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Leadership and management in education and care services

An analysis of Quality Area 7 of the National Quality Standard

Contents

Contents

Overview

This occasional paper is the fifth in a series on the National Quality Framework (NQF). It offers detailed insights into education and care service quality ratings for leadership and service management – Quality Area 7 of the National Quality Standard (NQS). The focus of this quality area is on effective leadership and management systems that contribute to quality environments for children's learning and development.

The NQS rating system

A service's overall rating is based on:

- **58 Elements**, which are assessed as Met or Not Met
- **18 Standards**, which are rated on the four point scale below
- **7 Quality Areas**, which are also rated on the four point scale below.

Standards, quality areas and the overall quality rating are assessed on a four point scale (**Figure 1**):

- Exceeding NQS
- Meeting NQS
- Working Towards NQS
- Significant Improvement Required.

In addition, a provider with a service that has an overall rating of Exceeding NQS may choose to apply to ACECQA to be assessed for the **Excellent rating**.

Figure 1 The NQS rating system

Significant Improvement Required

Service does not meet one of the seven quality areas or a section of the legislation and there is an unacceptable risk to the safety, health and wellbeing of children.

The regulatory authority will take immediate action.

Working Towards National Quality Standard

Service provides a safe education and care program, but there are one or more areas identified for improvement.

Meeting National Quality Standard

Service meets the National Quality Standard.

Service provides quality education and care in all seven quality areas.

Exceeding National Quality Standard

Service goes beyond the requirements of the National Quality Standard in at least four of the seven quality areas.

Excellent

Service promotes exceptional education and care, demonstrates sector leadership, and is committed to continually improving.

This rating can only be awarded by ACECQA.

Services rated Exceeding National Quality Standard overall may choose to apply for this rating.

Leadership and service management (Quality Area 7)

The NQS recognises the role effective leadership, a practical commitment to quality improvement and administrative systems (such as policies, processes and procedures) have in guiding and supporting educators, coordinators and staff members to deliver quality education and care programs.

Effective leaders set strategic directions and foster professional values which inform how services operate. They promote a positive workplace culture which allows educators, coordinators and staff members to create and participate in collaborative and reflective learning communities. Positive workplace cultures support educators to learn from each other and develop professionally. Such workplaces welcome new ideas, encourage reflection and self-review, and motivate educators to pursue continuous improvement.

Effective leaders also extend their practice beyond the service to connect with families and the local community, as well as establish links with other education and care services to form professional networks of practice. While leadership may be distributed among staff across the service, the NQF requires services to appoint an educational leader – a suitably qualified and experienced individual who is responsible for leading the development and implementation of educational programs at the service.

High quality internal systems comply with regulatory requirements and clearly set out how a service operates. Furthermore, they guide and support educators, coordinators and staff members to enable them to focus on delivering quality education and care.

An ongoing cycle of planning, review and evaluation, driven by strategic leadership and effective administrative systems, enables a service to engage in continuous quality improvement.

Key administrative systems at services include:

- documented policies and procedures
- a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP)
- regular performance reviews and individual staff development plans
- records and information management and storage systems
- complaints handling mechanisms
- displaying and reporting of information
- enrolment records
- attendance records.

While Quality Area 7 focuses on leadership and administrative systems, it has a direct influence on all other quality areas of the NQS. How a service addresses different aspects of the NQS – for example, how it embeds and promotes children's health and safety in relation to Quality Area 2 – will be shaped by its leadership team and service management. Similarly, how a service fosters and commits to continuous improvement will influence the way it implements quality improvement in all aspects of its operations and management.

The leadership and service management quality area comprises three standards:

- Standard 7.1: Effective leadership promotes a positive organisational culture and builds a professional learning community.

- Standard 7.2: There is a commitment to continuous improvement.

- Standard 7.3: Administrative systems enable the effective management of a quality service.

A description of these standards, and the associated elements, is provided in **Table 1**. The Education and Care Services National Law (the National Law) and Education and Care Services National Regulations (the National Regulations) set out the minimum requirements for the operation of education and care services, including governance, quality improvement and administrative systems. A full list of these requirements is provided in **Appendix A**.

This paper highlights contemporary research and theory related to leadership and service management, while providing a description of the operational requirements of the National Law and National Regulations. It then examines the distribution of quality ratings for Quality Area 7 and discusses possible explanations for these variations.

Case studies about leadership and service management are provided. The case studies examine Element 7.2.2 (staff evaluation and individual development plans) and Element 7.1.4 (educational leader), the elements in Quality Area 7 services are least likely to meet, along with examples of evidence collected by authorised officers when assessing these elements to highlight what can differentiate performance.

The paper culminates by discussing the implications of the data and literature related to Quality Area 7, including suggesting future directions.

Findings from the paper include:

- Effective leadership and service management are important in guiding and supporting the delivery of quality education and care programs, with the impact of leadership and service management felt across all areas of the NQS.

- Quality Area 7 is one of the most challenging areas of the NQS. This presents an opportunity for additional guidance around staff evaluations and individual development plans, and the role of the educational leader, especially for outside school hours and family day care services.

- Approved providers play a crucial and influential role in supporting and developing leadership at the service level. Services operated by large providers may benefit from the scale of the provider's organisational infrastructure and available resources. Large providers can offer 'system-wide' benefits to their services such as mentoring, peer to peer reviews, shared administrative systems and policies. In contrast, providers that only operate a single education and care service are less likely to meet or exceed the requirements of Quality Area 7, suggesting there may be an opportunity for small providers to benefit from additional guidance and support around leadership and service management.

The paper is intended to be of interest to people who deliver education and care services, people who provide training and professional development services to the sector, peak organisations, and officers in the state and territory regulatory authorities that regulate education and care services.

Unless otherwise stated, the paper draws on data from the National Quality Agenda IT System (NQA ITS) as at 30 June 2017. The NQA ITS is the national IT business system for service providers and regulatory authorities operating under the NQF.

The other papers in this series include:

- Quality Area 1: Educational Program and Practice

- Quality Area 2: Children's Health and Safety

- Promoting consistency and efficiency under the NQF

- Quality Area 3: Physical Environment.

Australian Children's
Education & Care
Quality Authority

Background

Effective leadership is an important part of high quality education and care service provision.[1]

The 2009 National Early Childhood Development Strategy, *Investing in the Early Years*, developed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) prior to the introduction of the NQF, identified workforce and leadership development as one of seven areas for action that make up an effective early childhood development system for children and their families. In particular, the strategy articulated a 2020 vision, that 'professional development and incentives are in place to grow and support leaders in the field'.[2] This vision was reiterated in recommendations from the Productivity Commission research report about the early childhood development workforce.[3]

The NQF recognises this vision and the importance of establishing effective service leadership and governance through Quality Area 7 of the NQS. The aim of Quality Area 7 is to encourage effective leadership and management of the service that contributes to quality environments for children's learning and development. Well documented policies and procedures, well maintained records, shared values and philosophy, clear direction and reflective practices enable the service to function as a learning community. An ongoing cycle of planning and review, including engagement with families and community, creates a setting for continuous improvement.

What the leadership and service management standards are aiming to achieve

The three leadership and service management standards of the NQS broadly focus on how the service operates a professional learning community, maintains quality improvement and manages administrative requirements.

An overview of each standard is provided below:

- **Standard 7.1: Effective leadership promotes a positive organisational culture and builds a professional learning community.** This standard focuses on the way service leadership fosters a positive workplace culture where professional learning and continuous improvement are valued. In services that value professional learning, educators, coordinators and staff members are motivated and supported to 'build their professional knowledge, reflect on their practice and generate new ideas'.[4] They openly discuss issues relating to service quality. In this way, a service's organisational culture enables educators, coordinators and staff members to learn from each other and pursue continuous quality improvement that contributes to improved outcomes for children. This standard includes the requirement for an educational leader to lead the development of the curriculum.

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[1] Sylva, K. et al., *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) project: Technical paper 12 – The final report: Effective Pre-School Education;* Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Manni, L., *Effective Leadership in the Early Years Sector: The ELEYS study.*

[2] COAG, *Investing in the Early Years – A National Early Childhood Development Strategy.*

[3] Productivity Commission, *Early Childhood Development Workforce.*

[4] ACECQA, *Guide to the National Quality Standard,* p. 168.

- **Standard 7.2: There is a commitment to continuous improvement.** This standard looks at a service's philosophy and its evaluation and self-assessment processes, and how these support a shared service-wide approach to continuous improvement. A service's statement of philosophy should guide decisions, policies and daily practices, and assist in planning, implementing and evaluating quality experiences for children. Furthermore, a service should support the ongoing improvement of its educators, co-ordinators and staff members through a regular cycle of review, evaluating their performance and implementing individual development plans.

- **Standard 7.3: Administrative systems enable the effective management of a quality service.** This standard looks at how the approved provider, nominated supervisor and family day care educator implement administrative systems necessary for the operation of an education and care service under the National Law. The Guide to the National Quality Standard states that efficient and effective internal systems (such as records management, complaints handling and documented policies and procedures) allow approved providers, nominated supervisors, educators, coordinators and staff members to primarily focus on planning, delivering and evaluating quality education and care for children at the service.

Operational requirements – leadership and service management

Quality Area 7 of the NQS is underpinned by a set of minimum operating requirements for the leadership and management of an approved service. These requirements relate to both centre-based services and family day care (FDC) services and address:

- management of services

- policies and procedures

- information and record-keeping requirements.

In addition to the requirements set out under Part 4.7 of the National Regulations, there are other relevant sections of the National Regulations that apply to Quality Area 7, such as regulations relating to the educational leader role (Regulation 118 and 148) and QIPs (Regulation 31 and 55-56).

There are several requirements specific to the leadership and management of FDC, including:

- other adults at the family day care service to be fit and proper (Regulation 163-164)

- visitors to FDC residences and approved FDC venues (Regulation 165-166)

- additional policies and procedures (Regulation 169).

A full list of the responsibilities of the approved provider, nominated supervisor and FDC educator in relation to leadership and service management, including the regulations that apply and the related NQS standards and elements, can be found in **Appendix A**. In addition, the *Guide to the National Law and National Regulations* contains lists of the following requirements:

- required policies and procedures for all service types (pp. 111-112)

- prescribed information to be displayed (pp. 113-114)

- notifications required (pp. 114-117)

- records and documents required to be kept at the service (pp. 120-121).

Effective leadership in education and care settings

Defining leadership

Waniganayake et al. note an 'absence of an agreed authoritative definition'[5] of leadership, although they question the value of a standard definition given the diversity of leadership roles in education and care settings, and the settings themselves. By contrast, Rodd argues the lack of definition 'has contributed to an observed unwillingness'[6] to engage with the role of leadership in education and care settings. The need for, and appropriateness of, a single definition of leadership in education and care remains contested. Overall, definitions of leadership have shifted from top-down, hierarchical notions of leadership to notions of leadership as interdependent and relational.[7]

The *Guide to the National Quality Standard* (p. 166) broadly defines leadership as 'a relationship between people and the best leaders are those who are able to empower others'.[8] This is consistent with a significant amount of research which conceptualises leadership as 'a relation between individuals to achieve a common goal through providing direction' and 'building commitment'.[9]

The literature surrounding educational leadership often uses the concepts of pedagogical and instructional leadership interchangeably. Therefore, leadership derives the concept of intentionality from the pedagogical concept of 'intentional teaching' in *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (EYLF).[10] In other words, leadership is enacted with purpose.[11]

The literature often draws a distinction between 'management' and 'leadership' in education and care settings, whereby management refers to maintaining 'functions, processes and people' and leadership to empowering and developing others. Managers focus on the present, day-to-day operations of a service compared to leaders who focus on the future, communicating a shared vision and inspiring commitment and collaboration. This distinction explains why Quality Area 7 refers to 'leadership and service management'. It is important to note the dimensions of 'management' and 'leadership' can be effectively embodied in the same role and individual.

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[5] Manjula Waniganayake et al., *Leadership: contexts and complexities in early childhood education,* p. 7.
[6] Jillian Rodd, *Leadership in Early Childhood: The pathway to professionalism (4th Ed.),* p. 11.
[7] Joanne B. Ciulla (2003) cited in Iram Siraj-Blatchford and Laura Manni, *Effective Leadership in the Early Years Sector: The ELEYS study,* p. 14.
[8] ACECQA, *Guide to the National Quality Standard,* p. 166.
[9] Sylvana Fenech, 'Leadership development during times of reform', p. 91.
[10] Australian Government, *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia.*
[11] Jenny Lewis and Jenny Hill, 'What does leadership look like in early childhood settings?', p. 10.

Rodd posits that leadership and management are different yet 'interwoven dimensions', and that leaders need to be aware of how they interact to practice effective leadership.[12] This builds on Kagan and Bowman's (1997) theoretical framework for early childhood education and care (ECEC) leadership comprising 'five dimensions: administration, pedagogy, advocacy, community and conceptual leadership'.[13]

It is possible the absence of an agreed definition of leadership in the education and care sector reflects the complexity of leaders' work.[14] Furthermore, there is a considerable amount of evidence that conceptions of leadership change over time and are not 'static'.[15]

Effective leadership

The Early Childhood Australia *Leadership Capability Framework* indicates leadership is 'complex, dynamic and varies from situation and from culture to culture'.[16] This reflects a view in the literature that it is difficult and inappropriate to prescribe the characteristics and behaviour of effective leadership. For example, Southworth emphasises the importance of leaders possessing 'contextual literacy'[17] – that is, the ability to recognise and consider the context in which they are operating. Different contexts require different behaviours, skills and attributes.[18] Educators must reflect on their leadership behaviour and practices, and how they influence the particular environment around them. **Figure 2** shows several key understandings about leadership about leadership in ECEC settings compiled by Lewis and Hill from research and national consultations.

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[12] Jillian Rodd, *Leadership in Early Childhood: The pathway to professionalism* (4th Ed.)*,* p. 19.

[13] Sharon Kagan and Barbara Bowman (1997) cited in Johanna Heikka and Manjula Waniganayake, 'Pedagogical leadership from a distributed perspective within the context of early childhood education', p. 500.

[14] Iram Siraj-Blatchford and Laura Manni, *Effective Leadership in the Early Years Sector: The ELEYS study,* p. 15.

[15] Elizabeth Stamopoulos, 'Reframing early childhood leadership', p. 47.

[16] Early Childhood Australia, *Leadership Capability Framework,* p. 7.

[17] Geoff Southworth (2004) cited in Iram Siraj-Blatchford and Laura Manni, *Effective Leadership in the Early Years Sector: The ELEYS study,* p. 14.

[18] Ofsted (2003) cited in Iram Siraj-Blatchford and Laura Manni, *Effective Leadership in the Early Years Sector: The ELEYS study,* p. 26.

Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority

Figure 2 Key understandings about leadership[19]

The *Guide to the National Quality Standard* notes that 'effective leadership creates a positive organisational culture that values openness and trust, where people are motivated to ask questions, debate issues and contribute to each other's ongoing learning inquiry'.[20]

In *Effective Leadership in the Early Years Sector: The ELEYS study*, Siraj-Blatchford and Manni[21] identify a range of effective leadership practices, including:

- identifying and articulating a collective vision
- ensuring shared understandings, meanings and goals
- effective communication
- encouraging reflection (on practice)
- commitment to ongoing professional development
- monitoring and assessing practice
- distributed leadership
- building a learning community and team culture
- encouraging and facilitating family and community partnerships
- striking a balance between leadership and management.

19 Adapted from Jenny Lewis and Jenny Hill, 'What does leadership look like in early childhood settings?', p. 11.
20 ACECQA, *Guide to the National Quality Standard,* p. 166.
21 Iram Siraj-Blatchford and Laura Manni, *Effective Leadership in the Early Years Sector: The ELEYS study,* p. 3.

This is by no means an exhaustive list; however it serves as a useful starting point for thinking about the diverse range of practices required of educators with leadership responsibility (formal or informal). Other effective practices include leading change, mentoring staff and volunteers, advocacy,[22] 'challenging established processes', 'embracing integrated approaches' and 'empowering others'.[23]

Leadership in education and care settings – research and theory

Empirical research

Waniganayake et al. identify three 'waves' of research in this area. The first wave focused on the traits, behaviours and qualities of the leader as an individual. The second wave shifted the discourse of leadership to consider the context where it was being practiced. And the third wave, the most recent, focuses on a range of leadership approaches, including models of distributed leadership.[24]

In spite of these developments, the literature frequently notes a lack of empirical research specifically relating to the impact of leadership on quality in ECEC settings.[25] Furthermore, there is also a lack of research investigating how outside school hours care (OSHC) services are managed and organised and how leadership operates in these environments. Research regarding leadership in FDC contexts is similarly scarce. Consequently, there is often a reliance on leadership research conducted in primary and secondary school contexts. There will, of course, be learnings, relevance and parallels that can be drawn from this school-based research to ECEC, OSHC and FDC settings.

The importance of effective leadership

Bloom and Sheerer describe leaders of ECEC programs as the 'gatekeepers to quality'[26] at their services. Effective leaders lead and influence organisational change and consequently are instrumental in driving quality improvement and implementing national reforms such as the NQS.

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[22] Marjory Ebbeck and Manjula Waniganayake, 'Early childhood professionals: leading today and tomorrow', p. 29.
[23] Alexandra Diamond, 'Pre-service early childhood educators' leadership development through reflective engagement with experiential service learning and leadership literature', p. 12.
[24] Manjula Waniganayake et al., *Leadership: contexts and complexities in early childhood education*, p. 10.
[25] Susan Krieg, Karina Davis and Kylie Anne Smith, 'Exploring the dance of early childhood educational leadership'; Iram Siraj-Blatchford and Laura Manni, *Effective Leadership in the Early Years Sector: The ELEYS study;* Daniel Muijs et al., 'How do they manage? A review of the research on leadership in early childhood'.
[26] Paula Jorde Bloom and Marilyn Sheerer, 'The effect of leadership training on child care program quality', p. 593.

The *Effective Provision of Preschool Education* (EPPE) study, which measured quality in preschool services in the UK against pre-reading and social development outcomes, found services offering high quality programs were characterised by qualified educators who practiced effective leadership. Separate research conducted in school settings has suggested leadership is the second most important factor in student outcomes after teaching.[27]

Leaders play a pivotal role in connecting theory with practice, supporting evidence-based practices[28] and setting the right conditions to enable educators to grow. Crowther, Kagaan, Ferguson and Hann note educators require effective leadership and support structures to reflect successfully on their practice and apply their knowledge of child development and educational theory.[29]

The research also indicates effective leadership improves services as workplaces. Leadership and management practices, as well as a service's organisational culture, influence job satisfaction and continuity, which in turn delivers positive outcomes for children over time.[30] For example, the positive influence of effective leadership on educator continuity supports the development, maintenance and continuous improvement of high quality relationships between educators, between educators and children, and between educators and families. In summary, the benefits of effective leadership are interrelated and operate together to enhance the quality of education and care provided at a service.

Leadership for learning

Quality Area 7 associates leadership with the way services support the professional learning and development of their educators. Colmer asserts that the processes by which educators learn and develop professionally in education and care settings, and apply this to effect a change in quality at a service, are complex, highly social and non-linear. [31] This position conflicts with popular, 'market-driven', management discourses which frame professional development as the transfer of skills and knowledge to individual educators monitored and evaluated through individual development plans and other accountability mechanisms.[32]

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[27] Kenneth Leithwood et al., *Successful school leadership. What it is and how it influences pupil learning.*
[28] Jane Page and Collette Taylor (2016) cited in Jane Page et al., 'Educational Leadership: Making a difference to children's learning and development'.
[29] Max Grarock and Anne-Marie Morrissey, 'Teachers' perceptions of their abilities to be educational leaders in Victorian childcare settings'.
[30] Sylvana Fenech, 'Leadership development during times of reform'.
[31] Kaye Colmer, 'Leading professional development and learning in early childhood centres: a social systems perspective'.
[32] Joce Nuttall, 'Leadership for professional practice development in early childhood education: From "performance management" to "system development"'.

Colmer's research found professional learning and development in education and care settings is determined by a range of external, internal, inter-personal and personal influences on educators. Leaders in education and care settings play a significant role in shaping these influences. They monitor and interpret external factors (for example, policy reform, theory, public debate) with educators, configure the service's internal processes and environment to best support meaningful professional development and learning, build constructive interpersonal working relationships between educators and have a strong bearing on educators' identity, beliefs and self-worth as professionals.

Consistent with the above, a large body of research conceptualises services as 'social systems'.[33] In these systems, educators and leaders are 'co-participants' who 'co-evolve'[34] with the service rather than individuals who are controlled by a service leader. This research is informed by social constructivist theories of learning which posit educators learn through social interaction in the professional learning communities of their services, connections with their local communities and links with other education and care services and organisations in a 'network of practice'. Standard 7.1 recognises the importance of social interactions in supporting educators' development and growth by emphasising the importance of collaborative professional learning communities. In professional learning communities, educators contribute their unique skills, knowledge and experiences which extend the thinking and learning of their peers. An important implication of professional learning communities is that it is not the responsibility of leaders to have all the answers to questions. Rather, educators in the professional learning community work collaboratively to find solutions to structural and process issues and ensure these solutions achieve their desired outcomes.

The educational leader

The approved provider of an education and care service must designate a suitably qualified and experienced individual as educational leader at the service to lead the development and implementation of educational programs (Regulation 118), as well as ensure the establishment of clear goals and expectations for teaching and learning (Element 7.1.4).

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[33] Eeva Hujala (2004) cited in Kaye Colmer, 'Leading professional development and learning in early childhood centres: a social systems perspective', p. 35; Joce Nuttall, 'Leadership for professional practice development in early childhood education: From "performance management" to "system development"'.

[34] Joce Nuttall, 'Leadership for professional practice development in early childhood education: From "performance management" to "system development"', p. 16.

Australian Children's
Education & Care
Quality Authority

Anecdotal evidence from the sector suggests that many educators attach confusion and anxiety to the role of the educational leader and the experience and knowledge it demands.[35]

Requiring service providers to formalise the role of educational leader and the introduction of mandated learning frameworks aligns with what Heikka and Waniganayake identify as fundamental to leadership in ECEC, that 'pedagogical leadership is connected to not only children's learning but also the capacity building of the early childhood professional, and values and beliefs about education held by the wider community'.[36]

Some examples of the skills, knowledge and attributes required of the educational leader include:

- communication and interpersonal skills
- highly developed thinking skills including the ability to critically analyse and challenge accepted practice and ideas
- knowledge of leadership theory and the use of a range of approaches
- knowledge of professional standards and approved learning frameworks, regulatory standards, pedagogy, and effective approaches to teaching and learning
- adaptability
- the ability to influence others, seek and secure support
- the ability to mentor rather than monitor staff
- the ability to create a culture of learning based on inquiry, action research and reflection.

Barriers to effective leadership

There are a range of barriers that may affect services' ability to effectively practice leadership:

- While an educational leader may be highly qualified in early childhood development and pedagogy, they may possess limited or no leadership training. Fenech argues there are limited ongoing leadership development opportunities for educators with leadership responsibilities and there is a need for greater investment in developing leaders in the ECEC sector.[37] Others have noted that high staff turnover poses a challenge to building the leadership capacity of not only educational leaders but also their fellow educators. Competing demands and priorities may also constrain the time and resources committed to leadership development.

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[35] Alma Fleet et al., 'The role of the Educational Leader: Perceptions and expectations in a period of change', p. 29.
[36] Johanna Heikka and Manjula Waniganayake, 'Pedagogical leadership from a distributed perspective within the context of early childhood education', p. 510.
[37] Sylvana Fenech, 'Leadership development during times of reform', p. 90.

- Research indicates educators are often 'reluctant leaders'.[38] Krieg et al. attribute this to educators' perceived notions of leadership as 'hierarchical, controlling and instrumental'.[39] These conceptions of leadership may conflict with educators' 'preferred status' as educators and 'child developers'.[40] Furthermore, leadership may be negatively associated with managing staff performance, which may also deter potential leaders from accepting leadership roles.

- Education and care educators in Australia commonly view leadership as the responsibility of staff with positional authority.[41] Without a formal position or title, educators tend to believe they have limited power to influence change.[42] Therefore, experienced educators without formal leadership positions may refrain from engaging in informal leadership. Moreover, other educators may disregard or challenge the influence of informal leaders.

- Sims, Forrest, Semann and Slattery argue that while the intent of policy changes might be to empower educators to consider how the standards apply to their context, the result could be that educators feel disempowered. This thinking is based on the idea that educators may fear straying too far away from accepted ideas and practice due to a strong focus on accountability. This can result in a tendency to simply focus on understanding and interpreting the 'rules' rather than debating the intent of the rules and 'experimenting with a variety of ways relevant to context'.[43]

- Initial findings from the Victoria Advancing Early Learning (VAEL) study highlight the importance of service management (for example, the service director) providing educational leaders with dedicated time to perform their role.[44] Educational leaders also need to possess effective time management skills, while ambiguity in the educational leader role can detract from the time allocated to the role and consequently the effectiveness of the role.[45] For example, the allocation of time and resources to educational leaders has a bearing on how effectively they can review educators, co-ordinators and staff members' performance, and support their professional development. Effective leaders monitor data and determine areas where support may be required, which can positively impact performance against Element 7.2.2. Where educational

[38] Marjory Ebbeck and Manjula Waniganayake (2004) cited in Susan Krieg, Karina Davis and Kylie Anne Smith, 'Exploring the dance of early childhood educational leadership', p. 75; Johanna Heikka and Manjula Waniganayake, 'Pedagogical leadership from a distributed perspective within the context of early childhood education', p. 507; Jillian Rodd, *Leadership in Early Childhood: The pathway to professionalism* (4th ed.).

[39] Susan Krieg, Karina Davis and Kylie Anne Smith, 'Exploring the dance of early childhood educational leadership', p. 75.

[40] Iram Siraj-Blatchford and Laura Manni (2006) cited in Susan Krieg, Karina Davis and Kylie Anne Smith, 'Exploring the dance of early hildhood educational leadership', p. 75.

[41] Alexandra Diamond, 'Pre-service early childhood educators' leadership development through reflective engagement with experiential service learning and leadership literature', p. 13.

[42] Max Grarock and Anne-Marie Morrissey, 'Teachers' perceptions of their abilities to be educational leaders in Victorian childcare settings'.

[43] Margaret Sims et al., 'Conceptions of early childhood leadership: driving new professionalism?', p. 150.

[44] Melbourne Graduate School of Education, *The E4Kids study: Assessing the effectiveness of Australian early childhood education and care programs – Overview of Findings at 2016*, p. 23.

[45] Page, J.et al., 'Educational Leadership: Making a difference to children's learning and development'.

Australian Children's
Education & Care
Quality Authority

leaders have clear and explicit roles and position descriptions, it is more likely they will have a greater effect in supporting the service to achieve quality outcomes for children.

■ Although not addressed extensively in the literature, in discussions with ACECQA, regulatory authorities and the sector have regularly indicated approved providers play an influential role in supporting and developing leadership at the service level. Services operated by larger providers (that is, those providers that operate several services) may benefit from the scale of the provider's organisational infrastructure and available resources (such as centrally resourced policies and procedures) which allow these services greater time to critically reflect on and develop effective leadership. Furthermore, the quality of the relationship between a provider and its services and the policies and procedures (whether developed by the service or the provider for its services) are also influential factors.

Distributed leadership

Traditionally, educational leadership in ECEC contexts has been connected to the position of service director. Although the role of the educational leader is critically important, research suggests a lack of understanding about how other educators can support educational leadership.[46]

In recent years, distributed (or shared) leadership has received increased attention in the research. Distributed leadership recognises the leadership of educators who are not in formal leadership positions. It is based on the idea individual staff members possess diverse knowledge, skills, expertise and strengths and that, together, these form a collective organisational intelligence.[47] When individuals influence those around them and enable others to benefit from their knowledge and expertise, they are practicing leadership.

Distributed leadership sees different staff members as having discrete and overlapping spheres of influence in a service. Leadership occurs as each staff member 'interacts and influences each other while contributing to a shared vision'.[48] In distributed leadership models, leadership is spread among staff across different aspects of the service such as 'curriculum, advocacy, personnel and community'.[49]

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[46] Kaye Colmer, Manjula Waniganayake and Laurie Field, 'Leading professional learning in early childhood centres: Who are the educational leaders?' p. 104.

[47] Manjula Waniganayake, 'Being and Becoming Early Childhood Leaders: Reflections on Leadership Studies in Early Childhood Education and Future Leadership Research Agenda', p. 74.

[48] Elizabeth Stamopoulos, 'Reframing early childhood leadership', p. 42.

[49] Johanna Heikka and Manjula Waniganayake, 'Pedagogical leadership from a distributed perspective within the context of early childhood education', p. 499.

- information gathering

- questioning

- planning

- acting/doing

- reflecting/reviewing.

The approved learning frameworks also identify 'ongoing learning and reflective practice' as one of the principles that underpin effective pedagogy and acknowledge the importance of establishing a culture of professional inquiry. Educational leaders play a significant role in inspiring critical conversations and enabling the establishment and maintenance of a professional workplace in which 'educators and those with whom they work are all involved in an ongoing cycle of review through which current practices are examined, outcomes reviewed and new ideas generated'.[57]

There are a range of resources available to assist in guiding critical reflection in education and care services. These include:

- a table from the *Educators' Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* titled 'Theoretical perspectives in early childhood'.[58] This table can be used to guide critical reflection and explore what theories and child development principles/perspectives influence practice

- Early Childhood Australia's *Code of Ethics*.[59] This document provides a basis for critical reflection, a guide for professional behaviour and principles to inform individual and collective decision making

- a poster series produced by the Health and Community Services Workforce Council titled 'Leading excellent pedagogy and practice in children's services'.[60] This resource explores the role of educational leader through action research, and can be used to unpack the role of the educational leader in professional conversations, or as a prompt to guide other action research

- 'Leading Learning Circles for Educators Engaged in Study' developed by the Child and Family Studies team at Griffith University.[61] This is a national resource for pedagogical leaders to support educators engaged in study. It outlines a process of guided conversations in the form of learning circles.

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[57] Australian Government, *Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*, p. 13; Australian Government, *Framework for School Age Care in Australia*, p. 12.

[58] Australian Government, *Educators' Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia,* pp. 54-57.

[59] Early Childhood Australia, Code of Ethics.

[60] Health and Community Services Workforce Council, *Leading excellent pedagogy and practice in children's services* poster series. http://files.acecqa.gov.au/files/QualityInformationSheets/QualityArea7/WFCPosterExploringTheRoleOfEdLeader.pdf

[61] Griffith University, *Leading Learning Circles for Educators Engaged in Study*. https://research-repository.griffith.edu.au/bitstream/handle/10072/69381/104005_1.pdf?sequence=1

Jurisdictional information on compliance and enforcement actions

The NQF aims to continually drive quality improvement through a national approach to the regulation of education and care services. It primarily does this through setting enforceable minimum standards for education and care services, and quality assessment and rating of services against the NQS. Regulatory authorities in each state and territory are responsible for administering the NQF, including approving, monitoring and quality assessing and rating services. Approved providers, nominated supervisors and educators have gradated compliance obligations with the requirements of the National Law and National Regulations, while regulatory authorities are responsible for helping providers understand their obligations and promoting compliance through a broad range of regulatory activities.

Where non-compliance is identified, regulatory authorities may determine that the most effective response is formal enforcement action. Identification of non-compliance can occur through observations and evidence gathered in the course of investigations, quality assessment visits, spot checks or targeted campaigns. Identification of non-compliance may also be as a result of an investigation into a complaint or notification of an incident made to the regulatory authority.

Regulatory authorities may publish information about enforcement actions taken under the National Law, including information about compliance notices, prosecutions, enforceable undertakings, and suspension or cancellation of approvals or certificates. Published information on regulatory authority websites[62] shows enforcement action for leadership and service management requirements most frequently involved non-compliance with:

- Regulation 160 (Child enrolment records to be kept by approved provider and family day care educator)
- Regulation 170 (Policies and procedures to be followed).

While it is important to note that services may be in breach of multiple sections of the National Law and National Regulations, regulatory authorities will determine the type of enforcement action to take based on a range of factors, including the nature and seriousness of the non-compliance, its impact on changing provider behaviour, and reducing risk to children.

[62] Accessed from regulatory authority websites, 1 June 2017.

For example, in relation to the cases of non-compliance for leadership and service management requirements described above, there were seven different types of enforcement action taken, including:

- compliance notice
- conditions on service approval
- conditions on provider approval
- suspension of service approval
- cancellation of service approval
- cancellation of provider approval
- prosecution.

It is difficult to draw meaningful conclusions from the published information on enforcement actions without more detailed research into the underlying circumstances of each case. This is because regulatory authorities consider a range of factors when applying the National Law and determine an appropriate regulatory response to non-compliance on a case by case basis. Regulatory authorities use a range of information sources to help assess risk to children's health, safety and wellbeing, including:

- the provider and the service's history of compliance
- the service's quality rating and QIP
- the physical characteristics of the service
- the number and age of children attending the service
- complaints and notifications
- monitoring and regulatory activities, including investigations
- analysis of broader sector or regional compliance trends
- other regulatory systems with relevant or overlapping requirements and/or compliance monitoring.

Collecting and analysing a range of information supports procedural fairness, an appropriate and responsive regulatory approach and assists regulatory authorities to consider all associated risks when addressing non-compliance.

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Leadership and service management (Quality Area 7) – differences according to jurisdiction, service sub-type, management type, socioeconomic status and remoteness classification

Quality Area 7 comprises three standards, underpinned by 13 elements, as shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1: Quality Area 7 standards and elements

Standard 7.1 Effective leadership promotes a positive organisational culture and builds a professional learning community.	
7.1.1	Appropriate governance arrangements are in place to manage the service.
7.1.2	The induction of educators, coordinators and staff members is effective.
7.1.3	Every effort is made to promote continuity of educators and coordinators at the service.
7.1.4	Provision is made to ensure a suitably qualified and experienced educator or coordinator leads the development of the curriculum and ensures the establishment of clear goals and expectations for teaching and learning.
7.1.5	Adults working with children and those engaged in management of the service or residing on the premises are fit and proper.
Standard 7.2 There is a commitment to continuous improvement.	
7.2.1	A statement of philosophy is developed and guides all aspects of the service's operations.
7.2.2	The performance of educators, coordinators and staff members is evaluated and individual development plans are in place to support performance improvement.
7.2.3	An effective self-assessment and quality improvement process is in place.
Standard 7.3 Administrative systems enable the effective management of a quality service.	
7.3.1	Records and information are stored appropriately to ensure confidentiality, are available from the service and are maintained in accordance with legislative requirements.
7.3.2	Administrative systems are established and maintained to ensure the effective operation of the service.
7.3.3	The Regulatory Authority is notified of any relevant changes to the operation of the service, of serious incidents and any complaints which allege a breach of legislation.
7.3.4	Processes are in place to ensure that all grievances and complaints are addressed, investigated fairly and documented in a timely manner.
7.3.5	Service practices are based on effectively documented policies and procedures that are available at the service and reviewed regularly.

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Quality Area 7 in context

The NQS comprises seven quality areas, as shown in **Table 2** below.

Table 2 NQS quality areas	
QA1	Educational program and practice
QA2	Children's health and safety
QA3	Physical environment
QA4	Staffing arrangements
QA5	Relationships with children
QA6	Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
QA7	Leadership and service management

Figure 3 compares the seven quality areas according to the proportion of services that have been rated as Working Towards, Meeting or Exceeding NQS. It shows 83% of services were rated as Meeting (51%) or Exceeding (32%) the NQS in Quality Area 7. This is comparable to the results for Quality Area 2 (*Children's health and safety*) and Quality Area 3 (*Physical Environment*) and slightly higher than the results for Quality Area 1 (*Educational program and practice*), but markedly lower than the results for Quality Area 4 (*Staffing arrangements*), Quality Area 5 (*Relationships with children*) and Quality Area 6 (*Collaborative partnerships with children and families*).

Figure 3: Percentage of quality rated services at each quality area rating level

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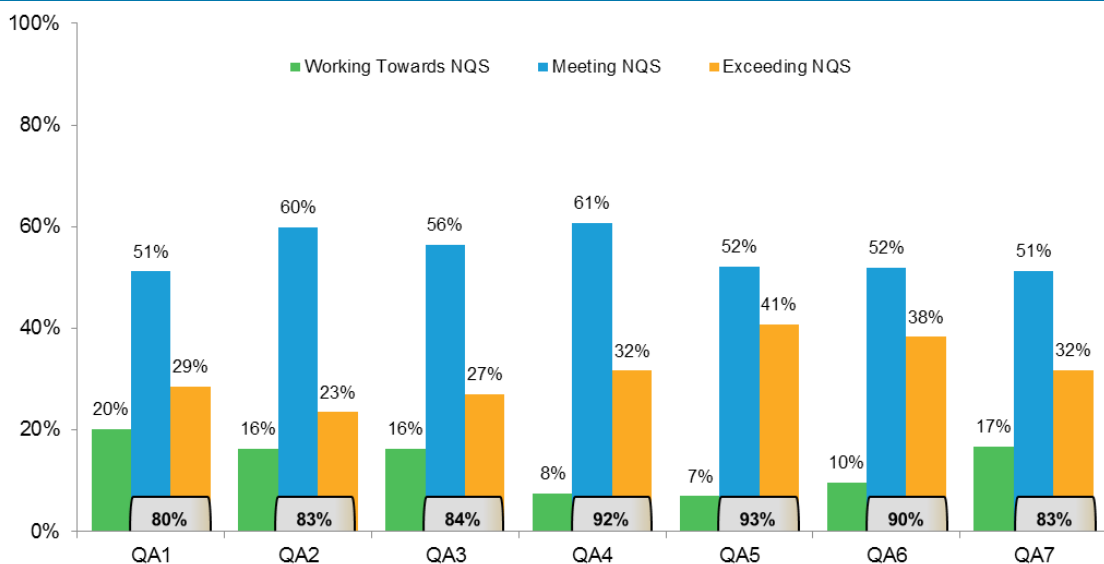
Quality Area 7 by service sub-type

Under the NQF, service providers are granted approval from regulatory authorities to operate either a centre-based or FDC service. Although providers are not obliged to define the type of service any further, when applying for service approval, providers of centre-based services are asked to indicate the specific nature of education and care their service will provide by selecting from a range of options. These services are counted in **Figure 4** using an ordered method:[63]

- long day care (LDC)

- preschool/kindergarten (stand alone or part of school)

- outside school hours care (before school care, after school care and/or vacation care) (OSHC).

Some centre-based services offer a combination of services or 'multiple programs' from the one venue (typically LDC offering another service such as OSHC).[64] Services may also vary their service mix to suit the needs of families without indicating this to regulatory authorities. For example, a centre-based service providing LDC may choose to also provide an OSHC service if there is demand.

Figure 4 compares how services in each service sub-type have been rated against Quality Area 7. Preschools/kindergartens had the highest proportion of services rated as Meeting or Exceeding NQS in Quality Area 7 (94%), while FDC services had the lowest proportion (54%).

Significance testing at the 95% level showed preschools/kindergartens and LDC services were significantly more likely than other service sub-types to be quality rated as Meeting or Exceeding NQS in Quality Area 7. The higher rate of preschools/kindergartens rated Meeting or Exceeding NQS may in part reflect governments historically subsidising and regulating for quality at a higher level among preschools/kindergartens in comparison to other service types covered by the NQF. It may also be influenced by other factors commonly present in preschools/kindergartens (and less common in OSHC and FDC) which have been linked to high quality. These factors include staff continuity, higher qualification requirements, reduced staff turnover, and the provision of release time and resources for planning. For example, a preschool/kindergarten with a stable, long-standing cohort of educators can focus less time and attention on managing staff turnover (such as inducting new staff), and more on planning for continuous improvement.

[63] The counting method applies a hierarchy to order services that offer more than one service type. That is, services which provide FDC in addition to any other service type are classified as FDC services; services which provide LDC in addition to Preschool/Kindergarten or OSHC services are classified as LDC services; services which provide Preschool/Kindergarten services as well as OSHC services are classified as Preschool/Kindergarten services; services which provide OSHC services only are classified as OSHC services.

[64] NQA ITS data collected on service sub-types is self-reported by providers when applying for service approval. Providers may choose multiple service sub-types when self-reporting. Reporting on service sub-types is not mandatory and therefore, may not be current.

For OSHC services rated Working Towards NQS or Significant Improvement Required for Quality Area 7, Element 7.2.2 (staff evaluation and individual development plans) and 7.1.4 (educational leader) were the elements least likely to be assessed as Met. This may be related to the relatively high turnover of educators in OSHC services which complicates the process of establishing and implementing individual development plans as well as finding and retaining suitably qualified and experienced educational leaders.

Similarly, for FDC services, Element 7.2.2 and 7.1.4 were the least likely to be assessed as Met, closely followed by Element 7.3.1 (records and information) and 7.3.5 (policies and procedures). This may indicate lower awareness among FDC educators and/or coordinators of regulatory requirements regarding record storage and policies and procedures.

Figure 4: Percentage of quality rated services at each Quality Area 7 rating level by service subtype

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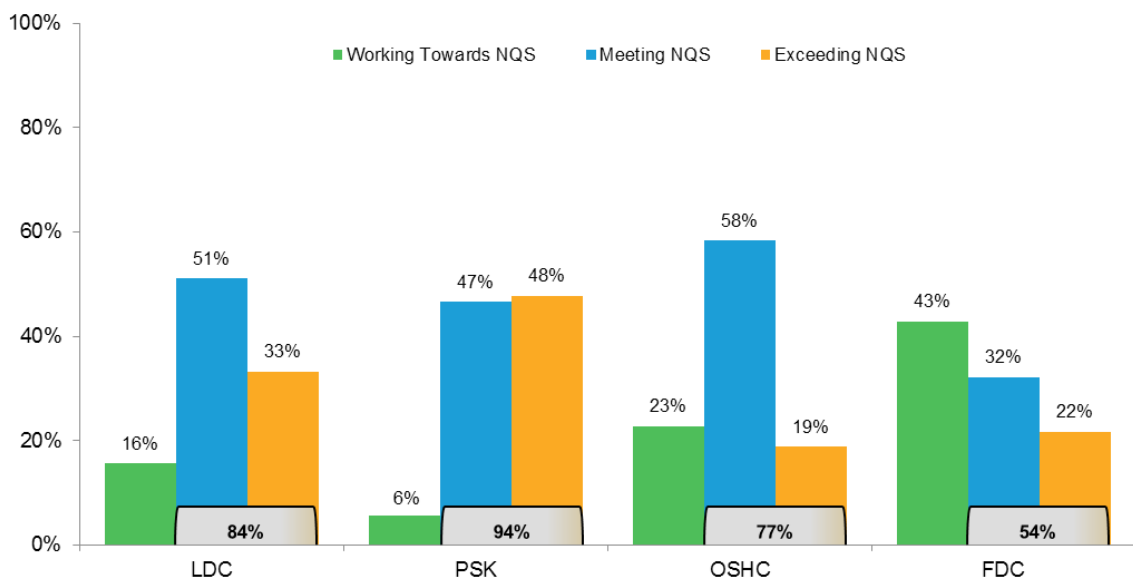
Quality Area 7 by provider management type

Education and care approved providers can be classified according to the eight different provider management types as defined in the Australian Bureau of Statistics National Early Childhood Education and Care Collection Data Collection Guidelines.[65]

Figure 5 compares how services in each provider management type have been rated against Quality Area 7. Significance testing at the 95% level showed 'State/Territory and Local Government managed' (95%), 'Private not for profit other organisations' (91%) and 'Private not for profit community managed' (88%) were significantly more likely than other provider management types to be quality rated as Meeting or Exceeding NQS in Quality Area 7, while 'Catholic schools' (73%), 'Private for profit' (76%) and 'State/Territory government schools' (78%) were significantly less likely.

Figure 5: Percentage of quality rated services at each Quality Area 7 rating level by provider management type

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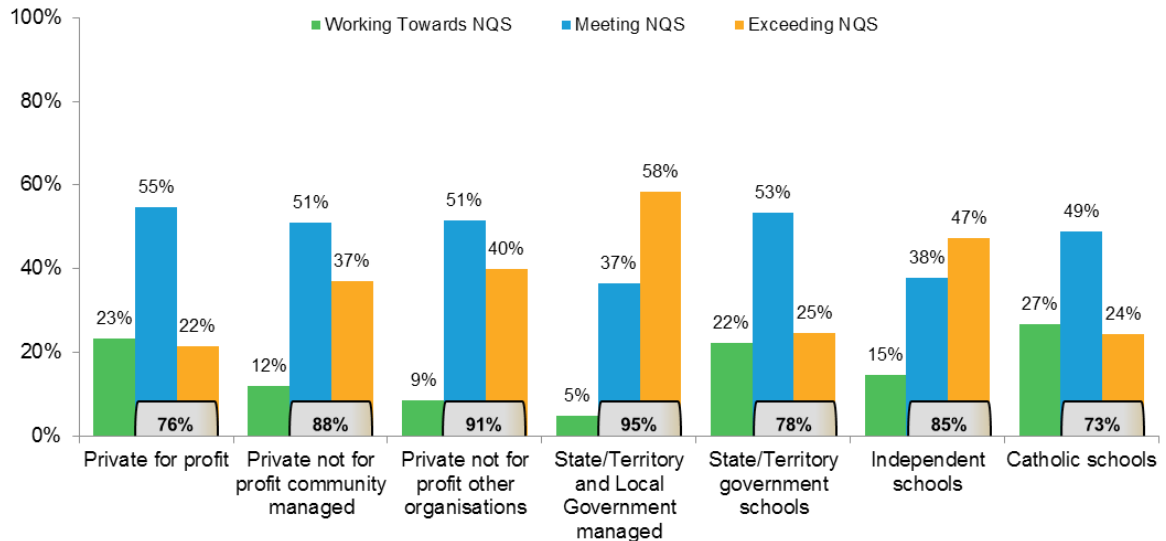
[65] Providers are asked to specify their 'Provider Management Type' (or 'Sector Classification') as part of their application for provider approval in line with the Australian Bureau of Statistics National Early Childhood Education and Care Collection Data Collection Guidelines.

Provider size

Education and care approved providers can also be classified by their size (that is, the number of services they provide). Large providers are defined as those that provide 25 or more services; medium providers are classified as those that provide between two and 24 services; and small providers are classified as those that provide one service. More than 80% of approved providers operate a single service.

Significance testing at the 95% level showed small providers were significantly less likely to be rated as Meeting or Exceeding NQS in Quality Area 7. Conversely, medium and large providers were significantly more likely to be rated Meeting or Exceeding NQS in Quality Area 7.

These results suggest provider size may have an impact on service quality, particularly in relation to the approach to management and administrative tasks. For example, larger providers may benefit from centralised administrative support compared to smaller providers, as well as the associated economies of scale, professional development opportunities and staff retention strategies.

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Quality Area 7 by SEIFA ranking

The Socioeconomic Index for Areas (SEIFA) is a tool that draws on census data to score socioeconomic advantage and disadvantage in localities across Australia. SEIFA deciles classify these scores into 10 groups, from 1 (most disadvantaged) to 10 (least disadvantaged).[66]

Figure 6 compares the distribution of Quality Area 7 ratings according to SEIFA decile. It shows minimal variation with more than 80% of services in all deciles receiving a rating of Meeting or Exceeding NQS in Quality Area 7. However, there is a slightly higher representation of services rated Exceeding NQS in the least disadvantaged localities compared to the most disadvantaged localities, with 37% and 35% of services rated Exceeding NQS in the two least disadvantaged SEIFA deciles (10 and 9) compared to 31% and 29% in the two most disadvantaged localities (SEIFA deciles 1 and 2).

Figure 6: Percentage of quality rated centre-based services at each Quality Area 7 rating level by SEIFA decile[1]
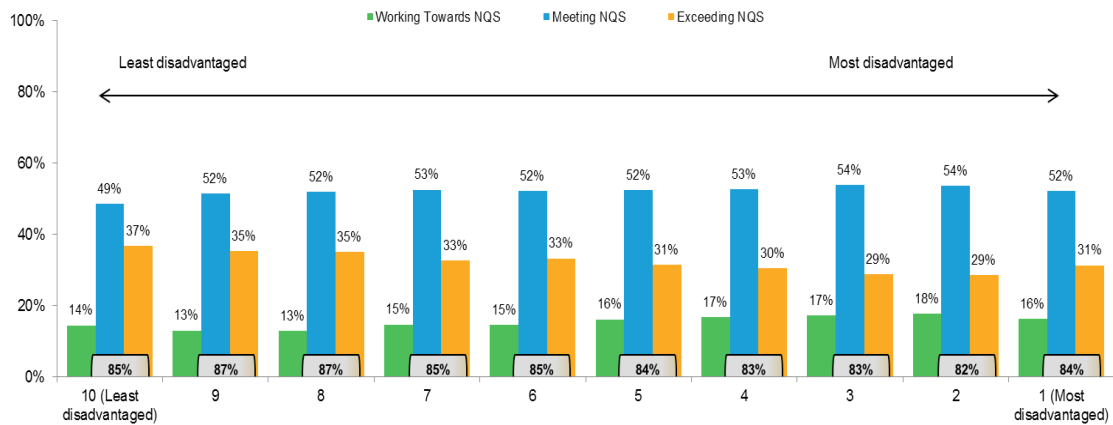
[1] FDC services are excluded from the SEIFA and ARIA+ classifications because their approval is not specific to one location.

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[66] Census data that contribute to the SEIFA index include household income, employment status, occupation, community or non community housing, and other indicators of advantage and disadvantage.

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Quality Area 7 by remoteness

Figure 7 presents the distribution of Quality Area 7 ratings according to the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA+).[67] The figure shows services in Remote and Very Remote Australia had the lowest proportion of services rated Meeting or Exceeding NQS (79% and 74% respectively).

Significance testing at the 95% level showed services in 'Inner Regional Australia' were significantly more likely to be rated Meeting or Exceeding NQS in Quality Area 7 compared to services in all other areas. Services in 'Major Cities of Australia' and 'Very Remote Australia' were significantly less likely to be rated as Meeting or Exceeding NQS in Quality Area 7.

Figure 7: Percentage of quality rated centre-based services at each Quality Area 7 rating level by remoteness classification[1]
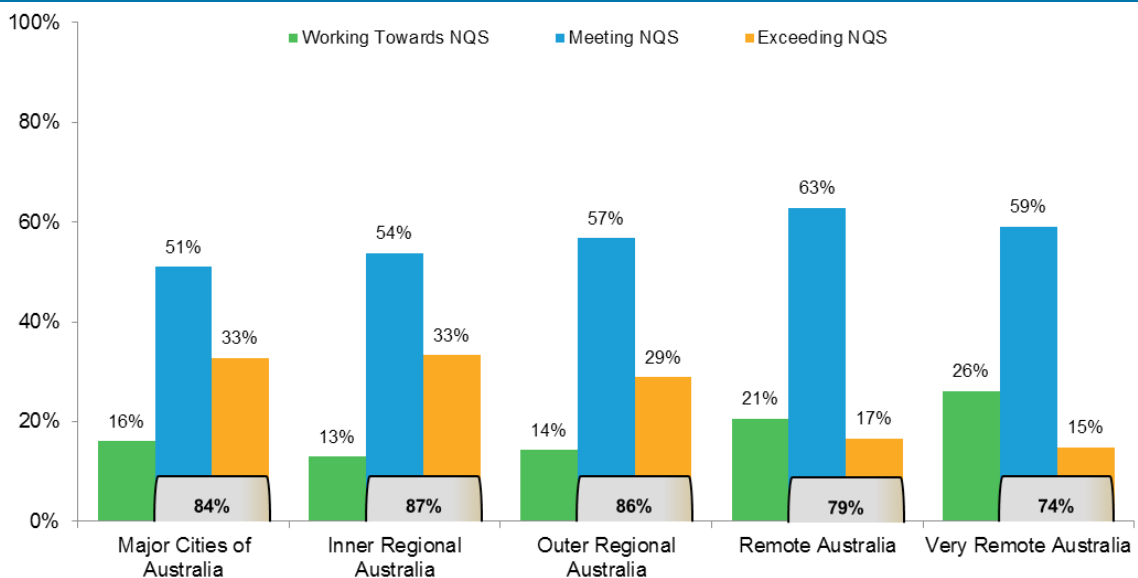
[1] FDC services are excluded from the SEIFA and ARIA+ classifications because their approval is not specific to one location.

[67] The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Remoteness Structure uses the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA+) to develop a standard classification and index of remoteness, based on road distances between populated localities and general Service Centres (not Early Childhood Education and Care services). The index can be used in policy development, implementation and evaluation to assist in targeting of programs to the various regions of Australia. For more information about the ARIA+ classification, see Australian Bureau of Statistics (2013) *Australian Statistical Geography Standard: Volume 5 - Remoteness Structure*, Cat. No. 1270.0.55.005, ABS, Canberra.

Quality Area 7 by jurisdiction

Figure 8 compares how services in each jurisdiction have been rated against Quality Area 7. The Australian Capital Territory had the highest proportion (90%) and the Northern Territory the lowest proportion (72%) of services rated as Meeting or Exceeding NQS in Quality Area 7. Significance testing at the 95% confidence level showed services in:

- Victoria, Queensland, the Australian Capital Territory and Tasmania were significantly more likely than services in other jurisdictions to be quality rated as Meeting or Exceeding NQS in Quality Area 7

- New South Wales, the Northern Territory and Western Australia were significantly less likely than services in other jurisdictions to be quality rated as Meeting or Exceeding NQS in Quality Area 7.

The relatively high number and proportion of preschools/kindergartens in Victoria may in part explain the difference between Victoria and New South Wales in the proportion of services rated as Meeting or Exceeding NQS for Quality Area 7. Preschools/kindergartens comprised 1208 services (or 29% of all services) in Victoria compared to 803 services (or 15%) in New South Wales. Significant testing at the 95% confidence level showed:

- preschools/kindergartens in Victoria, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory were significantly more likely than preschool/kindergartens in other jurisdictions to be rated Meeting NQS or Exceeding in Quality Area 7

- LDC services in the Northern Territory, South Australia and Victoria were significantly less likely than LDC services in other jurisdictions to be rated Meeting or Exceeding NQS for Quality Area 7

- OSHC services in New South Wales and the Northern Territory were significantly less likely than OSHC services in other jurisdictions to be rated Meeting or Exceeding NQS for Quality Area 7.

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Figure 8: Percentage of quality rated services at each Quality Area 7 rating level by jurisdiction

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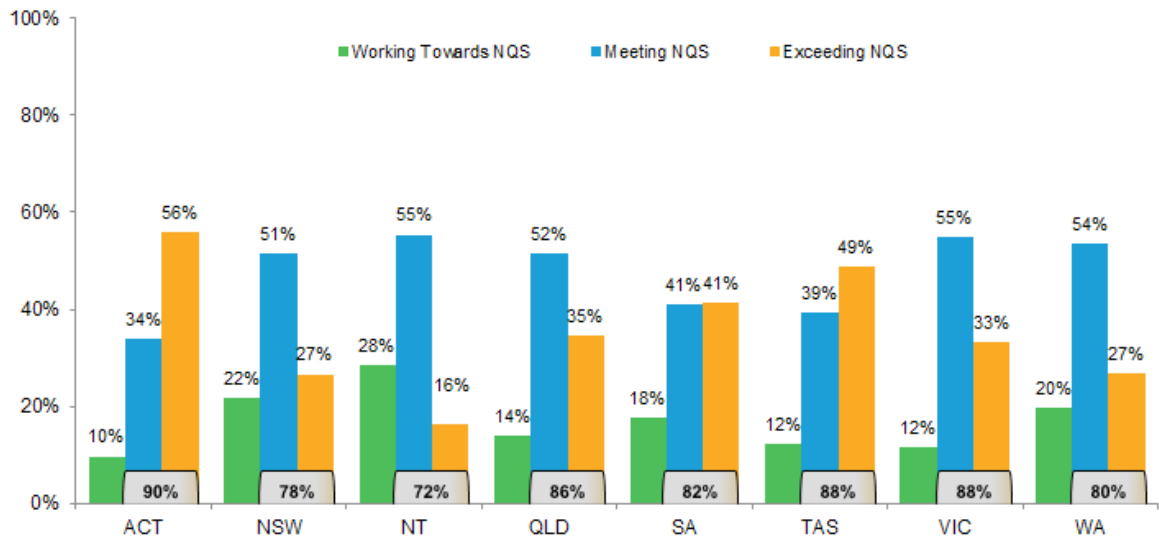
Quality Area 7 by standard

Figure 9 shows the three standards in Quality Area 7 are some of the most challenging for services to meet, with Standard 7.2 being particularly challenging.

Figure 9: Percentage of quality rated services at each standard rating level

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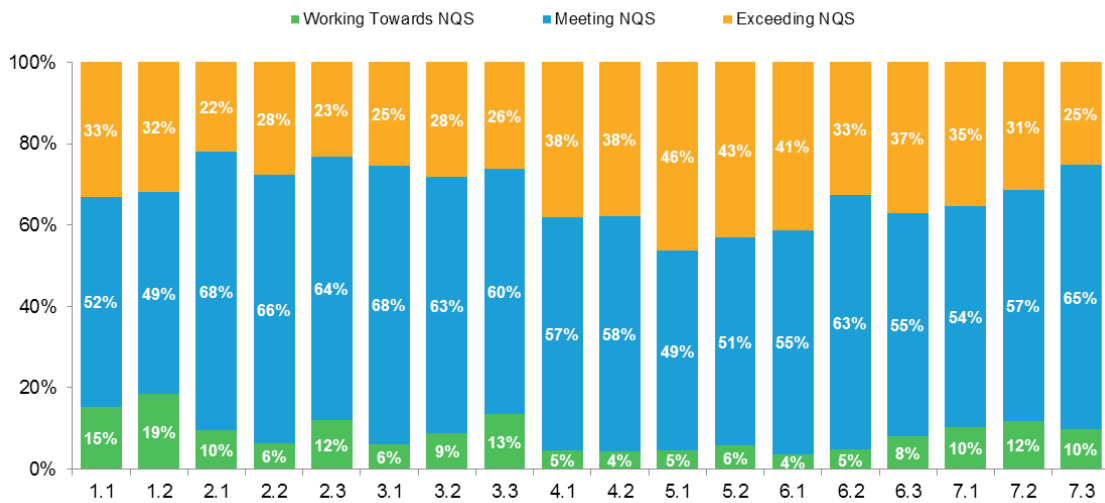
Quality Area 7 by element

Standard 7.1 and 7.3 comprise five elements each, and Standard 7.2 comprises three elements. All elements must be assessed as Met for a service to be rated as Meeting NQS or Exceeding NQS in that standard. In turn, at least two of the three standards must be rated as Meeting NQS or Exceeding NQS for the service to receive an overall rating of Meeting or Exceeding NQS in Quality Area 7.

As can be seen in **Figure 10**, the elements most likely to be assessed as Met in Quality Area 7 are:

■ **Element 7.1.5**: Adults working with children and those engaged in management of the service or residing on the premises are fit and proper (95%)

Element 7.1.3: Every effort is made to promote continuity of educators and coordinators at the service (94%). **Figure 10** also shows the least likely of the elements to be assessed as Met are:

■ **Element 7.2.2**: The performance of educators, coordinators and staff members is evaluated and individual development plans are in place to support performance improvement (64%)

■ **Element 7.1.4**: Provision is made to ensure a suitably qualified and experienced educator or coordinator leads the development of the curriculum and ensures the establishment of clear goals and expectations for teaching and learning (68%)

Figure 10: Percentage of Quality Area 7 elements assessed as Not Met or Met for services rated Working Towards NQS or Significant Improvement Required overall[1]
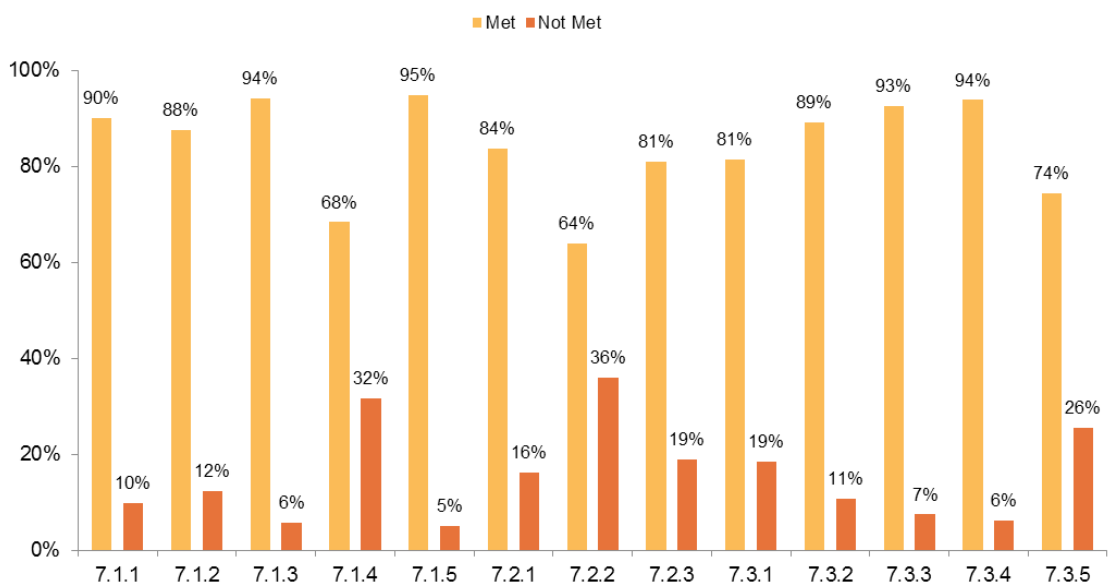
[1] Only services receiving an overall quality rating of Significant Improvement Required or Working Towards NQS are counted in these figures as services with an overall quality rating of Meeting NQS, Exceeding NQS or Excellent must have all elements assessed as Met.

Case studies

Given the requirement for services to meet all the elements of Quality Area 7 to be rated as Meeting NQS for this Quality Area as a whole, it is useful to explore why some services are falling short and others are meeting the elements. It is particularly pertinent to examine Element 7.2.2 and 7.1.4 as these are the elements in Quality Area 7 services are least likely to meet.

These case studies provide examples of evidence collected by authorised officers when assessing Element 7.2.2 and 7.1.4, including their contribution to quality education and care. They draw on accounts from authorised officers' assessment visits to highlight practice that does not meet the NQS and higher quality practice for these elements.

Examples of evidence collected by authorised officers

The reports from authorised officers highlight why some services have been assessed as having Met Element 7.2.2 and 7.1.4, while others have Not Met these elements. The examples and excerpts below represent a cross-section of jurisdictions and sub-service types.

The case studies are only examples of evidence collected by authorised officers when assessing services against these elements. They are not a 'checklist' of standard practice which should be applied by all services. The examples are listed under the following headings:

Observation – the authorised officer observes what children, families, educators, coordinators and staff members are doing (for example, the educational leader working with other educators and coordinators to observe, support and extend children's thinking and learning).

Discussion – the authorised officer and approved provider, nominated supervisor, educational leader, educators, coordinators, FDC educators or staff members engage in a discussion about why and how particular practices occur at the service.

Documentation – the authorised officer refers to documentation provided as evidence to support particular practices at the service (for example, records such as the staff record, educational program and practice records, the record of educators working directly with children and the record of volunteers and students).

The nature of Element 7.2.2 and 7.1.4 means authorised officers are much more likely to use discussion and documentation to gather evidence against these elements. Therefore, the case studies below do not always include examples of evidence gathered through observation.

Element 7.2.2

The performance of educators, coordinators and staff members is evaluated and individual development plans are in place to support performance improvement.

Rationale

The focus of Element 7.2.2 is that performance plans are in place for educators, coordinators and staff members and there is a regular cycle of review. This ensures knowledge, skills and practices are current, areas for further development are identified and addressed, and all parties benefit, including the approved provider, nominated supervisor, educators, coordinators, staff members, families and children.

When visiting a service, authorised officers may **observe**:

- the performance of each educator, coordinator and staff member supported by the educational leader and/or nominated supervisor.

They may **discuss**:

- how the service's performance review cycle contributes to planning for learning and further development

- processes to ensure each educator, coordinator and staff member receives ongoing feedback about their performance

- in the case of FDC services, opportunities for educators to provide feedback about the effectiveness of the support provided by the coordination unit.

Authorised officers may **sight**:

- documented position descriptions for educators, coordinators and staff members that clearly outline the responsibilities of the position

- evidence of participation by educators, coordinators and staff members in professional development activities to update their knowledge and skills

- in the case of FDC services, home visit records, re-registration documents, or policies and procedures about conducting visits to educators' homes.

Services meeting Element 7.2.2

Discussion

At a kindergarten, the service director confirmed the performance of educators was evaluated and individual development plans were in place to support performance improvement. Performance development reviews were completed on an annual basis and involved educators developing their own goals. The director detailed that an important part of the process involved supporting educators in recognising their achievements and reflecting on 'what they have achieved'.

At a LDC service, staff members completed a self-evaluation document where they assessed their skills and identified areas of strength as well as areas requiring additional focus and support. The nominated supervisor explained that goals and plans linked to curriculum development led by the educational leader were considered in an appraisal process. This ensured there was a shared approach to developing the educators' skills and knowledge. For example, the educational leader has been working with the educators to further develop their skills and confidence in the EYLF and Framework for School Age Care (FSAC) documents to ensure they capture children's learning and development in meaningful ways.

At a FDC service, discussions with coordination staff indicated educators undergo a yearly formal performance assessment. The service's child development advisor explained they visit educators on a regular schedule, every four to six weeks, offering support with programming and discussing areas that could benefit from professional development.

Documentation

At a LDC service, processes were in place to ensure feedback on performance was provided to all educators and individual development plans were in place to support performance improvement. The regular and ongoing evaluation of the performance of all educators was a collaborative process undertaken by the senior manager with each educator and documentation sighted during the visit demonstrated that this is a consistent and effective process.

At a preschool, the authorised officer sighted a performance management procedure and relevant documentation for all educators. The procedure was informed by the service's performance and development policy and guided by its Performance Conversations framework which detailed what the service had identified as the elements of best practice in relation to performance management.

At an OSHC service, the authorised officer sighted a well-documented appraisal process for leadership staff and educators. A template was used to encourage educators to reflect on their own performance and comment on how they had been implementing the service philosophy. They were also required to identify their achievements as well as areas for further development. The coordinator could add to this document before a formal meeting was organised to discuss each aspect of the review. A staff development plan was developed in this meeting. This included identifying professional goals and appropriate resources for these goals to be met.

At a FDC service, all staff members (educators and coordinators) had documented individual development plans in place to support their skill development and personal development. The appraisal process occurred in an annual cycle, involving regular meetings, six-monthly reviews and assessment of performance. Goals were set for individuals with professional development opportunities accessed to support achievement of these goals.

Services not meeting Element 7.2.2

Discussion

At an OSHC service, the nominated supervisor explained there were no current staff appraisals or performance plans in place as daily conversations on staff performance were conducted through informal discussions during the sessions. The nominated supervisor explained they were unaware that staff performance appraisals and individual development plans should be conducted regularly and in writing, and would implement this in the future.

At a LDC service, the authorised officer noted that in several instances, including in staff meeting minutes, staff appraisals and general discussions, areas of concern had been highlighted and identified by staff. When discussing these issues with the director it was unclear as to how they had been addressed or considered as part of continuous improvement.

At a FDC service, the performance of educators was informally evaluated and feedback was given during residential visits by coordinators. The coordinators advised they visited each educator monthly and provided them with a copy of observations and suggestions as documented by the coordinator for continuous improvement. There was, however, no formal process in place to develop individual development plans, including engaging both educators and coordinators in an ongoing documented review cycle that contributed to planning for learning and further development.

Documentation

At a LDC service, the authorised officer sighted the staff handbook which stated appraisals were to be carried out within the first three months of employment and then on an annual basis. These appraisal forms showed educators self-assessed their own work performances through ticking off a series of questions and making comment if they felt it was necessary. The centre manager then commented alongside these if they disagreed with the educator's self-assessment. The authorised officer sighted staff appraisals and noted that not all of them were dated. Some educators had recent appraisals; however there were no comments or development plans attached to these.

At a kindergarten, the authorised officer sighted documentary evidence of staff appraisals. However, these were not completed or followed up. For example, an educator had noted their interest in attending professional development, which had not been followed up. There was no evidence educators' performance improvement was supported. The nominated supervisor was unable to produce a complete appraisal or individual development plans.

At an OSHC service, the service had documentation that could be used to facilitate a formal performance appraisal process. However, the authorised officer noted feedback to educators about their performance had historically tended to be informal, verbal and with limited follow-up.

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Element 7.1.4

Provision is made to ensure a suitably qualified and experienced educator or coordinator leads the development of the curriculum and ensures the establishment of clear goals and expectations for teaching and learning.

Rationale

The focus of Element 7.1.4 is that the educational leader works with educators to provide curriculum direction and to ensure children achieve the outcomes of the approved learning framework.

When visiting a service, authorised officers may **observe**:

■ the educational leader working with other educators and coordinators to observe, support and extend children's learning.

They may **discuss**:

■ opportunities available for discussion and reflective practice

■ how the educational leader promotes children's learning and development to families

■ the strategies and processes the educational leader uses to lead the development of the curriculum and set goals for teaching and learning.

Authorised officers may also **sight** evidence of:

■ ongoing planning and evaluation that centres on children's learning and development

■ professional discussion and interrogation of research and new ideas.

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Services meeting Element 7.1.4

Observation

At a LDC service, it was evident reflective practice was embedded in each educator's performance and supported through guidance from the educational leader. Educators openly shared their individual reflections on the day's program and individual children, which contributed to the effective development of the curriculum. The educational leader was observed working with educators to focus on extending and scaffolding children's ideas, interactions with children and examining room configurations.

At a preschool, the authorised officer observed that educators would seek out the support and knowledge of the educational leader. Furthermore, the authorised officer observed how the educational leader had used the service's curriculum planning documentation to lead the effective development of the curriculum and set high expectations for teaching and learning.

At a preschool, the authorised officer observed the educational leader meet with the room leader to discuss how planning for the following month's program was progressing.

Discussion

At a LDC service, a highly qualified and experienced educational leader had been appointed to the service. During the visit, the educational leader discussed how they were allocated time to work with all educators to develop a high quality and responsive program to support, set clear learning goals and expectations, and promote learning and development for each child. In this time, the educational leader spent time in rooms with educators, offering suggestions and advice as they continued to enhance their skills and develop practice.

At a preschool, the educational leader promoted ongoing learning and development of educational skills through professional conversations, staff meetings, regular training and spending time working directly with groups of educators and children. For example, the service had recently commenced a journey looking at the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) data, engaging with Abecedarian Learning Games and looking at modern day educational theory. Discussions with educators demonstrated they had a good knowledge of the approved learning frameworks and the NQS, and had commenced using the Abecedarian Learning Games within their rooms.

At a FDC service, a suitably qualified and experienced educational leader led the development of the curriculum and had established clear goals for teaching and learning. They advised their role was to support educators in their roles, developing and implementing their programs, and regularly sourcing targeted professional development opportunities for educators.

Documentation

At a LDC service, documentation sighted demonstrated the educational leader had worked with educators to research relevant readings and theorists and jointly decide how findings from the research might be used to inform the program.

At an OSHC service, at the end of each term the service's educational leader held a formal documented meeting with educators to review operations, including aspects of the curriculum, and to set expectations and goals for the following term.

Services not meeting Element 7.1.4

Discussion

At an OSHC service, the service had designated an educational leader; however the educational leader was not suitably experienced and did not lead the development of the curriculum and establish clear goals for teaching and learning. For example, through conversations with the educational leader the authorised officer identified that they were not aware of the FSAC or NQS.

At a LDC service, the educational leader advised the service had recently reviewed its planning, however educators were still struggling to link the children's learning and development. They advised they assisted other educators with follow-up ideas on their programs; however they had not yet set any curriculum goals for the children's learning.

At a FDC service, the approved provider (also the educational leader) was not able to articulate how goals and expectations around delivery of the educational program were aligned with EYLF outcomes or how educators were supported to achieve these. For example, monthly meetings with educators were held; however the approved provider was unable to provide evidence of information, discussions, strategies or steps in place to inform and support educators to implement programs based on the approved learning framework.

At a preschool, the educational leader was not suitably qualified for the role. In a discussion with the educational leader, it was evident they were still building their knowledge of the EYLF and relevant state guidelines and had not set any clear goals or expectations for teaching and learning. For example, the educational leader stated they were not sure how to link the state guidelines to the programming as they were still learning. The educational leader was also asked how they support educators to set goals for children. They responded: 'We haven't touched on that too much yet.'

Documentation

At a LDC service, while a suitably qualified and experienced educator has been allocated the role of educational leader, documentation available to authorised officers did not demonstrate that appropriate expectations for teaching and learning were in place at the service. In addition, the outcomes, principles and practices of the EYLF were not consistently evident in the program.

At a FDC service, the educational leader had developed some goals and expectations for teaching and learning for educators. The educational leader had developed monthly templates including activities that educators could choose to use for their educational program; however this did not allow educators to create a cycle of planning. Although the educational leader had Fridays dedicated to supporting educators with their program, there were no formal goals or expectations developed to support teaching and learning or educators' understanding of the approved learning frameworks.

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Education & Care
Quality Authority

Conclusion

This paper has highlighted the importance of effective leadership and internal administrative systems (such as policies, processes and procedures) in guiding and supporting educators, coordinators, educational leaders and staff members to deliver quality education and care programs. It has also highlighted the central importance of Quality Area 7 to all other quality areas of the NQS; the way a service addresses different aspects of the NQS will be directly influenced by the quality of its leadership and management.

It has emphasised the importance of Quality Area 7 in informing how a service operates, from leadership that sets the strategic direction and professional values of a service, to administrative systems that enable the effective management of a quality service. It has also shown the contribution of effective leadership and administrative systems to achieving continuous improvement, through an ongoing cycle of planning, review and evaluation.

The introduction of the NQF and the approved learning frameworks signalled an increased expectation for pedagogical leadership. As described in the contemporary academic ECEC research and theory section of the paper, much of the contemporary literature focuses on models of distributed (or shared) leadership, which recognises the knowledge and skills all staff members bring to an organisation, regardless of the formal leadership status of their role.

The introduction of the educational leader role in part reflects this model of leadership in that it has an influential role in mentoring, inspiring, motivating, affirming and also challenging or extending the practice and pedagogy of educators. This is particularly evident under Standard 7.1 of the NQS which requires effective leadership promotes a positive organisational culture and builds a professional learning community. It is also acknowledged in the approved learning frameworks that identify 'ongoing learning and reflective practice' as one of the principles that underpin effective pedagogy and the importance of establishing a culture of professional inquiry.

Variations in results for Quality Area 7 were evident according to a range of provider and service characteristics – in particular service sub-type, provider management type, provider size, location and jurisdiction. While some results reflect the trends apparent in overall quality rating results, there are some other factors that may explain variation in quality rating results for this specific quality area. Higher proportions of preschool/kindergarten services explain some of the variation in quality ratings for Quality Area 7 between jurisdictions, for instance.[68] The lower proportion of FDC and OSHC services rated as Meeting or Exceeding NQS in Quality Area 7 was driven in part by Element 7.2.2 (staff evaluation and individual development plans) and 7.1.4 (educational leader), which were the elements least likely to be assessed as Met.

The higher Meeting or Exceeding NQS rate for preschools/kindergartens may in part reflect governments historically subsidising and regulating for quality at a higher level among preschools/kindergartens in comparison to other service types covered by the NQF.

[68] Note that most preschool/kindergarten services are out of scope of the NQF in Western Australia and Tasmania.

It may also be influenced by other factors such as staff continuity, higher qualification requirements and reduced staff turnover.

Implications and future directions

Analysis of quality rating results shows Quality Area 7 is one of the most difficult quality areas to meet. This paper has noted OSHC and FDC services may benefit from additional guidance around Element 7.2.2 and 7.1.4 – particularly Element 7.1.4 – as there is limited literature around what the educational leader role means in these settings.

The finding that small providers were less likely to be rated as Meeting or Exceeding NQS in Quality Area 7 may highlight the opportunity for additional leadership and service management support for these providers. A wide range of resources and support materials are available to help them understand the elements and standards underpinning Quality Area 7, as well as the requirements of the National Law and National Regulations. Many resources have been referred to in this paper and many more are available on the ACECQA website, such as articles on ACECQA's 'We Hear You' blog[69] including articles written by ACECQA's National Education Leader,[70] resources on the 'Quality Area 7' page[71] and the 'NQF videos, podcast and resources' page.

There are also many resources available specifically relating to educational leadership:

- The Australian Council for Educational Leaders (ACEL) provides subscriber access to a monthly e-publication called 'e-Early Learning' which provides teachers, educators and leaders in early learning settings with hands-on ideas and practical tips.[72]

- Early Childhood Australia has recently launched the 'Early Childhood Australia Leadership Program'.[73] The online program is based on research and sector consultation and has been specifically created as a strengths based, self-directed, short-term program for aspiring and current early childhood educators.

- ACECQA, in conjunction with state and territory regulatory authorities, recently completed the 2016-17 series of Quality Practice Workshops, which included a topic on Educational Leadership.[74] The highlights of these workshops will be made available on ACECQA's website for all providers and services to access.

This paper highlights a particular lack of research regarding leadership in the context of OSHC and FDC services. ACECQA has delivered a series of sessions in conjunction with the National Outside School Hours Services Association (NOSHSA) and will continue to work closely with NOSHSA to deliver tailored information and training sessions to the OSHC sector to assist them in meeting the

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[69] See, for example, the 'Educational Leader' blog series, https://wehearyou.acecqa.gov.au/tag/the-role-of-the-educational-leader-series/
[70] We Hear You blog, NEL, posts, https://wehearyou.acecqa.gov.au/nel-posts/
[71] See, for example, the resources under 'Developing effective performance review processes'.
[72] http://www.acel.org.au/acel/ACELWEB/Publications/ACEL_e-Publications.aspx
[73] http://leadership.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/
[74] This topic was delivered in New South Wales, the Northern Territory and Tasmania in 2015-16 and in Queensland and South Australia in 2016-17.

requirements of the NQF and encourage continuous quality improvement. Similarly, ACECQA has worked with Family Day Care Australia to deliver workshops on identified areas of need for FDC services, and will continue to do so.

Revised National Quality Standard

Education Ministers have agreed to changes to the NQF following a review of the National Partnership Agreement on the National Quality Agenda (NQA) for Early Childhood Education and Care.

Ministers agreed to changes to the National Law and National Regulations to maintain quality outcomes for children, while balancing the need to reduce red tape and unnecessary administrative burden for approved providers.

The Australian Government and state and territory governments jointly reviewed the NQA and recommended changes to the NQF which are outlined in the Decision Regulation Impact Statement (Decision RIS) on the Education Council website.[75]

One of the main changes is the introduction of a revised NQS that removes conceptual overlap between elements and standards, clarifies language and reduces the number of standards from 18 to 15, and the number of elements from 58 to 40.

The revised NQS, which will be introduced from 1 February 2018, is included in **Appendix E** of the Decision RIS. For Quality Area 7, the main changes are that it:

- consists of fewer standards and elements – two standards instead of three, and six elements instead of 13
- clarifies the quality concept in each element and standard, reducing duplication and overlap
- uses language that can be more readily and consistently understood, is accessible and straightforward.[76]

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[75] Education Council *Decision Regulation Impact Statement for changes to the National Quality Framework*.
[76] ACECQA, Changes to the National Quality Framework. http://www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf-changes

An outline of the revised NQS for Quality Area 7 is shown in **Table 3**.

Table 3: Revised Quality Area 7 – to be introduced from 1 February 2018

QA7	Concept	Governance and Leadership
7.1	**Governance**	**Governance supports the operation of a quality service.**
7.1.1	Service philosophy	A statement of philosophy guides all aspects of the service's operations.
7.1.2	Management systems	Systems are in place to manage risk and enable the effective management and operation of a quality service.
7.1.3	Roles and responsibilities	Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, and understood, and support effective decision making and operation of the service.
7.2	**Leadership**	**Effective leadership builds and promotes a positive organisational culture and professional learning community.**
7.2.1	Continuous improvement	There is an effective self-assessment and quality improvement process in place.
7.2.2	Educational leadership	The educational leader is supported and leads the development and implementation of the educational program and assessment and planning cycle.
7.2.3	Development of professionals	Educators, coordinators and staff members' performance is regularly evaluated and individual plans are in place to support learning and development.

As can be seen in **Table 3**, the six elements in the current Standard 7.3 have been condensed into the new Element 7.1.2 under the concept of 'management systems'.

Other changes include merging elements from the current Standard 7.1 and 7.2 into the new Standard 7.2 under the concept of 'leadership'.

These changes were made in response to a range of stakeholder submissions and comments in the Consultation Regulatory Impact Statement.

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Appendix A

Responsibilities of the approved provider, nominated supervisor and FDC educator in relation to leadership and service management

Table 4 shows each requirement under the National Law along with the following associated information:

- the related NQS standard/element

- the person to whom the requirement is attached, such as the approved provider, nominated supervisor or FDC educator

- the penalty, if any, that attaches to the requirement

- whether a waiver may be applicable to the requirement.

Table 4: Responsibilities of the approved provider, nominated supervisor and FDC educator in relation to leadership and service management

NQS element	Requirement	Approved provider	Nominated supervisor	FDC educator	Offence	Infringement notice	Compliance direction	Waiver*
7.3.1	Children's attendance record to be kept (Regulation 158, 159)	✓		✓				
7.3.1	Children's enrolment record to be kept (Regulation 160)	✓		✓				
7.3.1	Authorisations to be kept in enrolment record (Regulation 161)	✓		✓				
7.3.1	Health information to be kept in enrolment record (Regulation 162)	✓		✓				
7.1.5	Residents at family day care residences and family day care educator assistants to be fit and proper persons (Regulation 163)	✓			✓		✓	
7.1.5	Requirement for notice of new persons at residence (Regulation 164)	✓			✓		✓	

NQS element	Requirement	Approved provider	Nominated supervisor	FDC educator	Offence	Infringement notice	Compliance direction	Waiver*
7.3	Record of visitors (Regulation 165)	✓		✓				
7.3	Children not to be alone with visitors (Regulation 166)	✓		✓	✓			
7.3.1	Record of service's compliance (Regulation 167)	✓						
7.1.1, 7.3.1, 7.3.4, 7.3.5	Education and care service must have policies and procedures (Regulation 168)	✓			✓		✓	
7.1.1, 7.3.1, 7.3.4, 7.3.5	Additional policies and procedures – family day care service (Regulation 169)	✓			✓		✓	
7.1.1, 7.3.1, 7.3.4, 7.3.5	Policies and procedures to be followed (Regulation 170)	✓			✓		✓	
7.1.1, 7.3.1, 7.3.4, 7.3.5	Policies and procedures to be kept available (Regulation 171)	✓			✓		✓	
7.1.1, 7.3.1, 7.3.4, 7.3.5	Notification of change to policies or procedures (Regulation 172)	✓					✓	
7.3.1	Prescribed information to be displayed (Regulation 173, Section 172)	✓			✓	✓		

NQS element	Requirement	Approved provider	Nominated supervisor	FDC educator	Offence	Infringement notice	Compliance direction	Waiver*
7.3.1	Time to notify certain circumstances to regulatory authority (Regulation 174, Section 173)	✓			✓	✓		
7.3.1	Prescribed information to be notified to the regulatory authority (Regulation 175, Section 174)	✓			✓			
7.3.1	Time to notify certain information to regulatory authority (Regulation 176, Section 174)	✓			✓			
7.3.1	Prescribed enrolment and other documents to be kept by approved provider (Regulation 177, Section 175)	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
7.3.1	Family day care educator to provide documents on leaving service (Regulation 179)			✓				
7.3.1	Evidence of prescribed insurance (Regulation 180)	✓		✓				
7.1.1	Confidentiality of records kept by approved provider and family day care educator (Regulations 181, 182)	✓		✓	✓			
7.1.1	Storage of records and other documents (Regulation 183)	✓					✓	
7.1.1	Storage of records after service approval transferred (Regulation 184)	✓						
7.3	Law and regulations to be available (Regulation 185)	✓			✓		✓	

* Waivers do not apply to any of these requirements.

Appendix B

Limitations of the findings

A number of limitations of the analyses provided in this paper should be acknowledged.

Firstly, given that around 10% of approved services are yet to be quality rated, caution should be applied before generalising findings to all services. Although over 90% of services have been quality rated nationally, the proportion in South Australia is slightly less at 81%.

A second limitation stems from service sub-type and provider management type data. While data quality testing undertaken by ACECQA suggest a reasonably high level of accuracy in these variables, there may be some degree of inaccuracy.

Progress of assessment and rating

The NQS rating system applies to over 15,000 education and care services and is administered by authorised officers appointed by eight state and territory regulatory authorities.

Authorised officers from state and territory regulatory authorities review a service's compliance history and QIP before visiting the service, typically for one to two days. During the visit, authorised officers spend time observing and discussing practice, speaking with educators, managers, providers and other staff, and reviewing documentation. Since quality rating started in mid-2012, more than 14,000 education and care services have been rated, representing over 90% of all approved services in Australia.

Table 5 to 10 show the number and proportion of services that have been assessed and rated according to a range of service characteristics such as jurisdiction, service sub-type, provider management type, SEIFA ranking and remoteness classification.

Table 5: Progress of assessment and rating by jurisdiction

Jurisdiction	Number of approved services	Number of services with quality rating	Proportion of services with quality rating
ACT	354	308	87%
NSW	5346	4873	91%
NT	223	199	89%
QLD	2886	2667	92%
SA	1171	947	81%
TAS	232	221	95%
VIC	4168	3780	91%
WA	1166	1060	91%
TOTAL	15,546	14,055	90%

As at 30 June 2017, of the 14,055 services with a quality rating:

- 31% are rated at Exceeding NQS

- 42% are rated at Meeting NQS

- 26% are rated at Working Towards NQS

- 52 are rated as Excellent (by ACECQA)

- 40 are rated at Significant Improvement Required.

Table 6: Number of approved services, and number and percentage of services with a quality rating by service sub-type

Service sub-type	Total number of approved services	Number of services with a quality rating	% of services with a quality rating
Long day care	7166	6633	93%
Preschool/kindergarten	3118	2921	94%
Outside school hours care	4370	3898	89%
Family day care	885	649	73%
Unreported service type	7	5	71%
TOTAL	**15,546**	**14,106**	**91%**

Table 7: Number of approved services, and number and percentage of services with a quality rating by provider management type

Provider management type	Total number of approved services	Number of services with a quality rating	% of services with a quality rating
Private for profit	7243	6298	87%
Private not for profit community managed	3748	3588	96%
Private not for profit other organisations	1882	1779	95%
State/territory and local government managed	1299	1147	88%
State/territory government schools	725	706	97%
Independent schools	459	410	89%
Catholic schools	175	164	94%
Other	15	14	93%
Not stated	0	0	n/a
TOTAL	**15,546**	**14,106**	**91%**

Table 8: Number of approved centre-based services and number and percentage of centre-based services with a quality rating by SEIFA ranking[1]

SEIFA ranking	Total number of approved services	Number of services with a quality rating	% of services with a quality rating
10 (least disadvantaged)	1175	1073	91%
9	1275	1184	93%
8	1366	1260	92%
7	1307	1196	92%
6	1383	1265	91%
5	1363	1258	92%
4	1469	1376	94%
3	1451	1331	92%
2	1639	1522	93%
1 (most disadvantaged)	1649	1529	93%
N/A (incl. FDC)	1469	1061	72%
TOTAL	**15,546**	**14,055**	**90%**

[1] FDC services are excluded from the SEIFA and ARIA+ classifications because their approval is not specific to one location.

Australian Children's
Education & Care
Quality Authority

Table 9: Number of approved centre-based services and number and percentage of centre-based services with a quality rating by remoteness classification[1]

ARIA+ classification	Total number of approved services	Number of services with a quality rating	% of services with a quality rating
Major cities of Australia	10,402	9601	92%
Inner regional Australia	2559	2371	93%
Outer regional Australia	1204	1096	91%
Remote Australia	198	175	88%
Very Remote Australia	136	115	85%
N/A (incl. FDC)	1047	697	67%
TOTAL	**15,546**	**14,055**	**90%**

[1] FDC services are excluded from the SEIFA and ARIA+ classifications because their approval is not specific to one location.

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