



Resource

Guide



National Quality Standard **A guide to developing your Quality Improvement Plan**

Strengthening compliance and quality improvement under
the National Quality Framework

This resource guide explores:

- improving outcomes for children through the National Quality Framework
- using the NSW Quality Improvement Plan template.



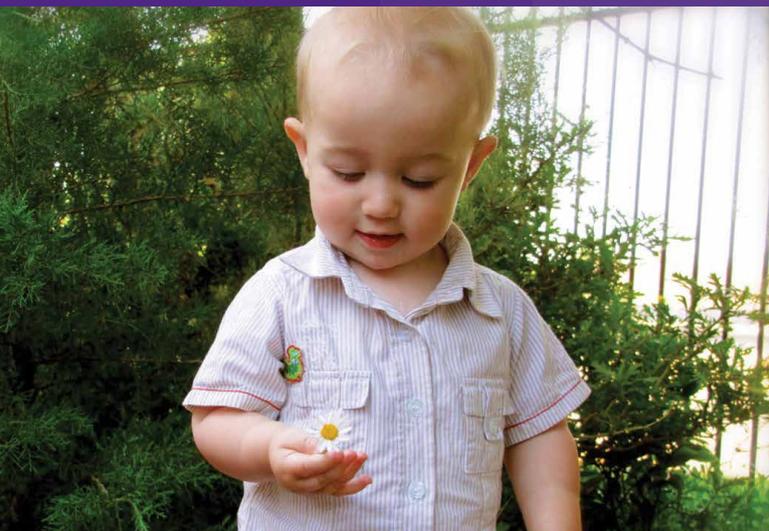
Education

This Resource Guide has been provided by the Department of Education as part
of the Early Childhood Education and Care Sector Development Program.

CCSA is the go-to organisation for early childhood education and care services.

We provide specialist information and support in governance, management, compliance and quality improvement, business support and workplace relations. We also provide [bookkeeping and payroll services](#), as well as [management training](#) for the professional development of directors, staff and management committees.

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This Resource Guide builds on training delivered through workshops and webinars from February to June 2016 to support compliance and quality improvement under the National Quality Framework and the National Quality Standard. This training focussed on Quality Areas 1, 2, 4 and 7. You can access copies of these presentations and related resource guides from [CCSA's website](#). You can also download a copy of the NSW Department of Education Quality Improvement Plan template from their [website](#).

This Guide should be read in association with the companion guide: *Strengthening compliance and quality improvement under the National Quality Framework: A guide to developing your Quality Improvement Plan*. When you are using this resource, you should also refer directly to the National Law, National Regulations and the National Quality Standard.

DISCLAIMER: The information contained in this publication has been prepared as general information only. It is not intended as a substitute for legal or professional advice relating to your specific circumstances. CCSA, its employees and agents shall not be liable for any loss or damage incurred as a result of any reliance on the information contained in this publication.

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Your **partner**
in management



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1. Overview of the Resource Guide.

1.1 How to use the Resource Guide

This Resource Guide builds on the webinar series, focused on compliance and quality improvement under the National Law, National Regulations and the National Quality Standard, delivered from March to June 2016. These webinars examine how to develop your Quality Improvement Plan by exploring principles and approaches to self-assessing compliance, service strengths and areas for improvement in Quality Areas 1, 2, 4 and 7 of the National Quality Standard.

This training was developed by Community Connections Solutions Australia (CCSA) and provided by the Department of Education's Sector Development Program in 2015-2016. This Guide has been written for Approved Providers and Nominated Supervisors of early childhood education and care services (Long Day Care and Community Preschools) to support self-assessment and quality improvement processes and the development of your service's Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) under the National Quality Framework.

The National Quality Framework (NQF) plays a vital role in ensuring the safety, health and wellbeing of all children using education and care services in Australia. It also aims to drive improvements in young children's learning and development, in response to the growing evidence that high-quality early childhood education and care has lasting benefits for children's educational outcomes in their early years, at school and later in adult life.

By producing this Guide, we highlight how meeting your legal obligations under the National Quality Framework provides the foundation for improving your assessment and rating under the National Quality Standard.

To help you with compliance and continuous quality improvement, this Guide provides:

1. an overview of the National Quality Framework
2. an outline of the legal requirements to develop a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP)
3. an introduction to the NSW Quality Improvement Plan template to support:
 - self-assessment for compliance
 - self-assessment to support quality improvement
 - development of your Quality Improvement project plans to support the implementation of your QIP.

We encourage users of this Guide to refer directly to source materials such as:

- [Children \(Education and Care Services\) National Law \(NSW\) No 104a](#)
- [Education and Care Services National Regulations \(NSW\)](#)
- [ACECQA's Guide to the National Law and the National Regulations](#)
- [ACECQA's Guide to the National Quality Standards](#)
- [Early Years Learning Framework](#)
- [Educators' Guide to Early Years Learning Framework.](#)



2. Improving outcomes for children through the National Quality Framework.

2.1 What is the National Quality Framework?

The National Quality Framework for Education and Care Services (NQF) commenced in 2012. Some parts of the NQF, such as improvements to staffing qualification requirements, educator-to-child ratios, and other staffing arrangements, are being phased in from 2012 and 2020.

Key features of the NQF are:

- Legal requirements set down in statutory law and regulations:
 - [Children \(Education and Care Services\) National Law \(NSW\) No 104a](#)
 - [Education and Care Services National Regulations \(NSW\)](#)
- The [National Quality Standard \(NQS\)](#) which aims to drive quality improvement in the delivery of early childhood education and care services

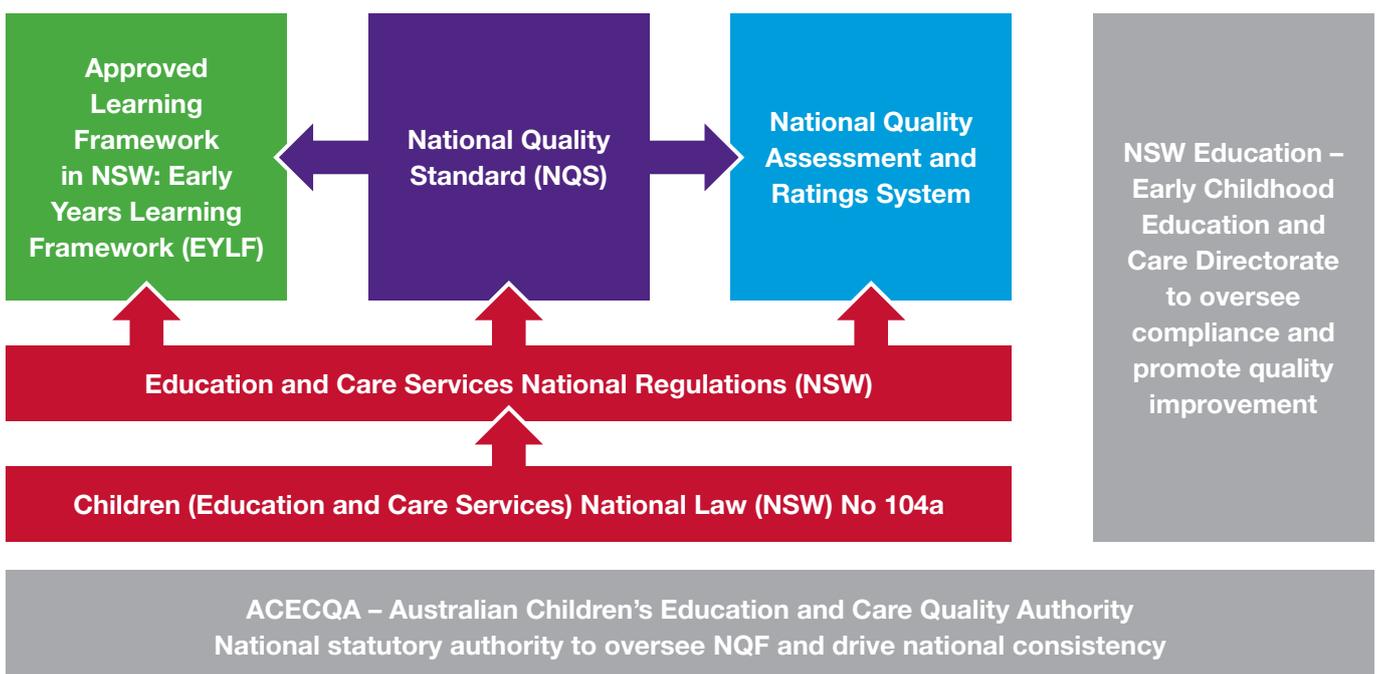
- Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) as the Approved Learning Framework for Early Childhood Services in NSW
- National Quality Assessment and Ratings System.

The Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) is the national statutory authority which oversees the NQF and the delivery of a nationally consistent education and care services for children and families across Australia.

In NSW, [the Department of Education, Early Childhood Education and Care Directorate](#) manages the day-to-day regulatory oversight of the NQF, including oversight of regulatory compliance, undertaking assessment and ratings of services and promoting quality improvement.

You can find out more about the National Quality Framework from the ACECQA website at www.acecqa.gov.au

Key elements that make up the National Quality Framework



2.2 What are the objectives and principles of the NQF?

The objectives and principles of the National Quality Framework (NQF) are set out in the Children (Education and Care Services) National Law (NSW) No 104a.

Section 3 of the National Law states the six objectives of the NQF are to:

1. Ensure the safety, health and wellbeing of children attending education and care services
2. Improve the educational and developmental outcomes for children attending education and care services
3. Promote continuous improvement in the provision of quality education and care services
4. Establish a system of national integration and shared responsibility between participating jurisdictions and the Commonwealth in the administration of the NQF
5. Improve public knowledge, and access to information, about the quality of education and care services
6. Reduce the regulatory and administrative burden for education and care services by enabling information to be shared between participating jurisdictions and the Commonwealth.

For education and care services, objectives 1-3 and 5 relate most directly to how your service plans for its short and long term goals and manages its day-to-day operations.

The NQF is underpinned by the principles that:

- the rights and best interests of the child are paramount
- children are successful, competent and capable learners
- the principles of equity, inclusion and diversity underlie this law
- Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are valued
- the role of parents and families is respected and supported
- best practice is expected in the provision of education and care services.

The NQF seeks to improve outcomes for children through legal obligations for all education and care services to:

- ensure children's safety, health and wellbeing (**compliance requirements**)
- engage in quality improvement by Working Towards, Meeting and, in turn, Exceeding the National Quality Standard (**quality improvement requirements**).

TOP TIP:

The objectives and principles of the NQF should underpin your service's strategic planning objectives, policy development and quality improvement processes.

2.3 What is the National Quality Standard?

The National Quality Standard (NQS) provides the benchmarks across 7 Quality Areas, which are drawn from 28 Standards and 58 Elements, for quality service delivery in early childhood education and care and outside school hours care services in Australia.

The NQS is based on international research and outlines the most effective ways to support children's safety, health and wellbeing and support children's learning and development.

The 7 Quality Areas are:

1. Educational program and practice
2. Children's health and safety
3. Physical environment
4. Staffing arrangements
5. Relationships with children
6. Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
7. Leadership and service management.

The NQS is used to inform the Assessment and Ratings system for all centre-based early childhood education and care services. Services are assessed on how they are meeting each of the elements and the standards under the NQS.

Following the assessment process, each service receives a rating for each of the seven quality areas as well as an overall rating. The five ratings are:

- Excellent rating – awarded by ACECQA
- Exceeding National Quality Standard
- Meeting National Quality Standard
- Working Towards National Quality Standard
- Significant Improvement Required.

2.4 What is compliance and what role does it play in the NQF Assessment and Ratings system?

Compliance is the process by which your service ensures it is meeting the minimum requirements set out in the relevant law or regulations. In early childhood education and care services, all staff have a role in ensuring that the service complies with its legal obligations. However, under the Children (Education and Care Services) National Law (NSW) and under the Education and Care Services National Regulation (NSW) specific legal obligations and responsibilities rest with the Approved Provider and Nominated Supervisor. ACECQA's [Guide to the National Law and National Regulations](#) highlights who is accountable for breaches of their legal obligations (p 131-138).

When your service is participating in its Assessment and Rating process, if you are found not to be compliant with a particular aspect of the National Law or National Regulations, you are likely to be assessed as “Not Meeting” the National Quality Standard for the corresponding NQS element and standard. This would then lead to a rating of “Working Towards” the Standard unless there is unacceptable risk to the children’s safety, health and wellbeing. Where there is unacceptable risk, you may be issued with a compliance direction or other enforcement action, and your service may be rated as ‘significant improvement required’ for the NQS element and standard.

TOP TIP:

Compliance with the Children (Education and Care Services) National Law (NSW) and the Education and Care Services National Regulation [NSW] form the foundation to Meeting and, in turn, Exceeding the National Quality Standard.

2.5 What is Quality Improvement under the NQF?

Under the NQF, Approved Providers and Nominated Supervisors are required to lead a service that is focused on Quality Improvement. The aim of Quality Improvement under the NQF is to improve outcomes for children.

The diagram on page 7 outlines the key steps involved in the quality improvement process. These are most commonly described as Plan, Do, Check, Act (PDCA). You may also come across a variation which is to Plan, Do, Study, Act or Adjust.

Research on Quality Improvement shows that engaging stakeholders in the assessment and improvement process leads to better results. Therefore, when you are undertaking self-assessment and quality improvement, you should gather information from and, where appropriate, enable participation from a range of stakeholders including:

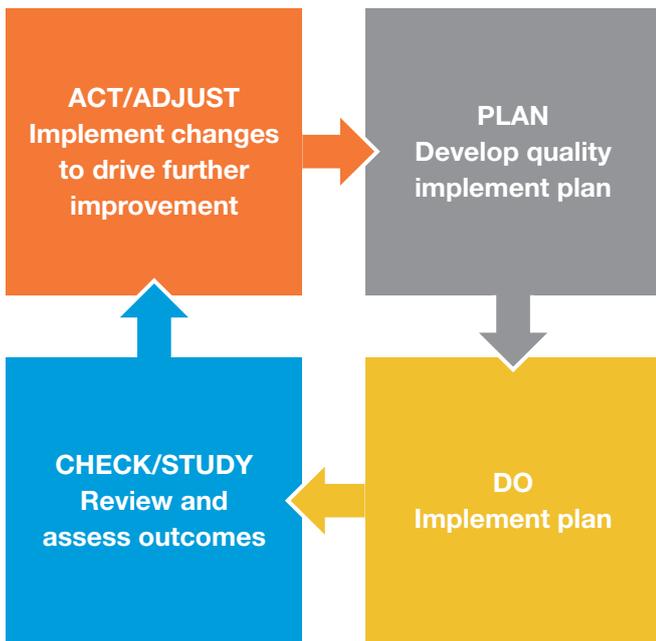
- educators and other staff at your service
- service leadership and management, including your management committee or the service owner
- children and their families
- other service providers that you work with.

TOP TIP:

As a minimum, educators and other staff, your service’s leadership team, children and families should participate in Quality Improvement self-assessment and planning in the areas that relate to their day-to-day practice and experience.

TOP TIP:

Some Quality Areas, such as Quality Area 4 Staffing Arrangements and Quality Area 7 Leadership and Service Management, may involve consultation with staff though final strategic decision-making rests with the service’s leadership team.



2.6 What is a Quality Improvement Plan?

To achieve the goals of the NQF, all participating services, such as centre-based community preschools and long day care services, are required to develop a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) under the Education and Care Services National Regulations (NSW).

These regulations also specify that services must review and update their QIP at least annually.

To develop a QIP, all services must undertake a process of ‘self-assessment’ for each of the seven Quality Areas under the National Quality Standard. This ‘self-assessment’ process involves three key steps:

- **assessing compliance** with the regulatory requirements under the National Law and National Regulation
- **identifying the service’s strengths** – the areas of which the service is most proud and would like to showcase
- **determining areas where the service would like to improve or extend** to improve outcomes for children.

Once the self-assessment process is undertaken for each quality area, the service’s leadership team will need to prioritise areas for improvement. These areas for improvement form short or long-term Quality Improvement projects that are integral to:

- the implementation of your service’s QIP
- improving the quality of your service to children and families in your community
- meeting the goals and objectives of the NQF.

It is the responsibility of the service’s leadership team to regularly monitor, review and record progress on Quality Improvement projects under your QIP. Monitoring and review of Quality Improvement projects, in turn, supports your service’s ongoing cycle of continuous quality improvement.

Your service’s QIP should feature in and, indeed, drive agendas at management and staff meetings and play a guiding role in your service’s strategic plan if you have one. Educators and other staff, children and families, service’s leadership and management should all be actively engaged in the development, implementation and review of your QIP.

As ACECQA notes: “The Quality Improvement Plan is designed to be a dynamic, evolving document.”¹

Reference: 1. ACECQA, Guide to developing a Quality Improvement Plan, June 2014, p.7. Available from the ACECQA website – www.acecqa.gov.au

3. Using the NSW Quality Improvement Plan template.

3.1 Overview of the NSW Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) template

In December 2015, the Early Childhood Education and Care Directorate released a new Education and Care Service Quality Improvement Plan template to help services develop their QIP.

Under the legislation, there is no specified ‘format’ or ‘style’ for your service’s QIP. If you have a QIP that is working well for your service, there is no requirement to use the new NSW Department of Education template. However, it is important that you can demonstrate how you comply with the National Law and National Regulations as part of your QIP self-assessment processes.

What are the benefits of the NSW template?

- ✓ Highlights the key steps in developing a QIP:
 1. Provides a place to include your service’s philosophy which defines your service’s purpose and approach to working with children, families and communities
 2. Leads you through the key steps to self-assess how your service is complying with its regulatory obligations, together with identifying your service’s strengths and areas for improvement under the National Quality Standard (NQS)
 3. Enables you to prioritise your service’s areas for improvement and develop plans for your service’s improvement goals and Quality Improvement Plan projects
- ✓ Ensures a stronger focus on compliance through the introduction of a “regulatory checklist” which highlights the legal obligations for each of the Quality Area in the NQS
- ✓ Encourages services to focus on the high-level standards when self-assessing strengths and areas of improvement for each Quality Area

- ✓ Helps to streamline the self-assessment process by using the elements as questions to guide your thinking about your service’s strengths and areas for improvement for each of the 28 Standards
- ✓ Provides two templates for your Quality Improvement projects:
 - a detailed planning template for your service to use for larger Quality Improvement projects
 - a shorter summary template for smaller projects and referencing larger projects.



The QIP template is available from the [Department of Education website](#).

3.2 Undertaking self-assessment to develop your Quality Improvement Plan (Section 2 of the QIP template)

To develop your QIP, you are required to undertake a three-step self-assessment process:

1. Assess (check) compliance with the regulatory requirements for each Quality Area under the NQS
2. Assess (identify) your service’s strengths for each of the Standards within each Quality Area
3. Assess (determine) areas within each Quality Area where your service can improve.

These steps are outlined in Section 2 of the NSW QIP Template.

TOP TIP:

As your service works with its QIP, you may find your service’s strengths align with goals that your service has delivered through the previous “iteration” or version of your QIP.

TOP TIP:

There is no requirement to develop Quality Improvement goals and projects for every Quality Area. However, every Quality Area must be self-assessed for compliance, service's strengths and areas for improvement.

3.3 Guidance on the three-step self-assessment process for your QIP (Section 2 of the QIP template)

Step 1: Assess your compliance with the regulatory requirements

Section 2 of the NSW QIP template includes a checklist to help your service assess compliance with its legal and regulatory requirements. If your self-assessment reveals an area where you are non-compliant, you must take immediate steps to rectify this non-compliance. You should also record the actions that your service took to rectify and address the area of non-compliance.

When your service is self-assessing how you comply with the legal requirements, it is vital that you also identify:

- how you 'know and show' or 'demonstrate' compliance.

References on how you reached your conclusion that you are compliant or non-compliant in a particular area might be included in an Appendix, such as a spreadsheet, which identifies where any supporting records that demonstrate assessment of compliance can be located. These records could include documentation of policies, procedures, activities (minutes of meetings, notes or photos of consultations and reflective practices) that took place to support and assess compliance.

TOP TIP:

When assessing compliance requirements, make sure you read directly from National Law and National Regulations and engage carefully with the directions set out in this legislation.

TOP TIP:

When creating the evidence to support compliance, try not to duplicate existing records, resources and documentation but rather identify how and where you can access this information, if you need to refer to it as part of your Assessment and Ratings visit.

Step 2: Identify and record your strengths

Once you have assessed your compliance with the legal requirements, the NSW QIP template asks you to assess your service's strengths in relation to each of the Standards for the Quality Area.

Focussing on your service's 'strengths' provides a range of benefits such as:

- Highlighting your service's own resourcefulness and capacity to find solutions to everyday challenges
- Acknowledging and celebrating achievements since the last QIP
- Building engagement and motivation amongst all stakeholders in the process of compliance and continuous quality improvement to deliver better outcomes for children
- Creating a sound platform for change and improvement by identifying the factors that enable projects and activities to work well.

The QIP Template also provides some helpful 'trigger' questions for each of the Standards in the Quality Area. These trigger questions are drawn from the Elements that relate to the respective Standard.

Step 3: Identify areas for improvement

When you have identified your service's strengths in relation to each Quality Standard, the QIP template asks you to identify the areas of your service's practice that you think could be improved or extended to improve quality outcomes for children.

TOP TIP:

Undertake careful and honest self-assessments by developing a culture where raising areas for improvement is encouraged and positively received.

Assess strengths and areas for improvement together – often when people work on identifying strengths, they may also identify challenges because the two areas can be linked through the process of continuous improvement.

TOP TIP:

Engage others (management committee members, service owners, staff, families, children, other local service providers) in your self-assessment and continuous improvement processes.

Build a culture of valuing input and collecting feedback – without feedback it is difficult to develop effective Quality Improvement Plans.

3.4 Using your self-assessment to plan your Quality Improvement goals and projects (Section 3 of the QIP)

Once you have completed your self-assessment for each of the Seven Quality Areas under the National Quality Standard, it is helpful to collate all of the areas identified for improvement into one list. This can make it easier for your service's leadership team to decide what areas of improvement to focus on.

The most effective way to prioritise areas for improvement is to apply a 'risk assessment' approach by asking:

- what are the consequences for children's safety, health and wellbeing and their learning and development if the improvement is not addressed?
- what are the benefits for children's safety, health and wellbeing and their learning and development if the improvement is implemented?

Each of the Quality Improvement areas identified should be prioritised using the categories of "High", "Medium", "Low" priorities.

This process is outlined in **Step 1: Prioritising areas for improvement** in Section 3 of the QIP, which encourages you to consider:

- Should we address the area immediately?
For example if the issue is not addressed:
 - Does it pose a risk to the health, wellbeing or safety of children?
 - Will we be non-compliant with the Law and Regulations?
- Will addressing the issue result in significant improvements to the quality of our service delivery or in the outcomes for children?
- Should it be a long or short term goal?

Other questions to consider when prioritising areas for improvement in your QIP are:

- Will addressing this area help us to comply with other legal obligations such as work health and safety, disability access and inclusion?
- Will addressing the area help the service improve its staffing or human resource management?
- What resources does the service have to invest in the improvement?
- What recommendations have you received from staff, families, children regarding the difference that particular areas of quality improvement will make?



TOP TIP:

Review the indicators from ACECQA's Assessment and Ratings Instrument that describe the difference between Working Towards, Meeting and Exceeding for each element in the National Quality Standard – consider what your service can do to ensure that high-quality practice for children is embedded in your service.

**TOP TIP:**

If your service has been assessed as Meeting or Exceeding in a particular quality area, you might consider how your service is meeting the founding principles of the National Quality Framework. You might ask:

- How is your service using the findings of Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) to improve outcomes for children in your local community?
- How is your service addressing barriers to inclusion of children with disability or high and complex needs?
- How accessible is your service to Aboriginal children, children from low-income and disadvantaged families, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in your community?

3.5 Developing your Quality Improvement Plan goals and project plans (Section 3 of the QIP template)

Once your service has prioritised areas for improvement, your service needs to develop plans to implement your Quality Improvement goals. This process is outlined in **Step 2: Developing your Improvement Plan** in Section 3 of the QIP template.

Having a project plan for each of your Quality Improvement projects will help your service allocate resources and tasks. It will also enable better monitoring and reporting and, in turn, build a culture of Quality Improvement at your service. In addition, a clearly defined plan can help you communicate goals and outcomes to children and families which, in turn, builds a better understanding of your service's Quality Improvement processes.

The QIP template provides two project planning templates that you can use and adapt your Quality Improvement projects.

- **Plan A Planning for Quality Improvement template** is a detailed Project Plan template which can be used for larger Quality Improvement projects that your service may be completing over an extended period (1 month – 12 months). This longer template outlines key aspects of sound project planning such as:
 - **summarising the rationale or purpose** of the Quality Improvement Project including what will be achieved and how the project seeks to mitigate current risks (Steps 1-5)
 - **outlining strategies**, time frames and allocating responsibilities for project tasks (Step 6)
 - **monitoring your project plan** to check it is on track
 - **reviewing and evaluating your project** to support continuous improvement.
- **Plan B Improvement Plan Summary template** is a summary Project Plan template which can be used to list or summarise the larger plans. It can also be used for smaller short-term projects.

TOP TIP

Creating a clear outline of the purpose of your Quality Improvement projects can help you communicate more effectively to stakeholders, such as children and families and other local community services, about what your service is seeking to achieve through your QIP.

TOP TIP

Try to keep your Quality Improvement project plans as simple as possible – ensure it is clear ‘who’ is expected to do ‘what’ by ‘when’.

TOP TIP

Develop processes to monitor and review your Quality Improvement project plans – this helps build engagement and understanding about how your service is seeking to improve outcomes for children.

TOP TIP:

Depending on the nature of your service’s Quality Improvement project, monitoring its progress may occur and be documented through:

- review of an individual staff member’s workplan through reference to actions or tasks on a Quality Improvement Project
- review of Quality Improvement project status updates at team or service-wide staff meetings
- reports on the status of Quality Improvement projects to the Approved Provider (Management Committee, Board, Service Owner)
- updates and reports to children and families – these may also be combined with consultations and feedback on the development and implementation of your Quality Improvement projects.

Monitoring and review of quality improvement projects and activities may occur weekly, fortnightly or monthly depending on your service’s routines and the scope of the plans.



4. Where can I get more information?

There are a range of resources available through the ACECQA website including:

- [the Guide to the National Law and National Regulations](#)
- [the Guide to the National Quality Standard](#)
- [the Guide to Developing a Quality Improvement Plan](#)

Early Childhood Australia also provides information through its extensive [Professional Learning Program](#)

You can download copies of CCSA's presentation slides from the *Legislation and the National Quality Standard* workshop and webinar series on Quality Areas 1, 2, 4 and 7, which were delivered from February to June 2016, from the [Sector Development Program Resources](#) page of CCSA's website.

CCSA also provides consultancies to support the development of your Quality Improvement Plan, including approaches to self-assessment, compliance and quality improvement, facilitation and stakeholder engagement skills and project planning. For more information, go to the [training pages](#) of CCSA's website or contact CCSA on 1800 991 602 or office@ccsa.org.au.



A guide to developing your Quality Improvement Plan