

UNDERSTANDING QUALITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION



A GUIDE TO CHOOSING QUALITY CHILDCARE
FOR PARENTS AND CARERS OF YOUNG CHILDREN
3rd Edition, 2018

The introduction of the National Quality Framework (NQF) in 2012 was one of the most significant reforms for the early education sector across Australia for many decades.

The NQF gives significant recognition to the importance of the quality of learning experiences for children in their early years to ensure their present and future health, development and wellbeing.

An important component of the NQF is the National Quality Standard, which aims to raise the quality of early childhood education and care in long day care, preschool, occasional care, outside school hours care and vacation care services. Since its introduction on 1 January 2012, and the revised National Quality Standard in February 2018, all these services are required to develop an ongoing Quality Improvement Plan and undergo an assessment process to be rated against the National Quality Standard.

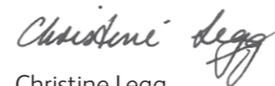
KU has long had a commitment to the provision of high quality early childhood education and care services and, as such, wholly supports this national assessment system. We are particularly proud that our services are achieving outstanding results in their assessment and rating visits – way above the rest of the sector.

Cover artwork by Vanessa, aged 4 – KU Koala Preschool

This booklet is designed to help families gain a better understanding of the seven Quality Areas in the National Quality Standard, whilst providing some practical ideas on what to look for, and what to ask when visiting or selecting an early childhood service for their child.

By understanding the National Quality Standard, and the often confusing terminology, we believe that families will be better positioned to make an informed assessment of the quality of the early childhood service they choose for their child.

We hope you find this booklet useful and I look forward to meeting you at one of our high quality early childhood services soon.



Christine Legg
CEO, KU Children's Services

The National Quality Standard has been developed based on research and early childhood best practice. It is designed to ensure positive outcomes for all children.

Under the National Quality Framework, each early childhood education service in Australia will be assessed and given a rating against the National Quality Standard (NQS).

The National Quality Standard is separated into seven Quality Areas:

- ▶ Educational program and practice
- ▶ Children's health and safety
- ▶ The physical environment
- ▶ Staffing arrangements
- ▶ Relationships with children
- ▶ Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
- ▶ Governance and leadership

Each Quality Area has a number of standards and elements that are assessed.

Following an assessment and rating visit, early childhood services are given a report which indicates their rating against these Quality Areas. The ratings for each service across Australia are published on the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) website, providing families with comprehensive information so they can make informed choices about an early childhood service for their child.

While ACECQA is the national body overseeing the National Quality Standard process throughout Australia, state and territory regulatory authorities are responsible for undertaking the assessment and rating of services.

As part of this process, each early childhood service is required to display their assessment rating.

For more information visit www.acecqa.gov.au



Artwork by Harriet, aged 2 – KU Crusader Preschool

QUALITY AREA 1: EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM AND PRACTICE

While schools adhere to a curriculum, early childhood education programs are guided by the national 'Early Years Learning Framework' for long day care and preschool services, and the 'My Time, Our Place' framework for outside school hours care. Additionally, some states and territories have their own specific frameworks.

Each of these frameworks recognise the importance of play-based learning and intentional teaching in the development of young children.

They place a particular emphasis on the development of relationships and skills such as cooperation, problem solving, curiosity and independence.

Educators within high quality early childhood services use these frameworks, along with feedback from families, to develop programs that acknowledge the individual strengths and interests of the children within their service.

These programs include a range of individual and small group experiences designed to challenge young children and promote learning. This contributes to each child's sense of identity, wellbeing and confidence as learners.

High quality early childhood services also provide programs that build relationships with the children and their families, and acknowledge and celebrate the diversity of the local community.

By incorporating the unique aspects of each family and the local community within the program, high quality services help children to develop an understanding of the world around them and their place in it.

Enrolling in an early childhood service with a high quality education program will ensure your child's individual needs are being met, and that they will be challenged to grow and develop.



Artwork by Lizzy, aged 5 – KU Grandstand Preschool

“At KU Killarney Heights Preschool we discuss each child’s learning with their family to ensure the education experience is unique and caters to their child’s individual needs. From their very first visit, we speak with families about what they want for their child and work to ensure they feel safe and supported. We then organise follow up surveys and interviews throughout the year to discuss children’s emerging interests and any possible concerns. This feedback, combined with educator’s observations and interactions with the child, ensures we develop a program where each child’s needs are met and they feel like they belong.”

– Early Childhood Teacher, KU Killarney Heights



QUALITY CHECKLIST

THINGS TO LOOK FOR:

- Does the early childhood service offer a program that includes both individual and group experiences?
- Do the staff at the service make you and your child feel welcome?
- Is the educational program displayed?

THINGS TO ASK:

- What is the orientation process for new children?
- How will your child’s development and learning be planned, assessed and recorded? Are you able to access these records?
- How are your child’s strengths, abilities, ideas and interests included in the program?
- Are there any opportunities to share your home culture at the service?
- How will your child’s routines be included?
- What is the transition to school program at the service?

QUALITY AREA 2: CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND SAFETY

Children's health and safety are essential components of any high quality early childhood service.

Appropriate supervision and a focus on health and safety ensures that children are kept safe and protected from avoidable injuries and illness.

Along with providing safe environments, high quality early childhood services provide children with frequent opportunities to learn about and practice healthy lifestyles, including:

- ▶ Personal safety and wellbeing
- ▶ Health and hygiene
- ▶ Nutrition

Educators within high quality services work with families to incorporate the individual requirements of each child into the routines and experiences they offer. This ensures each child remains healthy and develops confidence and a sense of wellbeing.

High quality services will also have plans in place for any unexpected accidents and emergencies, and will ensure that evacuation drills and procedures are practiced regularly, and communicated clearly to the children and families.

Above all, high quality early childhood services have an obligation to protect children from the risk of harm and to ensure that any accidents or incidents are dealt with quickly and appropriately to ensure that each child's wellbeing is maintained.

*Artwork by Kai, aged 3
– KU Kintaiba Children's Centre*



"Our daughter was the first Type 1 diabetic at our preschool. Within one training session by hospital educators and only one day of overseeing by myself, the staff had understood about the disease and its effects, learnt how to manage our daughter and administer her medication. Their level of care and professionalism will never cease to amaze me!"

– Parent, KU Preschool



QUALITY CHECKLIST

THINGS TO LOOK FOR:

- Is the service clean and hygienic?
- Are all the children wearing sunscreen and a hat outdoors?
- Do the educators also wear their hats outside?
- Is there drinking water available for the children to access at all times?

THINGS TO ASK:

- Does the service have a policy on administering medication?
- Does the service have an emergency evacuation plan and practice it regularly?
- How will the service incorporate your child's specific nutritional or medical needs?
- Does the service offer nutritional meals or provide information on healthy food?
- Does the service offer opportunities for children to be physically active?
- How does the service keep children safe from bullying and when online?

QUALITY AREA 3: THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

A safe and welcoming physical environment plays an important role in enhancing children's learning and development.

Physical environments include:

- ▶ Indoor and outdoor play areas
- ▶ The equipment available
- ▶ The resources that are provided for the children

High quality services offer children more than just the opportunity to play in open spaces or with a range of equipment, they offer a variety of opportunities for learning and discovery through play.

High quality early childhood services offer environments that are safe, clean, suitable for the age and ability of the children, and that encourage exploration, experimentation and creativity.

These opportunities may include planned areas set up for dramatic play, block building and construction; quiet spaces for reading, art and creativity; or room set aside for children to experiment with music and movement.

Whilst not all early childhood services have vast amounts of room or natural areas for play, high quality services will also provide opportunities for children to learn from nature and the world around them.

This may include water or sand play, the use of natural found objects instead of plastic toys, exploration of sustainable activities such as gardening, recycling and worm farms, or the opportunity to play and explore in the outdoors.

By providing a fun and welcoming physical environment, high quality services support children's growth and promote the development of confidence and a sense of belonging.



Artwork by Mia, aged 3 – KU Cheltenham Memorial Preschool

“Our kitchen garden encourages healthy eating, it allows the children to be involved right from the start – from planting, to harvesting, to cooking and eating. It gives children a realistic view that food is not just found in the supermarket but it is grown and has to be taken care of, and it gives them a sense of responsibility.”

– Director, KU Carillon Avenue



QUALITY CHECKLIST

THINGS TO LOOK FOR:

- Does the environment look clean, well maintained and feel safe and secure?
- Are there experiences set up for children to explore and learn about nature and sustainability?
- Are there enough resources for all of the children to be involved in play?
- Does the environment provide opportunities for both indoor and outdoor experiences?
- Is there a range of equipment that is suitable for both younger and older children?

THINGS TO ASK:

- What opportunities does the service provide for children to learn about the outdoors and be responsible for the environment?
- How does the service allow for the inclusion of children with additional needs?

QUALITY AREA 4: STAFFING ARRANGEMENTS

Qualified and experienced educators play an important role in developing and maintaining high quality early childhood services.

Having consistent early childhood staff helps to create an environment of trust and cooperation, where staff work together with families to meet the needs of the children.

Under the National Quality Standard, all early childhood services are required to meet specific regulations, including the ratios of staff to children across various age groups, and minimum levels of staff qualifications.

All early childhood services are required to have access to a university qualified Early Childhood Teacher.

Whilst many services will transfer to this over time, other high quality services already have university qualified Early Childhood Teachers and have done so for many years.

Research shows that qualified and experienced early childhood staff can produce better social and cognitive outcomes for children. They create safe, well-planned learning environments for children to enjoy and maximise opportunities that extend children's learning.

Experienced educators are also able to develop warm and respectful relationships with the children and their families.

By providing well-planned play spaces and challenging experiences, qualified staff provide children with a range of opportunities to play, discover and learn.



Artwork by James, aged 4 – KU Crusader Preschool

THE NATIONAL QUALITY FRAMEWORK REQUIRES THE FOLLOWING STAFF-TO-CHILD RATIOS:

LONG DAY CARE AND PRESCHOOL

Age Group	Ratio of Staff:Children
0 to 2 years	1:4
2 to 3 years	1:5
3+ years	1:11

- ▶ A staff-to-child ratio of 1:5 for children 0 to 24 months will be retained in some declared approved services in QLD until January 2020.
- ▶ A staff-to-child ratio of 1:4 for children 25 to 35 months will be retained in VIC where this ratio currently applies.
- ▶ A staff-to-child ratio of 1:10 for children 36 months to school age will be retained in NSW, WA and TAS where this ratio currently applies.
- ▶ A staff-to-child ratio of 1:10 for children 36 months to school age in centre-based services and disadvantaged preschools in SA.

FAMILY DAY CARE

Age Group	Ratio of Staff:Children
Mixed age group	1:7 with a maximum of four children not attending school

OUTSIDE SCHOOL HOURS CARE

Age Group	State/Territory	Ratio of Staff:Children
School age	NT, QLD, SA, TAS, VIC. NSW from 1/10/18.	1:15
	ACT	1:11
	WA	1:13 (1:10 if kindergarten children in attendance)

For more information visit www.acecqa.gov.au

QUALITY CHECKLIST

THINGS TO LOOK FOR:

- Do the staff seem to be working as a team and have a good relationship with each other?
- Are the qualifications and experience of all staff available and on display?

THINGS TO ASK:

- How many staff are there in each of the rooms at any time?
- Does the service have a university qualified Early Childhood Teacher?
- Is there a consistent staff roster so children get to spend time with the same people each day?
- Does the current staffing meet the requirements of the National Quality Framework? If not, what are the service's plans for meeting the new requirements?
- What standards guide interactions and practices at the service?

QUALITY AREA 5: RELATIONSHIPS WITH CHILDREN

Relationships with educators and the other children help to provide a secure foundation for children to explore and learn.

These relationships are built on mutual respect, and help to enhance children's wellbeing, self-esteem and feelings of security.

Strong relationships also help children to develop a sense of belonging, while acknowledging their individuality and ability to contribute to their community.

High quality early childhood services support children to develop positive relationships by providing frequent opportunities for group interactions, one-on-one activities with educators and interactions with other children through open-ended play.

Safe, secure relationships between children and educators provide an ideal platform for children's growth and learning.

By establishing positive and trusting relationships, young children will be more likely to:

- ▶ Develop confidence
- ▶ Work cooperatively
- ▶ Learn new skills
- ▶ Take calculated risks
- ▶ Express themselves

Children will also develop the social skills necessary to succeed at school and for years to come.



Artwork by Thomas, aged 5 – KU Bligh Park Preschool

"I have been very happy with our family's time at KU Sutherland. Our son has grown from the variety of activities and has been able to connect with the staff and other children. The staff have built friendships with our son where they can share interests and also share in humour and personal accounts from home. I will forever be thankful for their continued support and dedication to running a great service."

– Parent, KU Sutherland



QUALITY CHECKLIST

THINGS TO LOOK FOR:

- Do the staff welcome and interact with your child?
- Are the educators communicating with the children in a respectful way that they can understand?
- Do the educators take time to listen to the children?
- Are the educators encouraging the children to play cooperatively and participate well together?

THINGS TO ASK:

- What opportunities are there for your child to share their interests with the other children and the educators?
- What happens if your child finds it difficult to fit in and make friends?
- What is the service's procedure for managing children's behaviour?
- How does the service maintain the dignity and rights of children?

QUALITY AREA 6: COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS WITH FAMILIES & COMMUNITIES

Sound early childhood education relies on strong partnerships between educators, families and the broader community.

By combining the insight, support and consistency offered by the family with the expertise of qualified, experienced educators, high quality services acknowledge and reinforce the important role that families play in their child's ongoing learning and development.

Through collaborative partnerships, high quality services are also able to develop an understanding of each family's expectations and can address any concerns in an open and supportive way.

The best learning outcomes occur when families and educators work together.

For successful partnerships to occur, families and educators must share information with each other.

This may include:

- ▶ Sharing information about the child's experiences and interests from home
- ▶ Providing opportunities for family input into the learning program
- ▶ Formal feedback through daily journals, regular developmental updates or meetings with educators



Artwork by Olivia, aged 5 – KU Kangaroo Preschool

High quality early childhood services will also provide families with information on local schools, support agencies and services, where appropriate.

By encouraging regular visits to, or from, local community groups and performers, quality services acknowledge the important role that culture and community plays in the development of positive, happy children.

“At KU Union we regularly visit the local university, museums, cafes and sport centre. This helps extend the children's learning and allows us to develop strong links with families and the local community.”

– Early Childhood Teacher, KU Union



QUALITY CHECKLIST

THINGS TO LOOK FOR:

- Do you feel welcome within the service?
- Do you see aspects of different cultures and the local community reflected at the service?
- Is there information available about the service and community resources to support families?

THINGS TO ASK:

- What opportunities are there for families to be involved in the program?
- How will you find out what happens during your child's day?
- How can you share information about your child with the educators?
- Does the service have a Parent Group or Committee?
- Does the service have links with local schools?
- Will your child have opportunities to go on excursions or will there be any special visitors to the service?

QUALITY AREA 7: GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

The demands on educators within early childhood services are complex and diverse. Depending on the type of service, educators are often expected to be business managers, policy writers, accountants and managers of staff – all while delivering a high quality educational program.

The key to high quality early childhood education services is providing effective support structures to ensure the education and wellbeing of children are the primary focus.

There are a number of different models for the management and governance of early childhood services, including services run by parent committees, those run by larger not for profit organisations and those operated by an individual or company for profit.

Regardless of the model, it is important that the service complies with government legislation and has a commitment to ongoing improvement.

It is also important that the educators are encouraged to continue growing and developing in their role as educational leaders.

Services with a strong governance structure, leadership and management systems, provide a stable learning environment for children, while offering well-planned and resourced programs.



Artwork by Jackson, aged 3 – KU Crusader Preschool

High quality services have a clear educational vision and philosophy. These are developed and shared between the families and educators.

“The smooth management of KU Fox Valley ensures that the entire focus of staff and parents is on the children. This incredible level of attention from the staff means that my child’s strengths and weaknesses are identified, discussed and addressed.”

– Parent, KU Fox Valley



QUALITY CHECKLIST

THINGS TO LOOK FOR:

- Does the service have a good reputation in the local area?
- Is information about the management structure of the service on display?

THINGS TO ASK:

- What is the service’s educational philosophy?
- What opportunities are there for you to provide feedback to the service?
- Have the service’s policies and procedures been updated to reflect the National Quality Standard?
- What happens to any profits that the service generates?
- What ongoing professional learning opportunities are there for the educators?
- How does the service involve families in the quality improvement process?

QUICK FACTS: KU CHILDREN'S SERVICES IS THE RECOGNISED LEADER IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

- ▶ Established in 1895, KU is regarded as the founder of early childhood education in Australia, and is the most experienced early childhood education provider across the nation
- ▶ We provide high quality, play-based learning experiences based on approved learning frameworks
- ▶ KU meets the early childhood needs of more than 13,000 children and their families each year
- ▶ We manage around 140 children's services and programs across NSW, VIC, QLD and the ACT
- ▶ We have a strong commitment to research informed practice and staff's professional learning
- ▶ Since our early days, KU has led the way in employing university qualified Early Childhood Teachers within its services
- ▶ We offer a full range of service types including preschool, long day care, occasional care, outside school hours care, work based child care, early intervention services and family programs
- ▶ KU manages work based services on behalf of a range of corporate clients
- ▶ KU provides childcare for the children of new migrants through the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) in partnership with Navitas
- ▶ KU supports the inclusion of children with additional needs across Australia as the Inclusion Development Fund Manager (in partnership with Include Me and Gowrie NSW) and the lead Inclusion Agency in NSW, ACT and QLD, and a partner organisation in VIC
- ▶ KU is a NDIS provider of early intervention services
- ▶ Our services are supported by professional early childhood and administrative teams
- ▶ We have a dedicated Child Wellbeing Team for children's safety and protection
- ▶ We provide professional, ongoing support for children with additional needs through a team of qualified Education Support Managers
- ▶ We encourage parent and family involvement in our services
- ▶ KU is a trusted adviser on early childhood education and care issues
- ▶ We are proudly a not for profit organisation, governed by a volunteer Board of Directors



KU'S QUALITY ASSESSMENT PROFILE

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM AND PRACTICE

- Children are acknowledged as capable learners
- Play-based learning programs cater to children's individual needs

CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND SAFETY

- Educators prioritise children's health and physical wellbeing
- Checks are completed regularly to ensure children's safety

THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- Sustainable, natural learning environments
- Indoor and outdoor environments offering challenges to extend children

STAFFING ARRANGEMENTS

- University qualified Early Childhood Teachers
- 1:4 staff ratio for children aged 0-2 years
- 1:5 staff ratio for children aged 2-3 years

RELATIONSHIPS WITH CHILDREN

- Engaged educators take time to listen and respond to children
- Educators work well as a team and have a good relationship with each other

COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS WITH FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

- Families are acknowledged as the experts in their child's life
- Each service is a unique reflection of their local community

GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

- An ongoing commitment to professional learning for staff
- A not for profit organisation with children as its focus

Visit www.ku.com.au to find your nearest service and experience the KU difference for yourself!



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Children's Services
Since 1895

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