

## Guidelines for applicants - Excellent rating

### Who are these guidelines for?

These guidelines are for services who wish to apply, or re-apply, for the Excellent rating.

Only services rated 'Exceeding National Quality Standard' overall are eligible to apply for the Excellent rating.

### Why have an Excellent rating?

The Excellent rating is a unique feature of the National Quality Framework.

The opportunity to be awarded the Excellent rating by ACECQA is only available to providers with a service rated 'Exceeding National Quality Standard' overall.

The purpose of the National Quality Framework Excellent rating is to:

- **celebrate** excellence in the delivery of education and care
- **engage and involve** families and the community in the profession's discussion about quality, and what is important in education and care
- **learn from and be inspired by** examples of highly accomplished practice, innovation and creativity in education and care
- **promote and reinforce the value** of education and care, and of the people who work in this sector
- **recognise** providers and educators who are champions of quality improvement.

### What is the relevant law?

Section 134(2) of the *Education and Care Services National Law* gives ACECQA responsibility for awarding the highest rating of 'Excellent' to services under the National Quality Framework.

Sections 152 to 160 of the National Law set out ACECQA's role in determining a rating of 'Excellent'.

Regulation 71 of the Education and Care Services National Regulations sets out the process for an approved provider to apply.

## **What criteria does ACECQA use to assess our application?**

To be awarded the Excellent rating, you must show that your service meets three criteria.

### **1. *The service exemplifies and promotes exceptional education and care that improves outcomes for children and families*** across at least three of the following themes:

- Collaborative partnerships with professional, community or research organisations
- Commitment to children that respects, reflects and celebrates culture and diversity, including place of origin
- Inclusive partnerships with children and families
- Positive workplace culture and organisational values
- Practice and environments that enhance children's learning and growth
- Sustained commitment to professional development and support of educators.

Your application must nominate at least three excellence themes, explain how each is supported and promoted through your service's practice, and demonstrate how those practices improve outcomes for the participating children and families.

### **2. *The service demonstrates leadership that contributes to the development of a community, a local area, or the wider education and care sector***

Leadership is about guiding, influencing and inspiring change. Leadership can be bold and far reaching, or subtle and local, and still be influential. Leadership occurs in many ways and takes different paths, from local networks to new technologies.

A service aspiring to an Excellent rating can be a leader in its community and/or the wider education and care sector. Your application must show how your service takes initiative to develop and model exceptional practice that improves outcomes for children and families, and is willingly shared to inspire and educate others.

### **3. *The service demonstrates commitment to sustained excellent practice through continuous improvement and comprehensive forward planning***

A service aspiring to an Excellent rating is not only exceptional across several practice themes; it embraces the responsibility of maintaining excellence and pursuing opportunities for further improvement.

Your application must show how your service will sustain exceptional practice and leadership, and continue to improve outcomes for children and families, over the three year rating period.

## How do I make an application?

To make an application to ACECQA, you must:

- complete the application form
- attach statements and evidence showing how you meet each of the three criteria
- pay the required fee.

We recommend you read the section on “How to Write an Application for the Excellent Rating” at the end of these guidelines before preparing your application.

## When can an approved provider apply for the Excellent rating?

You may apply for the Excellent rating only if the current overall rating for your service is ‘Exceeding National Quality Standard’ (section 152(5)), or if your service currently holds the Excellent rating and the rating is due to expire within 90 days (section 159).

## Do I need to be rated Exceeding in all quality areas to apply?

As long as your overall rating is ‘Exceeding National Quality Standard’, you may apply. You do not need to be rated Exceeding in all quality areas.

## What is the application fee?

The National Law requires the application fee be paid before ACECQA can consider an application. An application is not complete until the fee has been paid. The fee is set by the National Regulations and varies according to the size of the service. It is not subject to GST. The application fee for the Excellent rating is:

<b>Centre-Based Service</b> (Number of approved places)			<b>Family Day Care Service</b> (Number of family day care educators engaged by or registered with the service)		
less than 25	25-80	more than 80	less than 6	6-20	more than 20
\$204	\$408	\$612	\$204	\$408	\$612

The application fee must be paid in advance and can be paid by credit card, money order or bank cheque made payable to ‘ACECQA’.

## How do I submit an application?

ACECQA prefers to receive applications electronically. If possible, please submit your application by email.

Completed applications can be sent to ACECQA

By email: [excellent@acecqa.gov.au](mailto:excellent@acecqa.gov.au)

By post: Excellent rating  
ACECQA  
PO BOX A292  
Sydney NSW 1235

## **How detailed should my submission be and what should it include?**

As well as filling out the application form, you need to provide a statement and evidence to show how you meet the criteria. You need to provide enough information and evidence for ACECQA to be able to assess your service against the criteria.

ACECQA will be focused on assessing the quality of your service, not the quality of your application. This means we will consider your service's practices, partnerships, programs, forward planning, commitment to quality improvement, and importantly, how your service improves outcomes for children and families. How you present this information is up to you, just make sure you provide us with enough information to assess your service against the criteria.

It is not necessary to engage an external consultant to put together your application.

For more information about what to include in your application, refer to the section on "How to Write an Application for the Excellent Rating" below.

## **What happens to my application?**

ACECQA will email you to confirm your application has been received.

Please ensure the application is complete and all supporting documents are attached. We are unable to process incomplete applications. For all complete applications, an ACECQA Operations Officer will contact you to discuss the application process and to answer any questions you may have.

ACECQA will assess the service against the Excellent rating criteria (section 153(2)) and provide you with a written notice of the outcome of the application (section 156(1)).

## **Will I have an opportunity to provide more information?**

We may or may not ask you to provide more information. For this reason, you should submit the information you would like us to consider when you apply.

If we receive information or advice that adversely affects your application during our inquiries, we will provide you with that information and give you an opportunity to respond.

## **What information may be considered by ACECQA?**

ACECQA must ask for, and take into account, advice from the relevant Regulatory Authority in making a decision about whether to award an Excellent Rating (section 153(3)). ACECQA may make other inquiries for the purposes of assessing the service (section 154(1)(b)). We may seek advice from people with expertise in the education and care sector under section 154(1)(b), or take steps to verify the information provided in the application. We may visit the service to undertake inquiries.

ACECQA will not assess your service against the National Quality Standard, as the Regulatory Authority will have already carried out that assessment.

### **How long does the Excellent rating process take?**

ACECQA must make a decision within 60 days after the application was made (section 155(2)). This period may be extended by up to 30 days if ACECQA requests further information from the approved provider or makes any inquiries (section 155(3)(a)) or if the approved provider agrees (section 155(3)(b)).

Because ACECQA must process applications within these timeframes, it is important you ensure that someone is available to provide further information if ACECQA has any questions about your application. If your service will be closed for any period of time after you submit your application, please provide us with an out of hours contact number.

Please note the decision timeframe does not include the period between when ACECQA requests, and is provided with, information (section 154(2)).

### **Will I receive information about the decision?**

Yes. ACECQA must provide written notice to the approved provider and Regulatory Authority within 14 days of making its decision (section 156(2)).

Applicants will receive written feedback detailing the reasons for the decision.

### **What will be my service's final rating?**

If ACECQA awards a rating of 'Excellent', it becomes the overall rating for the service (section 155(4)). The rating applies for 3 years, unless revoked (section 155(5)). ACECQA does not automatically renew the Excellent rating for a service. To keep the Excellent rating, an approved provider will need to re-apply (section 159).

If ACECQA decides not to award a rating of 'Excellent', the service will continue to be rated at Exceeding the National Quality Standard.

### **What happens if my service is rated Excellent?**

Services awarded the Excellent rating will receive a certificate showing their Excellent rating. They will also receive branding to promote their status as an Excellent rated service.

Services receiving an Excellent rating may be promoted by ACECQA in its newsletters, media releases and website, and may be invited to be involved in ACECQA's conferences and other events to help promote excellence in education and care services. Depending on circumstances, ACECQA may support Excellent rated services to participate in those ACECQA events.

### **Can I withdraw my application?**

You may withdraw your application at any time before ACECQA makes a decision. However, your application fee will not be refunded.

### **Will the application remain confidential?**

Information provided by a service will be handled in line with [ACECQA's Privacy Policy](#). ACECQA may need to disclose personal information to some third parties, including regulatory authorities, to verify the information provided in the application.

ACECQA will publish the names of services and providers that receive the Excellent rating on its website.

### **Can the decision be appealed?**

There is no review process for a decision about an application for the Excellent rating.

If you believe you have been unfairly treated by ACECQA, you may complain to the Education and Care Services Ombudsman. For more information, please visit [www.necsombudsmanprivacy.edu.au](http://www.necsombudsmanprivacy.edu.au)

### **When can I re-apply?**

A service that applied for, but was not awarded the Excellent rating, may not submit another application for three years from the date of lodging the original application, unless ACECQA decides otherwise (section 152(4)).

As a general rule, ACECQA will only accept one application from a service every three years. However, there may be circumstances where it would be appropriate to allow a provider to re-apply sooner. Providers wishing to make a second application should contact ACECQA in the first instance.

A service that has achieved the Excellent rating may re-apply for the award once every three years (sections 152(4) and 159(1)). Applications for re-assessment must be made within 90 days before the expiry of the existing Excellent rating if the provider wishes to maintain a continuous Excellent rating (section 159(2)).

### **How do I reapply?**

To re-apply, an applicant must:

- complete the application form
- attach application submission, including supporting documentation and evidence
- pay the required fee.

### **Can the Excellent rating be revoked?**

ACECQA can revoke the Excellent rating if the service no longer meets the criteria (section 158(a)) or if the regulatory authority advises ACECQA that the overall rating level of the service is lower than 'Exceeding National Quality Standard' (section 158(b)).

### **Where can I get further information?**

If you have questions about the application process for the Excellent rating, please contact ACECQA on 1300 4 ACECQA (1300 422 327) or [enquiries@acecqa.gov.au](mailto:enquiries@acecqa.gov.au).

# How to write an application for the Excellent rating

## The difference between Exceeding and Excellent

Being rated as Exceeding NQS tells us that your service has already gone beyond what is necessary to meet the National Quality Standard.

The Excellent rating is about what sets you apart from your peers in the sector and makes your service exemplary and a leader. When you write your application, you will need to explain what makes your service exceptional, how your influence extends beyond your service and how you will sustain excellent practice.

## Statement and evidence

As mentioned earlier in these guidelines, when applying for the Excellent rating, you will need to prepare a statement addressing the Excellent rating criteria and provide evidence to support your claims.

When writing your statement, it is important that you address the criteria and present information about your service in a clear and logical way.

To do this, you will need to identify which practices, programs or partnerships within your service best demonstrate how you are meeting the criterion you are addressing. You will then need to describe what these practices involve and explain how these practices show you are meeting each criterion. Most importantly, you must show how the practices, programs or partnerships you have chosen improve outcomes for the children who attend your service, and their families. To support your application, provide evidence of your excellent practices, programs and partnerships and evidence or examples of the positive outcomes you have achieved.

The following information will help you prepare your statement and help you decide what evidence and examples you should provide.

## How to write your statement

In your statement, explain how you meet each of the three criteria for the Excellent rating.

### *Addressing criterion 1*

Excellent services are finely attuned to the particular and unique circumstances of the children and families who attend the service and adapt their practice to support and benefit these children and families. They are able to clearly identify what shapes and influences their practice and to clearly describe those practices. Importantly, Excellent services can describe how outcomes for the children and families who use the service are improved because of the education and care the service delivers.

Their practices, programs and partnerships are innovative and/or inspiring. Excellent services demonstrate education and care that is exceptional.

In your statement addressing criterion 1, explain what makes your service exceptional against each of your chosen themes.

When explaining how your service is exceptional, use some real examples. Depending on which themes you have chosen to address, you might provide examples of the exceptional education and care you provide, partnerships you have developed, environments you have created or support you have provided for educators.

Concentrate on examples of what you have done and what you currently do. Explain why you do it, what led you to do it, how you do it, and what outcomes for children and families have been achieved. If you are describing what you plan to do in the future, explain why you are implementing the plans, how you are planning to achieve your goals, how you will know that you have achieved your goals and what outcomes for your service's children and families you will achieve.

You should tell us how your practice has been influenced by any opportunities, characteristics, circumstances or needs within your community that you have identified. Similarly, if your practice has been influenced by any theories, research or professional documents, you should tell us.

If you document how outcomes for children and families have been improved because of your service's exceptional education and care, or if you have specific examples of where outcomes for children and families have been improved, you should tell us.

#### *Addressing criterion 2*

Excellent services have influence that extends beyond their service. Whereas Exceeding services may have outstanding leadership within the service, Excellent services are leaders within the sector. They extend their influence to develop their community, local area or the wider education and care sector.

In your statement, you should explain how your service has contributed to, or supported the development of, a community, a local area or the education and care sector. Identify and describe any changes that are the direct result of your influence and input. Describe any improved outcomes for children and families that result from your leadership.

You should tell us how your leadership has contributed to the development of a community, local area or the sector, and specific examples of how you have developed a community, local area or the sector.

#### *Addressing criterion 3*

Excellent services do not stop the journey of continuous improvement. They are champions of continuous improvement.

In your statement, you should explain how you will sustain excellent practice through continuous improvement and comprehensive forward planning. Explain how your service plans for the future and how you will ensure your service is committed to continuous improvement. Providing clearly detailed objectives with timelines and defined roles and responsibilities can ensure quality improvement projects are both completed and successful. Provide copies of any planning documents you have.



For example, you might use your strategic plan, Quality Improvement Plan or other planning documents. Please share the documents you use with us.

Your commitment to continuous improvement may extend beyond your service. For example, you may encourage continuous improvement in the wider education and care sector by sharing your successes, or act as a mentor to other services. If this is the case, you should tell us.

### **Evidence you should provide**

You must provide evidence to support your claims. 'Evidence' is the proof of something you have done or achieved. It can come in different forms and could include documents, reports, photographs, video, audio, information computer technology (ICT), video conferencing (e.g. Skype or FaceTime), proposals, plans, research and other professional documents, declarations, testimonials, industry awards or something in the physical environment at the service.

When providing evidence, make sure that it links to your statement and supports your claims. Please do not provide documents without explaining how they relate to your claims against the criteria. You must explain how the evidence you are providing supports your claims.

### **Choosing aspects of your service to write about**

Take time to think about your service's practices, programs and partnerships; consider how they compare with other services and with current practice across the education and care sector, and consider any exceptional outcomes for children and families you have achieved. Also consider feedback you may have received about your service from parents, children, organisations and other early childhood professionals. Review your final Assessment and Rating report and consider which aspects of your service would be considered well above practice found in most services.

Once you have identified these practices, programs and partnerships, think about:

*How and why these practices, programs or partnerships were developed* – Who initiated them? Why? How long has the service been engaged in these practices, programs or partnerships? Who do they benefit? How do they improve outcomes for the children and families who use your service?

*Who and what these practices, programs or partnerships involve* – Do these practices involve specific educators? Do they involve children and families? Do they involve the wider community? What are these practices? How often do these practices occur?

*How you reflect upon and improve these practices* – Do you reflect on these practices? How? How often? Who provides input on improving these practices? How do you know your practices, programs or partnerships are meeting their intended purpose?

*How to best show evidence of these practices in your application* – What documentation shows these practices and their outcomes? Do you need to provide a video to support the written statement? Can you take a picture of something produced as part of the practices? Do you have research reports about these practices?

It's important to remember that, although you are familiar with your service's practices and the value they provide, it is likely that ACECQA will be unfamiliar with your service and its practices. For ACECQA to fully understand and appreciate your practices, you will need to break them down and explain them as clearly and fully as you can.

### **Deciding whether to apply**

You should apply if:

- your practice is well above practice expected in most services
- you can clearly set out the reasons why you do what you do
- you can identify improved outcomes for children and families from your practices
- your influence extends beyond your service
- you are committed to continuous improvement, and
- you share your exceptional practice and leadership with the sector or wider community.

If you find it difficult to address the criteria, it may not be the right time for you to apply. Remember, you can apply at any time if your overall rating is Exceeding NQS. If you need some time to develop aspects of your practice, leadership or planning to meet the Excellent rating criteria, you should take that time before applying.