Guideline comes out then we can sit down and ask ourselves if we are meeting all the requirements.

To be honest, it's not a huge priority at the moment. We've downloaded the NQF and printed it off and have lots of circles and highlighted sections and questions – What does this mean? Are we doing this?... but I have mostly been telling staff to: 'Carry on as you are... there's no need to panic. It's not going to be so radically different to what a high quality centre is already all doing.'

'I have been telling staff to: carry on as normal. There's no need to panic! it's not going to be so radically different to what a high quality centre is already doing.'

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How are you preparing for **the NQF?** (continued from front page)

that were successfully implementing these frameworks rated higher than others.

Absorb

You need to absorb the National Quality Standard. All staff, directors/co-ordinators and managers need to become very familiar with the Standard as the guide to what quality in children's services now looks like.

Evaluate

You should evaluate your service against the National Quality Standard. How are you travelling?

Think

Think about your first self-assessment and Quality Improvement Plan.

Prepare

Prepare for changed requirements such as toddlers and family day care ratios and staff qualifications. Who is going to be your service's educational leader? Certified Supervisors?

Revise

Determine what policies and procedures will need to be changed in light of the new Regulation and the new Standard. How will you introduce those changes?

Train

Work out the professional development needs for your service – see what is on offer at:

www.cscentral.org.au/pd

■ **How do you prepare when the documents are still in draft form?**

The final regulations should be released this month, and the other documents later this year. Yes, it is difficult to prepare when everything is not finalised, but the timeframes the Department of Education and Communities (DEC) and the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) are working to, take the documents' release dates into consideration.

The first requirement of the Assessment and Rating process is for services to develop a Quality Improvement Plan. All services will be given 'at least four months to develop and submit their QIP', according to the Department of Education and Communities. DEEWR has stated that 'during this development time, no assessment visits will occur.

The first assessment visits to services are expected to commence in mid-June 2012. This will give providers and services time to understand the National Quality Standard, the assessment and rating process and prepare for the assessment visit.'

