

Quality Support Program

End of Stage Four Evaluation Report



Australian Children's
Education & Care
Quality Authority

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Published by ACECQA

ABN 59 372 786 746

Level 6, 175 Liverpool Street, Sydney NSW 2000

Web: www.acecqa.gov.au

Email: info@acecqa.gov.au

Media enquiries: media@acecqa.gov.au

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ACECQA acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the Lands on which we work and extend our respects to Elders, past and present.

We recognise and celebrate the contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of Australia, including their role in the education and care of children. We recognise the rich and diverse cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and the valuable contribution this diversity brings.

Glossary

Term	Meaning
A&R	The Assessment and Rating process conducted by the NSW regulatory authority.
ACECQA	Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority.
Approved Provider	A person who holds a provider approval. A provider approval authorises a person to apply for one or more service approvals and is valid in all jurisdictions.
Centre-based services	Centre-based services include long day care, preschool, and outside school hours care (including vacation care only services) but exclude family day care services
Current quality rating	The most recent quality rating results (as of 1 July 2021) of the assessment and rating process conducted by the NSW regulatory authority since the service's participation in the QSP.
Exit QSP service evaluation	The evaluations given by QSP facilitators based on their final service visit on which of the supported 2018 NQS elements were estimated 'met' or 'not met'.
Exit service self-evaluation	The survey completed by service leaders after the QSP consisting of a service self-evaluation of the 2018 NQS elements estimated 'met' or 'not met', areas of received QSP support, and confidence about the next A&R.
Exit feedback survey	The optional anonymous survey sent to service leaders after the QSP consisting of questions about the perceived value of the QSP.
FDC	Family day care.
Initial QSP service evaluation	The evaluations given by QSP facilitators based on their first service visit and subsequent discussions on which 2018 NQS elements estimated were 'met' or 'not met'.
Initial service self-evaluation	The survey completed by service leaders before the QSP consisting of a self-evaluation of the 2018 NQS elements estimated 'met' or 'not met' in their service, requested areas of support, and confidence about the next A&R.
In-person	Service visits and workshops where participants met in person.
LDC	Long day care.

Term	Meaning
Matched services	A group of NSW services that are matched to QSP participating services based on their Working Towards NQS quality rating and other characteristics. The subsequent quality rating reassessment results of the non-participating matched services are then compared to post-QSP quality ratings for the purposes of this evaluation.
Nominated Supervisor	In relation to an education and care service, means a person who: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is nominated by the approved provider of the service to be a nominated supervisor of that service and; • Unless the individual in an approved provider, has provided written consent to that nomination.
NQA ITS	National Quality Agenda IT System.
NQF	National Quality Framework.
NQS	National Quality Standard.
Occurrences of support	Occurrences of support refer to 16-week (Stage One) or 18-week active support periods where services attended workshops, received resources, and interacted regularly with their QSP facilitator.
Online	Support activities conducted online via video-conferencing technology.
OSHC	Outside school hours care.
Post-QSP quality rating	The quality rating results of the first assessment and rating process conducted by the NSW regulatory authority after the service's participation in the QSP.
Pre-QSP quality rating	The quality rating results of the assessment and rating process conducted by the NSW regulatory authority prior to the service participating in the QSP.
PSK	Preschool.
QSP Facilitator	The ACECQA facilitator assigned to deliver the QSP to participating service leaders.
QSP services	Services that participated in the Quality Support Program.
QSP	The Quality Support Program consists of support interactions in person, by phone, video or email, and the digital and physical resources and learning opportunities provided to participating service leaders.
Repeat QSP services	Services that participated in the Quality Support Program twice.
Round	The cohort of services to participate Quality Support Program on the same dates.

Term	Meaning
Stage	The classification of all rounds within a funding period.
SEIFA	Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas.
Service leader	Refers to a person who has been identified as holding a leadership role within an education and care service. For example, the role titles may be approved provider, approved provider representative, nominated supervisor, educational leader, director, coordinator, team leader, room leader etc.
VC	Vacation Care.

"This program has been just what we needed. Our team was very fresh after some massive and stressful changes and being part of this program has helped us to rebuild with a clear focus and increased understanding and knowledge. Our support officer was great at showing us our strengths and helping us to identify and work with our weaknesses. We all feel much more confident in our role and have a very clear picture of future improvements needed to get us to our goal of a higher quality rating. Thank you :-)."

- Family day care service leader

1 Executive summary

1.1 Background

This report presents key findings from the four 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 four stages, with each stage comprising separate groups of services in 'rounds' of up to 18 weeks of tailored support. These rounds have overlapped with each other. This report covers Stages One to Four.

In Stage One (March 2018 to July 2019), Stage Two (February 2019 to August 2020), Stage Three (July 2020 to June 2021) and Stage Four (July 2021 to June 2022), the QSP has delivered 626 occurrences of support to 588 services, providing education and care for approximately 60,000 children¹.

The eligibility criteria for services to participate in the QSP is:

- » rated Working Towards the [National Quality Standard](#) (NQS)
- » in Stage One to Three only: not meeting six or more elements of the NQS (or otherwise indicated need for support)
- » in Stage One and Two only: long day care or family day care providers
- » in Stage One only: last quality rated between June 2015 and the end of December 2017

- » 626 occurrences of support
- » 588 long day care, family day care, preschool and outside school hours care services
- » Attended by approximately 60,000 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 and assessment and rating.

¹ This estimation is based on the maximum approved places in each service assuming full capacity on any given day, estimated hours per week based on service type, and average attendance per child as reported in Report on Government Services 2021.

Participants were provided with bespoke resources, a QSP facilitator to answer questions, discuss improvement priorities and through a coaching approach prompt critical reflection, and provide one-on-one targeted tailored support with continuous quality improvement. The structure of each QSP round consisted of introductory workshops, provision of eLearning modules and other resources, service visits, support phone calls, video coaching calls, and emails. Workshops and service visits were conducted in-person in Stages One and Two and mostly online in Stage Three and Four due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Different service types presented with different contexts and support needs. The QSP drew on the insights of participants to produce service-type specific resources.

1.2 Participating services

During Stages One to Four of the QSP, 626 occurrences of support were provided, to 457 long day care, 32 family day care, 28 preschools, and 109 outside school hours care services. **Table 1** shows the breakdown of services across four stages covered in this report. **Table 2** groups the participating services by number of National Quality Standard elements assessed as 'not met' when quality rated prior to participating in the QSP.

Table 1: Numbers of services in each QSP stage, by service type²

Stage	# Long Day Care	# Family Day Care	# Preschool	# Outside School Hours Care	All service types
One	126	16	-	-	142
Two	127	5	-	-	132
Three	94	8	16	65	183
Four	110	3	12	44	169
Total	457	32	28	109	626

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

Number of elements 'not met' ³	# Long Day Care	# Family Day Care	# Preschool	# Outside School Hours Care	All service types
1 to 5	86 (19%)	10 (31%)	12 (43%)	27 (25%)	135 (22%)
6 to 10	190 (42%)	8 (25%)	11 (39%)	37 (34%)	246 (39%)
11 to 20	132 (29%)	8 (25%)	4 (14%)	29 (27%)	173 (28%)
21 to 30	39 (9%)	6 (19%)	1 (4%)	14 (13%)	60 (10%)
31 to 40	10 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (2%)	12 (2%)
Total	457	32	28	109	626

² Includes repeat services

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.

1.3 Summary of program objectives and evaluation findings

QSP evaluation questions	Program objective	Evaluation findings ⁴
Has the QSP improved the quality of participating services to Meeting NQS or higher?	Increase in the number of NQS elements 'met'	At re-assessment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » 96% of centre-based QSP services increased the number of NQS elements 'met' (average increase 11.6 elements) » 83% of similar matched services increased the number of NQS elements 'met' (average increase 9.6 elements)
	Increase in services rated meeting NQS or above	At re-assessment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » 73% of centre-based services attained a rating of Meeting NQS or above » 51% of similar matched services achieved a rating of Meeting NQS or above during the time » QSP services were 2.59 times (95% CI: 1.86 – 3.60) more likely to be rated Meeting NQS or above than matched services
How effective was the QSP in changing quality from the perspective of Program participants?	Increase in NQS Knowledge	In pre-and post-surveys, service leader's knowledge scores increased significantly for the following indicators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » I clearly understand how the 2018 NQS applies to the service (4.07 vs 4.47) * » Staff and educators clearly understand how the 2018 NQS applies to the service (3.48 vs 4.05)* » Staff and educators are well informed about service policies, procedures and practices (4.02 vs 4.34)*.
	Increase in confidence in preparing for A&R	In pre-and post-surveys, service leader's confidence scores increased significantly for the following indicators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Preparing paperwork for the visit (3.17 vs 4.00)* » Preparing staff and educators for the visit (3.12 vs 3.99)* » Documenting quality improvement opportunities (2.87 vs 4.01)* » Discussing quality improvement opportunities with staff and educators (3.14 vs 4.25)* » Responding to questions from the authorised officer conducting the visit (3.12 vs 3.90)* » Demonstrating your service complies with the regulations that link to each quality area (3.18 vs 4.10)*.

⁴ Unless otherwise specified, evaluation findings present overall results, which include all service subtypes. * Statistically significant $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed)

1.4 Findings to date

96% of centre based QSP services improved in the number of National Quality Standard elements 'met', by an average of 12 elements.

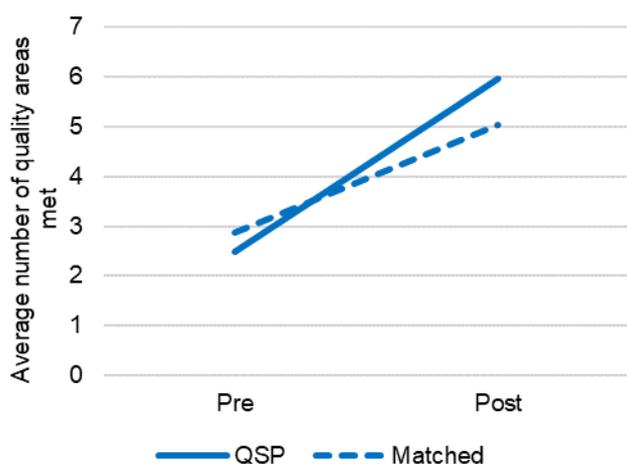
The QSP was largely successful in supporting centre-based participating services to achieve an overall rating of Meeting NQS, this is evidenced in the findings below.

- » 73% of centre-based services achieved a rating of Meeting NQS or above.
- » Centre-based participating services were 2.59 times more likely to achieve a rating of Meeting NQS or above compared to matched non-participating services⁵.
- » 96% of centre-based QSP services improved in the number of NQS elements 'met', by an average of 12 elements.
- » Participating centre-based services showed a greater increase in the number of NQS quality areas, standards, and 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 that were quality rated Meeting or Exceeding NQS after QSP support had been Working Towards NQS or lower for more than 4.7 years on average prior to participating in the QSP. The majority (78%) had been Working Towards NQS for three or more years, and almost a quarter (24%) had been Working Towards NQS for seven or more years, receiving the rating two or more times during this period.
- » The QSP was effective at increasing the number of elements 'met' for services from disadvantaged and advantaged socio-economic locations (**Table 3**).

Centre-based services were 2.59 more likely to achieve Meeting NQS or above if they participated in the QSP.

⁵ Stratification and propensity score matching was used to select non-participating services with similar characteristics.

Figure 1: Centre-based services increased more in quality areas Meeting NQS if they participated in the QSP (Stages One to Four)

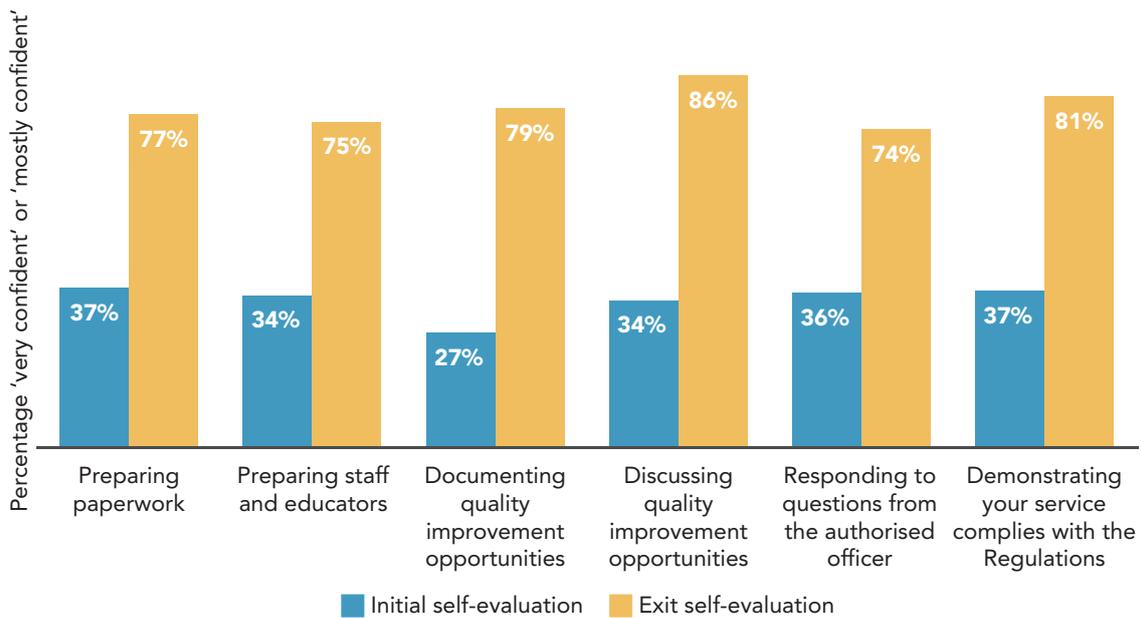


1.4.1 Quality ratings for family day care services

Participating family day care services improved more than matched non-participating services in Quality Area 7 (Governance and leadership), Quality Area 2 (Children’s health and safety), Quality Area 4 (Staffing arrangements) and Quality Area 5 (Relationships with children), but not on overall quality ratings. One reason for this could be that family day care service leaders may have less frequent contact with their educators than centre-based service leaders who may work with their educators on a daily or at least weekly basis. Therefore, changes that service leaders implemented may have taken longer to impact on educator practice in family day care services. Improvements in Quality Area 7 may have been faster to implement because they are less reliant on changes in educator practice. A delivery model that directly supports family day care educators, coordinators and service leaders may be more effective for this service type.

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 **Figure 2**.

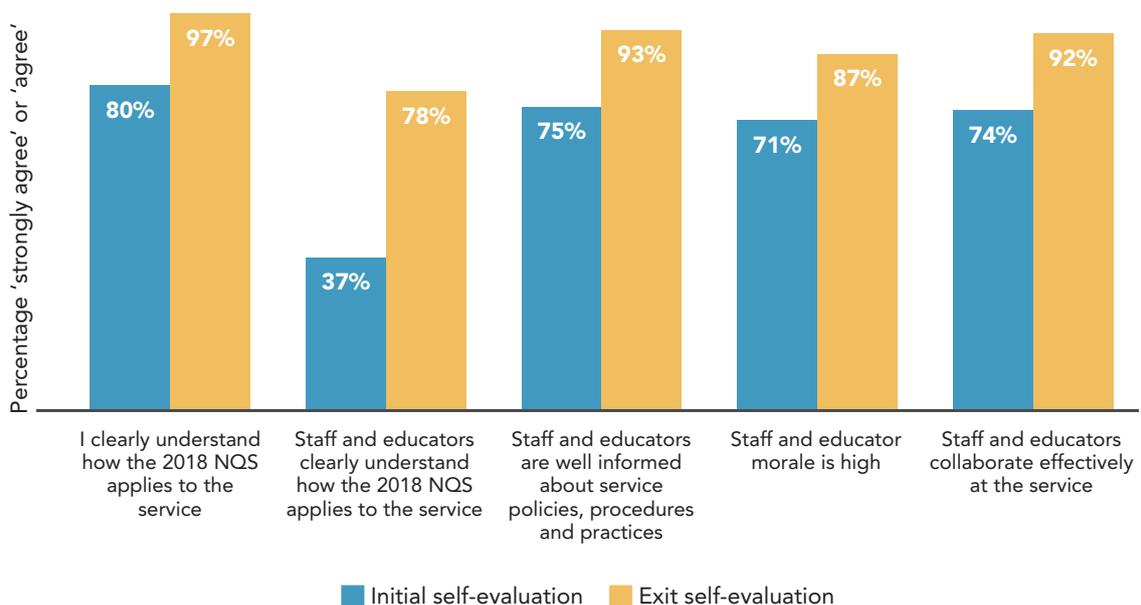
Figure 2: Service leaders were more confident after participating in the QSP (Stages One to Four)



Service leaders increased in confidence after participating in the QSP. **Figure 2** shows that the greatest gains were in Documenting quality improvement opportunities and Discussing quality improvement opportunities (52 percentage point gains respectively) and demonstrating your service complies with the regulations (44 percentage point gain).

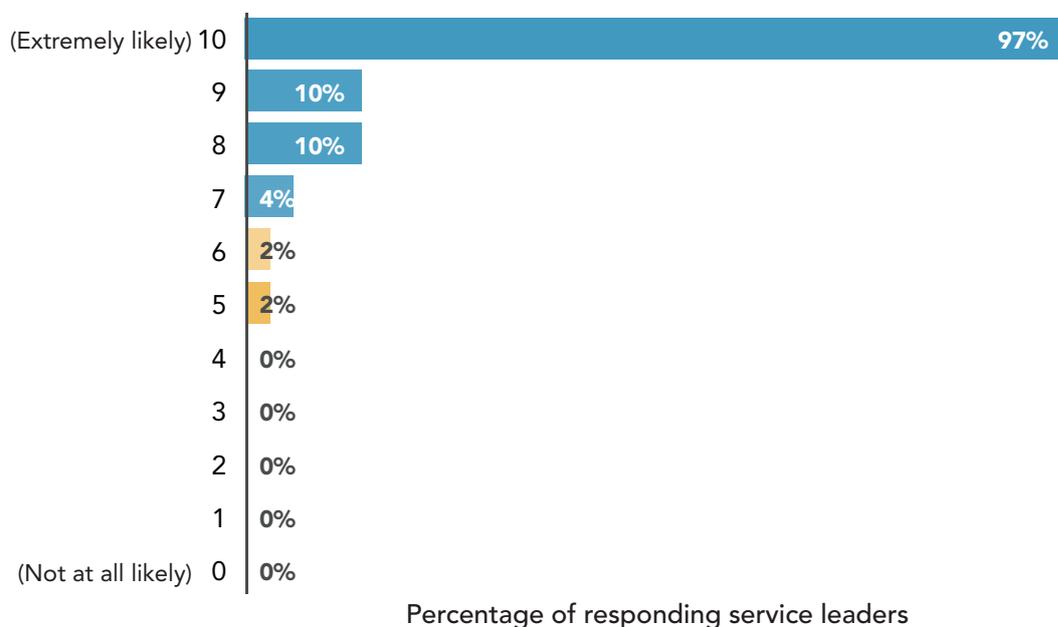
Service leaders felt more informed about the NQS at completion of the QSP, as shown in **Figure 3**.

Figure 3: Service leaders felt more informed after participating in the QSP (Stages One to Four)



Service leaders were overall very satisfied with the QSP, would recommend it to others (**Figure 4**), and found that the support and resources provided were helpful.

Figure 4: Participants report that they are very likely to recommend the QSP to other services (Stages One to Four)



1.5 Additional learnings

- » Long day care, family day care, preschool, and outside school hours care services operate in very different contexts, with different stakeholder expectations. To be relevant to service leaders and educators, resources need to be tailored to address application of the NQF as it applies to their service type, or at least provide application examples in their service type.
- » Participant feedback suggests that resources are not always used to their full potential until service leaders are guided on how to use them effectively to answer their questions and needs.
- » 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, the QSP resource team developed a suite of resources that use plain English, practical tips, graphical representation, and service-type specific resources. A selection of QSP resources is nationally available on the [Meeting the NQS](#) web page, with more than 100,000 page views since publication in July 2019. The resources have been accessed by people across Australia.

Many of the QSP resources are available on the Meeting the NQS web page, with more than 100,000 page views since publication in July 2019.

- » 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 facilitator, and a coaching approach. Support is tailored by targeting chosen focus quality NQS 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.
- » Tailored support, like that provided by the QSP, is much needed. Every service operates in a unique context. Through one-on-one support, QSP facilitators can recognise the strengths and identify the needs of the individual service, and adapt the Program to changing circumstances, as observed during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- » The QSP support was effective for services regardless of their location or history of quality improvement. Services from relatively disadvantaged locations, and services with a long history of consecutive Working Towards NQS quality ratings, improved to Meeting NQS or above at the same rate as other services with QSP support.

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.

I am more confident with talking about my program.
- Out of school hours care service leader

1.6 Methodology

The impact of the QSP on service quality was evaluated by examining changes between quality ratings conducted independently by the NSW regulatory authority before and after participation in the QSP. These results were compared to quality rating results for a selection of non-participating (comparison) services with similar characteristics .

Service leaders' experience of the QSP and perceived quality improvement was measured using service self-evaluation surveys before and after participation in the QSP, and an anonymous feedback survey completed after participation.

1.7 Conclusion

The quantitative QSP evaluation results, together with the qualitative feedback from QSP facilitators and participating service leaders, continues to demonstrate how the provision of tailored, service-specific support can improve quality and deliver other benefits for services rated Working Towards NQS. The provision of tailored, service-specific support has demonstrated benefits for education and care services, service leaders, and educators including:

- » Improved service quality ratings.
- » Increased confidence in preparing for assessment and rating, discussing and documenting quality improvement, and demonstrating compliance with regulations.
- » Perceived improvements in service leader and educator understanding of how the National Quality Standard applies to their service, and team morale and collaboration.
- » Reported significant improvements in knowledge and skills including reflective practice, and ability to use resources to their potential.

The primary objective of the QSP is to improve the quality of education and care services, which was achieved. The evaluation uses NQS service ratings to assess changes in the quality of education and care among participating services compared with similar matched services. Almost three-quarters (73%) of participating centre-based services improved their overall rating at reassessment, compared with half (51%) of matched services.

Statistical testing shows that QSP services were 2.5 times (95% confidence interval: 1.86 - 3.60) more likely to be rated Meeting NQS or above than matched services. In addition to improving service quality, there were statistically significant increases across all measures of knowledge and confidence among participating service leaders.

Support was able to continue during the COVID-19 pandemic with in-person support replaced by online engagement. QSP support delivered remotely remained effective in achieving program outcomes and service leaders were very satisfied with the program. There were advantages to in-person support that were hard to substitute, including the speed of rapport-building and engagement, and observing practice and assessing quality. During Stage Four, QSP facilitators continued to find new and innovative ways to engage services and support practice remotely and returned to in-person visits when it was safe to do so.

Services also experienced challenges to QSP engagement during COVID-19 such as low enrolment numbers, service closures, and workforce issues. As a result, while confidence increased significantly, it showed a slightly smaller increase, and engagement and satisfaction were still high, but slightly lower for COVID-affected rounds of QSP support.

Feedback from QSP participants and reflection on the program has led to a number of improvements, including outside school hours care and family day care specific eLearning modules and resources, live online workshops that encourage participant engagement and interaction, and online video support rather than phone calls where possible.

Additionally, the QSP solution-focused coaching approach continued to be beneficial for building service leader capacity and creating lasting change, the QSP solution-focused coaching approach:

- » facilitated critical reflection
- » encouraged and supported the service leader to find answers to their questions rather than just being a source of advice and
- » enabled service-leaders to manage and lead change and improvement ideas, drawing on their expert knowledge of their own contexts.

"I would recommend the Quality Support Program to every centre regardless of their assessment and rating. I found it helpful having someone to bounce ideas off and knowing that there was someone to point me in the right direction was also comforting."

- Long day care service leader

"The Quality Support Program gave us the opportunity to focus on specific areas of improvement, making success attainable. The resources provided to us were invaluable and we are extremely appreciative of our mentors' assistance."

- Long day care service leader



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