

Supporting Quality Improvement in Education and Care

*Findings from the
Quality Support
Program*



Australian Children's
Education & Care
Quality Authority



Background

This report presents key findings from the first two years of the Quality Support Program (QSP). The QSP is an initiative of and funded by the NSW Department of Education Early Childhood Education Quality Assurance and Regulatory Services Directorate (NSW DoE), involving the delivery by ACECQA of free tailored professional development and support to approved providers and service leaders of eligible services across NSW.

The QSP has been implemented in two stages, with each stage comprising separate groups of services in three 'rounds' of up to 18 weeks of tailored support. These rounds have overlapped each other, and Round 6 was paused and then extended due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Stage One (March 2018 to July 2019) and Stage Two (February 2019 to August 2020), the QSP has delivered 274 occurrences of support to 251 long day care (LDC) and 21 family day care (FDC) services¹, providing education and care for approximately 23000 children². The eligibility criteria for services to participate in the QSP was:

- rated 'Working Towards the National Quality Standard (NQS)' and not meeting six or more Elements of the NQS
- provides LDC or FDC
- in Stage One only: last quality rated between June 2015 and the end of December 2017.

- 274 occurrences of support
- 272 long day care and family day care services
- Attended by approx. 23000 children

Approved providers of eligible services were invited to voluntarily participate in the QSP. The objectives of the QSP are to improve the quality of participating services so they receive a rating of 'Meeting NQS' or higher and to improve participants' knowledge of and confidence in the NQS. Additional information about the QSP can be found on the [QSP webpage](#).

Participants benefitted from resources, advice and one-on-one targeted tailored support to help improve practice and prepare for their next quality rating. The structure of each QSP round consisted of an introductory workshop, face-to-face service visits, support phone calls, video calls, emails, eLearning training, and bespoke resources.

Two areas where participants most sought support were [continuous improvement](#) and [critical reflection](#). The QSP drew on the insights of participants to produce videos on both topics.

¹ Two services participated twice in the QSP.

² This estimation is based on the maximum approved places in each service assuming full capacity on any given day, 50 hours per week, and average attendance per child as reported in [Report on Government Services 2020](#).

Participating services

During Stages One and Two of the QSP, 272 services participated, of which 251 were LDC and 21 FDC. **Table 1** shows the breakdown of services across the six rounds covered in this report. Given the small number of FDC services that have participated, this report mainly presents results for the LDC services. **Table 2** groups the participating services by number of NQS Elements assessed as 'not met' when quality rated prior to participating in the QSP³.

Table 1: Numbers of services in each QSP round, by service type

| Stage | Round | # LDC | # FDC | Total |
|-------|---------------|------------------------|-----------|------------------------|
| One | 1 | 30 | 5 | 35 |
| | 2 | 62 | 7 | 69 |
| | 3 | 34 | 4 | 38 |
| | total | 126 | 16 | 142 |
| Two | 4 | 37 | 1 | 38 |
| | 5 | 46 | 3 | 49 |
| | 6 | 44 | 1 | 45 |
| | total | 127 | 5 | 132 |
| | Totals | 253⁴ | 21 | 274⁴ |

Table 2: Number of NQS Elements 'not met' on entry to the QSP

| Number of Elements 'not met' ³ | 1 to 5 | 6 to 10 | 11 to 20 | 21 to 30 | 31 to 40 | Total Services |
|---|----------------------|------------|------------|-----------|----------|------------------------|
| Long Day Care | 9 | 116 | 96 | 25 | 7 | 253 ⁴ |
| Family Day Care | 0 | 8 | 7 | 6 | 0 | 21 |
| Total Services | 9⁵ | 124 | 103 | 31 | 7 | 274⁴ |

³ Element counts for quality ratings are converted from the 2012 NQS to the 2018 NQS where required. Adjusted 2018 NQS results are only an approximation, and can result in fewer than six Elements not met.

⁴ Includes two initial A&R results for the two services that participated in Stage One and Stage Two.

⁵ Services with fewer than six Elements not met were also invited if they were rated Working Towards NQS since 2012.

Findings to date

95% of QSP services improved in Elements 'met', by an average of 10 Elements.



Findings from Stage One and Stage Two of the QSP:

The QSP was largely successful in supporting participating services to achieve an overall rating of 'Meeting NQS'.

- 65% of LDC services achieved a rating of 'Meeting NQS' or above.
- LDC participating services were two and a quarter times more likely to achieve a rating of 'Meeting NQS' or above compared to matched non-participating services⁶.
- Both LDC and FDC participating services showed a greater increase in the number of Elements 'met' between pre QSP and post QSP quality ratings than matched non-participating services did (**Figure 1**). This result is very unlikely to have occurred by chance.

Services from more socio-economically disadvantaged areas improved by 11 NQS Elements met on average if they participated in the QSP, but only 4.5 Elements met if they did not.

LDC services were 2.25 times more likely to achieve Meeting NQS or above if they participated in the QSP

The QSP was effective at increasing the number of Elements 'met' for services from disadvantaged and advantaged socio-economic locations.

- In the matched non-participating services, and in ACECQA's [Occasional Paper 7](#), services in disadvantaged socio-economic locations showed less improvement than their peers. However, services supported by the QSP achieved greater improvement regardless of location (**Figure 2**).
- Services from relatively disadvantaged areas improved by 11 NQS Elements on average if they participated in the QSP, but only around 4.5 Elements if they did not. In comparison, services from relatively advantaged areas improved by almost 10 Elements on average if they participated in the QSP, but only 7 Elements if they did not (**Figure 2**).

⁶ Propensity score matching was used to select non-participating services with similar characteristics.

Figure 1: Both LDC and FDC services increased more in Elements 'met' if they participated in the QSP

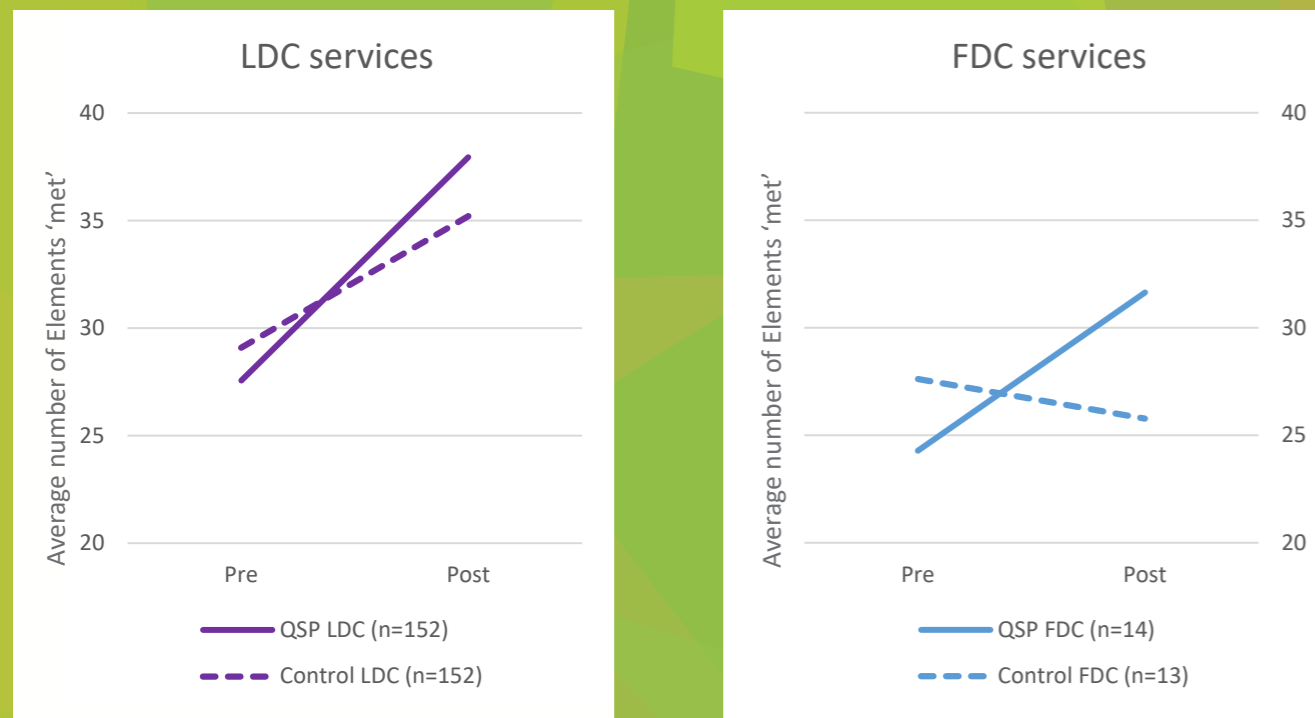
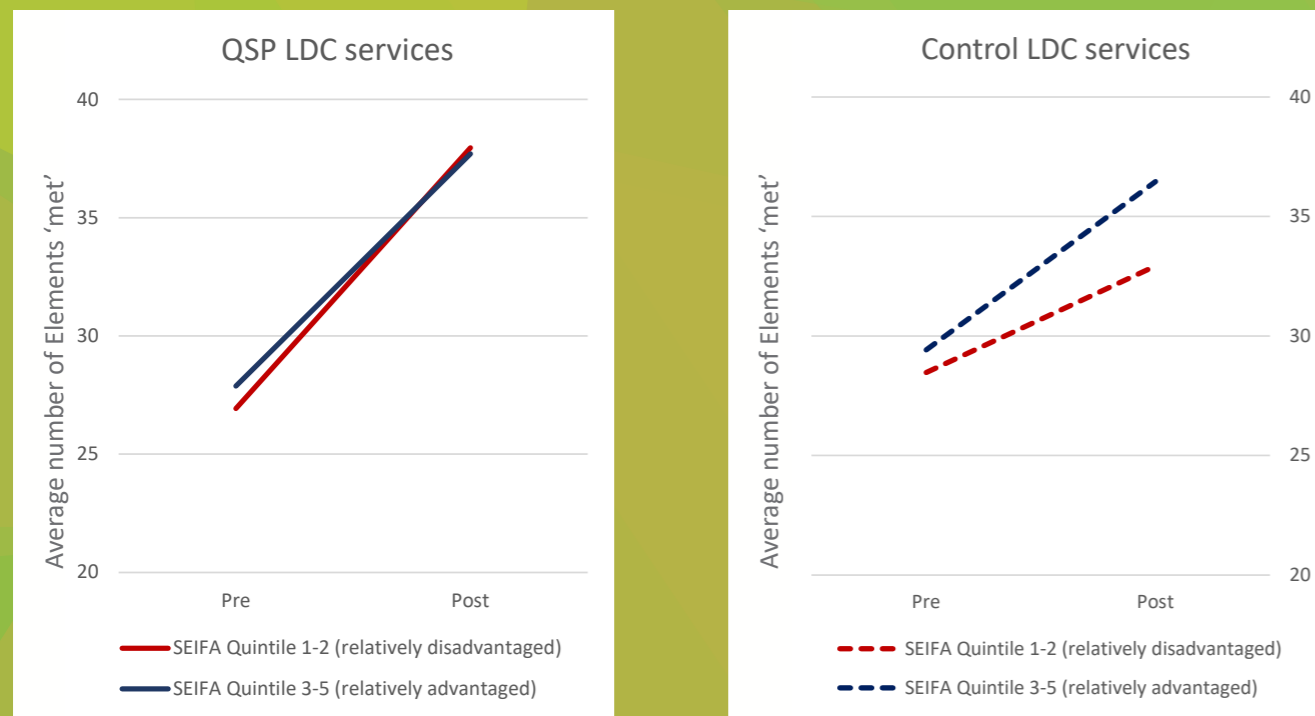


Figure 2: The QSP was effective at increasing Elements 'met' for services from disadvantaged and advantaged socio-economic locations



Note: Results are displayed for the 152 LDC and 14 FDC participating services reassessed at the time of the evaluation. As there is a gap between a service completing the QSP and its reassessment by the NSW DoE, the change in rating for all participating services is not available at the time of this report.

“ While I found the program challenging in parts I would highly recommend this to any director. Navigating your way through the framework can be overwhelming. However I learnt that it is a journey and when things are broken down there is so much to be excited about learning! It has given me the confidence to articulate my pedagogy and where my team is headed for our children and families. I am confident to discuss what we do. Thank you for allowing us on this journey and I know my fellow educators, families and children have already benefited greatly and will continue to do so. ” — Feedback received from QSP service leader

Service leaders became more confident following their participation in the QSP and felt they were better prepared for the A&R process, as shown in **Figures 3 and 4**.

Figure 3: LDC service leaders were more confident after participating in the QSP

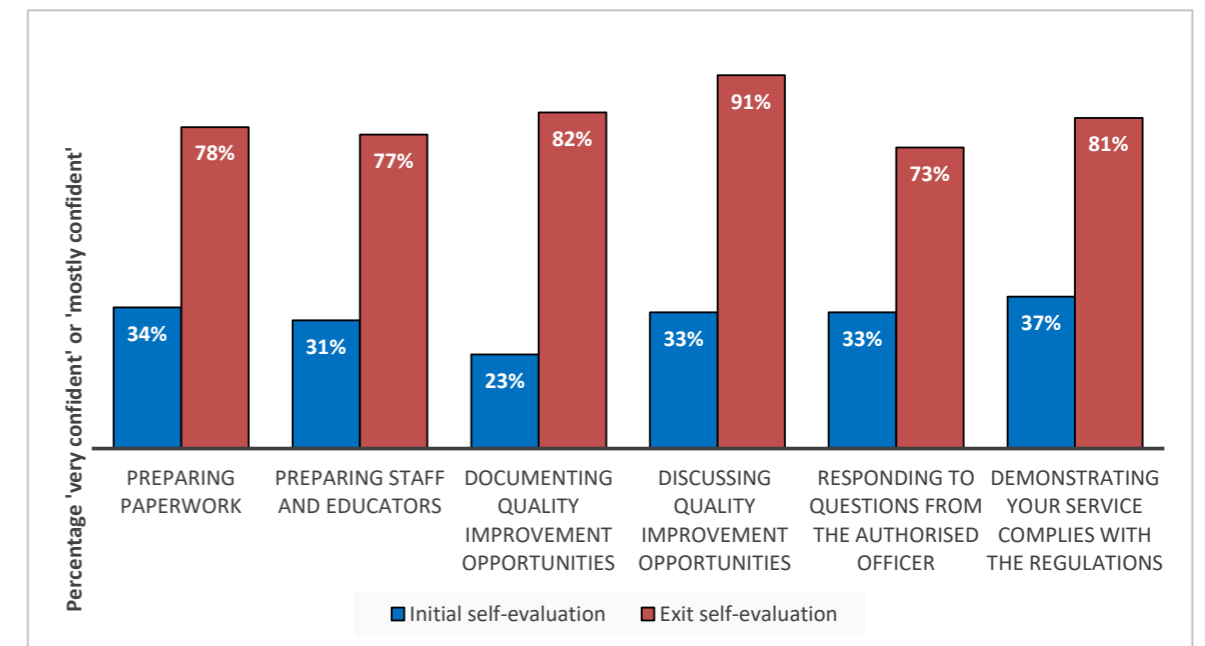
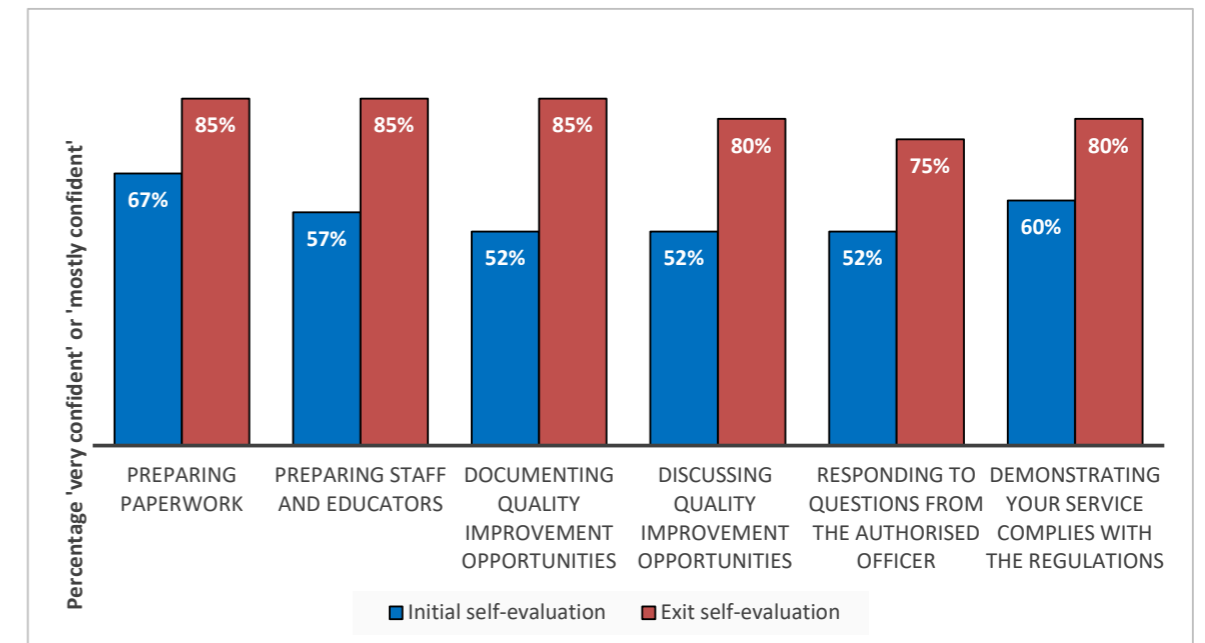
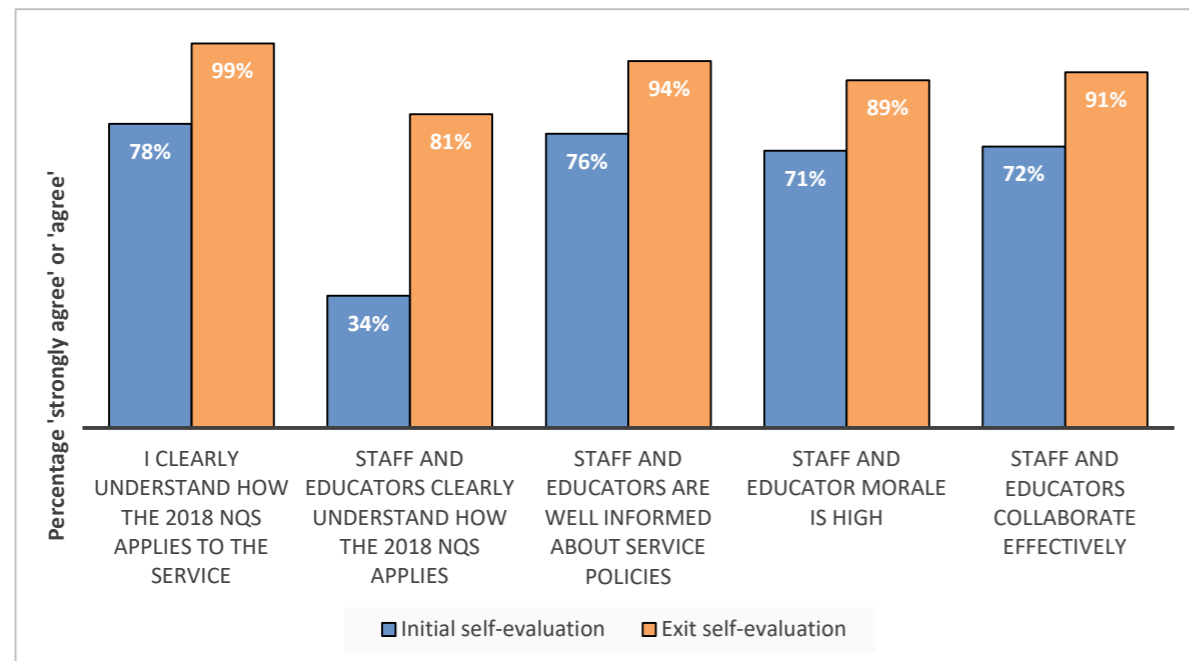


Figure 4: FDC service leaders were more confident after participating in the QSP



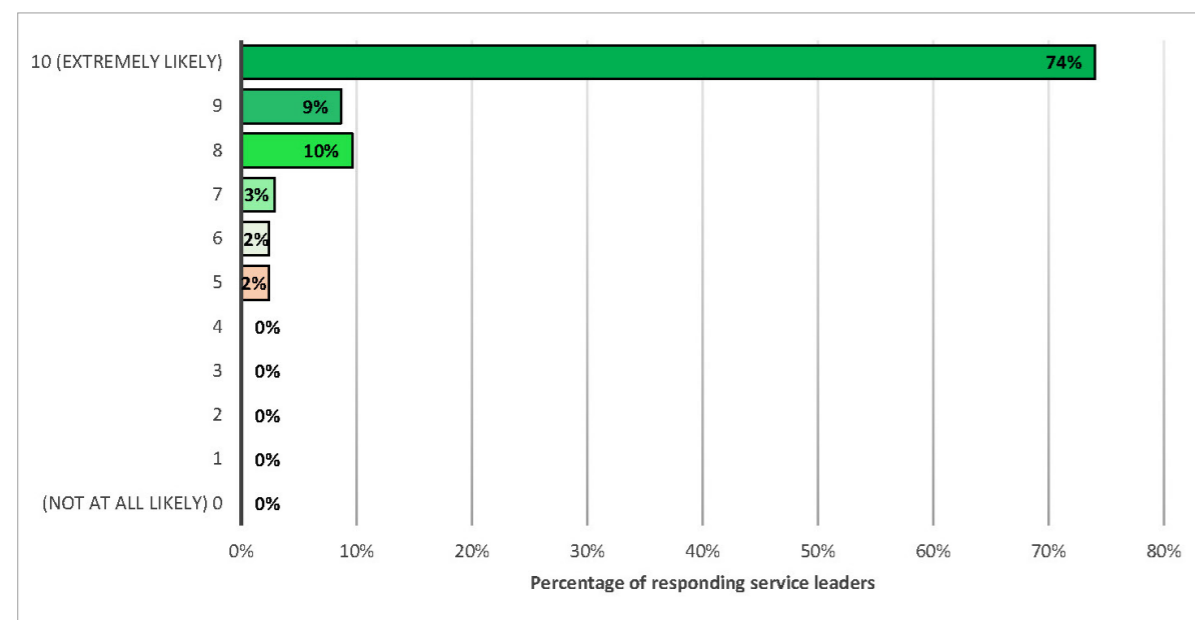
Service leaders were more knowledgeable about the NQS at completion of the QSP, as shown in **Figure 5**.

Figure 5: Service leaders felt more informed after participating in the QSP



Service leaders were overall very satisfied with the QSP, would recommend it to others (**Figure 6**), and found that the support and resources provided were helpful.

Figure 6: Participants report that they are very likely to recommend the QSP to other services



Additional learnings

- The QSP continues to highlight that many of the general sector resources available to support services' understanding of the NQS can be better tailored to the needs of services. In response, ACECQA developed a suite of resources that use plain English, practical tips, and graphical representation⁷. A selection of QSP resources is nationally available on the [Meeting the NQS webpage](#), with more than 40000 page views since publication in July 2019⁷. The resources have been accessed by people across Australia.
- Participating service leaders and QSP support officers also identified gaps in National Quality Framework sector resources which ACECQA addressed. Five new information sheets that were developed specifically for the QSP audience have been published to the [ACECQA website](#), as well as more general sector resources.
- Sector resources, guidance and templates were found to be more effective for use by QSP participating service leaders when they were provided with support and advice on how to apply them in their service context. This finding is influencing how agencies support

A selection of QSP resources are available on the [Meeting the NQS webpage](#), with more than 40000 page views since publication in July 2019

quality improvement. For example, NSW DoE has introduced the Quality Support Team to assist service providers self-assess for quality improvement.

- The benefits of tailoring support to suit the needs and capabilities of the service leaders are highlighted in this report's findings. Support includes the encouraging, non-judgmental relationship that is developed between service leaders and their QSP support officer, and a coaching approach. Support is tailored by targeting chosen focus quality Standards for improvement and adapting resources to meet service leaders' needs. This has proven effective in developing confidence and understanding of service leaders in areas of the NQS that they previously identified as challenging.
- Our findings suggest that these plain English resources, combined with the encouraging and non-judgemental tailored support provided by the QSP support officers, helps services to improve, regardless of where their service is located. Without this support, services in more disadvantaged socio-economic areas tend to improve less when it comes to quality ratings than services in advantaged areas. The QSP was more effective in helping service leaders improve quality, regardless of where their service is located.



High quality early childhood education and care has positive effects on children's immediate and future health and wellbeing. The QSP helps to improve service quality ratings regardless of service location. Without this support, services in more disadvantaged socio-economic areas tend to improve less on quality ratings than services in advantaged areas.

⁷ In agreement with NSW DoE, ACECQA retains the copyright to these resources.

Conclusion

The QSP evaluation results, together with the qualitative feedback from QSP support officers and participating service leaders, demonstrate how the provision of tailored, service-specific support can improve quality and deliver other benefits for services rated 'Working Towards NQS'.

An aim of the QSP is that once this program of tailored support is provided, service leaders will have more capacity and skills to continue the quality improvement journey and support their staff and educators' understanding of the NQS. The feedback received from service leaders demonstrates that continuous improvement is and will continue to occur after the QSP has concluded:

“ This program is so wonderful and we will continue to use the resources and support documents for many years to come. ”

Feedback from QSP participants and reflection on the program has led to a number of improvements, including: The duration of each round of support has been increased by two weeks; the number of service visits has increased; and the eLearning modules now include additional functionality.

The stages of support provided by the QSP overlap to ensure a seamless transition between rounds. Therefore, Stage Three of the QSP commenced in February 2020. As requested by NSW DoE, the extension of the QSP for two more years of funding, incorporating Stages Three and Four, will include outside school hours care (OSHC) and preschool services in addition to LDC and FDC. This extension will enable up to an additional 400 eligible services to participate in the QSP. The program delivery has been adapted to cater for the operating structure of the OSHC and preschool services. For these services, the 18 weeks of tailored support is offered over two school terms. For services that operate vacation care only, the support is being offered across four vacation care periods.

Follow up evaluations are planned to track and report on progress and adjustments to program delivery. These will be presented in the Stage Three Evaluation Report due for release in October 2021.

“ We feel very confident to go on and continue our journey of quality assurance and much more informed of how to better our service. ”

“ ...helped give me the confidence, ability and understanding to assess where I was at and where I needed to be.... ”

