Quality Support Program, Dual Pathways Program

End of Stage Five Progress Report

NSW GOVERNMENT

Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority

Contents

Dual Pathways Program End of Stage Five Evaluation Report | November 2023

Glossary

Term	Meaning
ACECQA	Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority.
QSP/DPP	Quality Support Program, Dual Programs Pathway – The overarching program
SRS	The State Regulated Services.
QSP	The Quality Support Pathway.
CSP	The Compliance Support Pathway.
SRSP	The State Regulated Services Pathway
DPP	Dual Pathways Program, incorporating the QSP, CSP and SRSP (Stage Five onwards).
A&R	The Assessment and Rating process conducted by the NSW regulatory authority.
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.
Final 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.
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.
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.
QSP services	Services that participated in the Quality Support Program or the Quality Support Program Dual Programs Pathway.
Matched control services	A control 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 control services are then compared to post-QSP quality ratings for the purposes of this evaluation.
FDC	Family day care.
LDC	Long day care.
OSHC	Outside school hours care.
NQS	National Quality Standard.
NQF	National Quality Framework.
NQA ITS	National Quality Agenda IT System.
SEIFA	Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas.

Executive summary

Overview

This report presents key findings from the ongoing five-year initiative, funded by the New South Wales Department of Education, established to support the continuing quality improvement of children's education and care services in New South Wales.

The Quality Support Program (QSP) - Dual Program Pathway (DPP) is a professional learning partnership between ACECQA and the NSW Department of Education that delivers free tailored professional development and support to eligible approved providers and service leaders across NSW.

Between March 2018 and June 2023 (Stages One to Five), 915 services have completed the QSP/DPP, providing education and care for approximately 85,000 children[1].

Given the QSP/DPP has been running for five consecutive years, the nature, scope, and service eligibility criteria evolved over time to better suit the needs of service providers.

The eligibility criteria for services to participate in the QSP (Stages One to Five) is:

- ✓ being rated Working Towards the National Quality Standard (NQS) at the time of entry
- ✓ 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
- ✓ in Stages Three to Five: all service types in scope of the NQF (LDC, FDC and OSHC)
- ✓ in Stage Five: incorporation of Compliance Support Pathway and State Regulated Services Pathway.

In Stage Five the QSP program expanded into the Dual Pathways Program, which incorporated the Compliance Support Pathway (CSP), a 6-week tailored support program designed to build approved providers and service leader's capability in identifying the root cause of non-compliance instances and implement management systems that support children's health and safety. The Pathway aims to support services to adopt a whole service approach to compliance and begin to embed compliance practices.

The eligibility criteria to participate in the CSP (exclusively in Stage Five) was extended to all types of services and any NQS service rating. Participation in the Compliance Support Pathway is by direct referral from the NSW Department of Education. The Department referred services by using regulatory data that highlighted a need for improvement in the areas of children's health and safety and governance and leadership.

The State Regulated Services Pathway (exclusively in Stage Five) was an extension of the work of the Quality Support Pathway and was available to eligible services out of scope of the NQF located in NSW. Initially, SRS services with a rating of Working Towards the NQS or not yet assessed were prioritised to participate and in later rounds services rated Meeting NQS were eligible to participate.

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[1] This estimation is based on the maximum approved places in each service.

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The objectives of the Quality Support Pathway, Compliance Support Pathway and the State Regulated Services Pathway are:

- ✓ to improve the quality of participating services by boosting the knowledge of and confidence in the NQS and assessment and rating process, providing a route to improved service rating
- ✓ to improve the quality of participating services by enhancing skills and knowledge across broad regulatory requirements that relate to children's health and safety and governance and Leadership.
- ✓ Improve knowledge and confidence in the NQF as it relates to SRS and support the capability of SRS in meeting the requirements of the NQS for the first time.

Key Findings

Quality Support Pathway

711 services supported in the QSP

73% received an overall higher service rating after participating in the QSP

91.7% of services increased the number of elements Meeting NQS

9.7 more elements on average rated 'Met' after participating in the QSP

Confidence boost for the next Assessment and Rating, with **96%** feeling more prepared

NQS knowledge and staff morale enhanced, with an average **22%** point increase

Compliance Support Pathway

166 services received compliance support in the CSP

90% report improved knowledge of implementing management systems to support compliance at their service

89% report improved understanding of the National Law and Regulations

5.6% point gain on general knowledge of regulatory requirements check after participating in CSP

Quality Support Pathway (QSP)

Overview

Table 1 shows the characteristics of 711 services that completed the QSP across Stages 1 to 5. These characteristics include service types, [Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA)][2], and location.

Most of the services (over 70%) that participated in the QSP were Long Day Care (LDC) services, followed by Outside school hours care services (OSHC) 19%, and Family Day Care (FDC). Preschool/Kindergarten (PSK) made up 4.6% of participants. Although half of the participating services were in SEIFA 2 to 4 areas, services in the most disadvantaged areas made up 26% of all participants, and those in the most advantaged areas (21%). Almost three-quarters of participating services were in major cities.

Table 1. Overview of the QSP services (n=711)

LDC services constitute over 70% of all participants, OSHC 19%, and FDC 5%.

QSP Stage	LDC	FDC	PSK	OSHC	Total
Stage 1	126	16	0	0	142
Stage 2	126	5	1	0	132
Stage 3	94	8	16	65	183
Stage 4	110	3	12	44	169
Stage 5	48	7	4	26	85
Total	**504**	**39**	**33**	**135**	**711**

26% of participating services were in the **most disadvantaged** socio-economic locations.

QSP Stage	SEIFA Quintile 1 (most disadvantaged)	SEIFA Quintiles 2-4	SEIFA Quintile 5 (most advantaged)	N/A	Total
Stage 1	37	72	28	5	142
Stage 2	29	71	28	4	132
Stage 3	50	92	39	2	183
Stage 4	41	81	36	11	169
Stage 5	28	39	18	0	85
Total	**185**	**355**	**149**	**22**	**711**

Almost 75% located in **major cities** and only 1% in remote or very remote Australia.

QSP Stage	Major Cities of Australia	Inner Regional Australia	Outer Regional Australia	Remote Australia	Very Remote Australia	Total
Stage 1	115	25	2	0	0	142
Stage 2	109	16	6	1	0	132
Stage 3	130	38	11	2	2	183
Stage 4	114	42	11	2	0	169
Stage 5	63	19	3	0	0	85
Total	**531**	**140**	**33**	**5**	**2**	**711**

[2] The Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage (IRSAD) is used to classify services by the level of relative socio-economic advantage or disadvantage of their local area, ranging from 1 (most disadvantaged) to 5 (most advantaged).

Outcomes

The QSP was largely successful in supporting participating services in boosting their knowledge of and confidence in the NQS and assessment and rating and contributing to an improved service rating, as evidenced in the key findings listed below:

✓ **Majority of services received a higher service rating after participating.**

Table 2: Change in overall rating by service type

Service type	Lower rating	Unchanged rating	Higher rating	Total post-program ratings	Total program support	Services yet to be assessed
LDC	3	125	350	478	504	26
FDC	1	15	15	31	39	8
PSK	0	3	28	31	33	2
OSHC	1	28	83	112	135	23
Overall	**5**	**171**	**476**	**652**	**711**	**59**

Table 2 shows that out of 711 supported services, 652 received a post-program rating, with 72.9% (476 services) obtaining a higher overall service rating, 26.4% had an unchanged rating and only 0.8% (5 services) were rated lower. As of 1 October 2023, there are 59 services yet to receive a post-program service rating.

Table 3 shows that, at the overall level, 73% of QSP services received a higher rating, compared to 65.3% of matched control services. All QSP service types improved against matched services, except for family day care services.
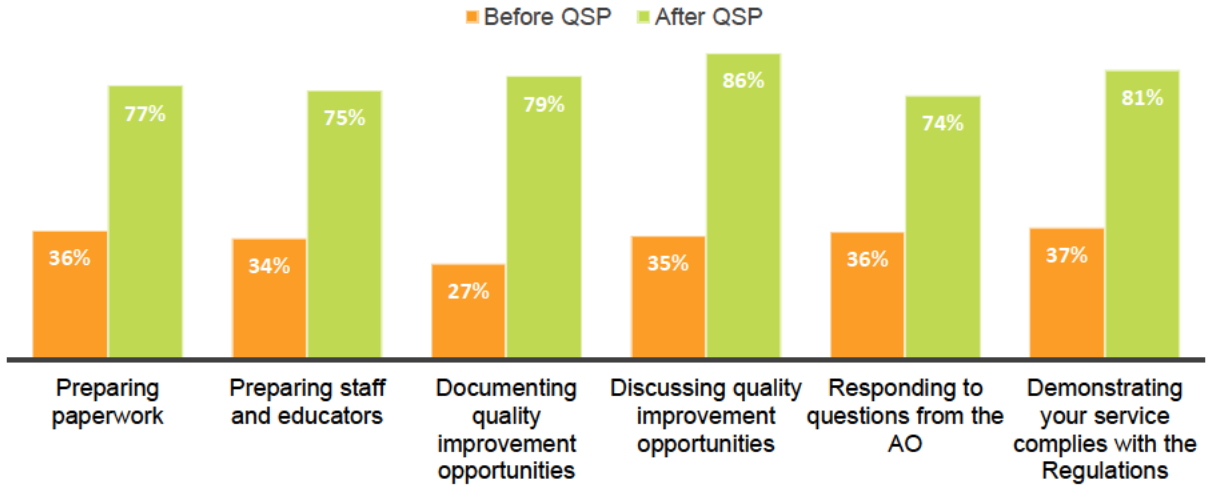
✓ **QSP services received higher ratings compared to the matched control group.**

Table 3: Change in overall rating by service sub-type (QSP v Matched)

QSP	LDC	FDC	PSK	OSHC	Centre-based	Overall
Lower rating	3	1	0	1	4	5
Unchanged rating	125	15	3	28	156	171
Higher rating	350	15	28	83	461	476
Total post-program ratings	**478**	**31**	**31**	**112**	**621**	**652**
Lower rating %	0.6%	3.2%	0.0%	0.9%	0.6%	0.8%
Unchanged rating %	26.2%	48.4%	9.7%	25.0%	25.1%	26.2%
Higher rating %	**73.2%**	**48.4%**	**90.3%**	**74.1%**	**74.2%**	**73.0%**
Matched control						
Lower rating	5	2	0	1	6	8
Unchanged rating	167	13	5	33	205	218
Higher rating	306	16	26	78	410	426
Total post-program ratings	**478**	**31**	**31**	**112**	**621**	**652**
Lower rating %	1.0%	6.5%	0.0%	0.9%	1.0%	1.2%
Unchanged rating %	34.9%	41.9%	16.1%	29.5%	33.0%	33.4%
Higher rating %	**64.0%**	**51.6%**	**83.9%**	**69.6%**	**66.0%**	**65.3%**

✓ **QSP participation** boosted confidence **for the next Assessment and Rating.**

Figure 1. Participants' self-assessed confidence related to A&R activities

Legend: ■ Before QSP ■ After QSP

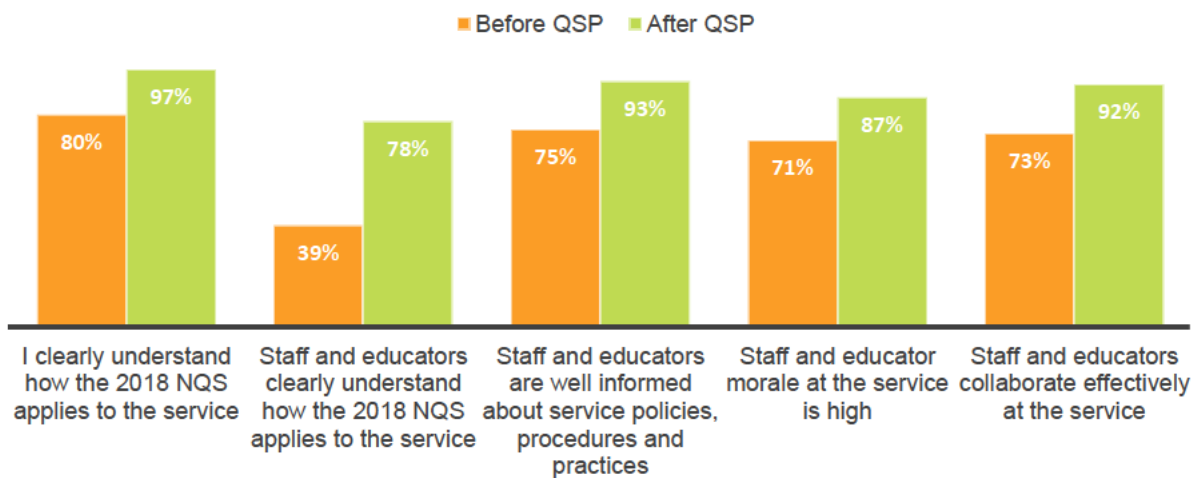| Category	Before QSP	After QSP
Preparing paperwork	36%	77%
Preparing staff and educators	34%	75%
Documenting quality improvement opportunities	27%	79%
Discussing quality improvement opportunities	35%	86%
Responding to questions from the AO	36%	74%
Demonstrating your service complies with the Regulations	37%	81%

Overall, post-program self-assessment revealed that 96% of participants agreed or strongly agreed on feeling more prepared for the next A&R. **Figure 1** results highlight an average 45%-point score improvement in feeling confident with activities ensuring preparedness for service assessment.

After completing the program, participant self-assessed their understanding of NQS, policies and procedures, and staff and educators' morale and collaboration at the service (**Figure 2**), on average, 22%-points higher.

✓ **Enhanced** NQS knowledge **and higher staff and educators' morale.**

Figure 2. Participants' self-assessed knowledge and understanding of NQS, staff morale, and collaboration

Legend: ■ Before QSP ■ After QSP

Category	Before QSP	After QSP
I clearly understand how the 2018 NQS applies to the service	80%	97%
Staff and educators clearly understand how the 2018 NQS applies to the service	39%	78%
Staff and educators are well informed about service policies, procedures and practices	75%	93%
Staff and educator morale at the service is high	71%	87%
Staff and educators collaborate effectively at the service	73%	92%

The QSP was effective at increasing the number of elements rated as 'Meeting NQS' for all service types after participating in the program.

Table 4 shows 91.7% of all QSP services that have received a post-program rating across Stages 1-5 increased the number of elements 'Met' on average by 9.7, compared to matched control services (8.7).

For centre-based care services, the average increase in number of elements rated 'Met' after participation was 9.8, compared to an average of 8.5 for matched control services.

✓ **Services met on average 9.7 elements more after receiving quality support.**

Table 4: Change in elements 'Met' by service sub-type (QSP v Matched control services)

QSP	LDC	FDC	PSK	OSHC	Centre-based	Overall
Less elements 'Met' (n)	31	3	0	11	42	**45**
Unchanged no. of elements	6	1	0	2	8	**9**
More elements 'Met' (n)	441	27	31	99	571	**598**
Total post-program ratings	**478**	**31**	**31**	**112**	**621**	**652**
Less elements met %	6.5%	9.7%	0.0%	9.8%	6.8%	**6.9%**
Unchanged no. %	1.3%	3.2%	0.0%	1.8%	1.3%	**1.4%**
More elements met %	**92.3%**	**87.1%**	**100.0%**	**88.4%**	91.9%	**91.7%**
Average increase in elements 'Met'	9.8	8.9	6.8	10.5	**9.8**	**9.7**
Matched control						
Less elements met (n)	57	6	3	11	71	77
Unchanged no. of elements	10	0	0	0	10	10
More elements met (n)	411	25	28	101	540	565
Total post-program ratings	**478**	**31**	**31**	**112**	**621**	**652**
Less elements met %	11.9%	19.4%	9.7%	9.8%	11.4%	11.8%
Unchanged no. %	2.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.6%	1.5%
More elements met %	**86.0%**	**80.6%**	**90.3%**	**90.2%**	87.0%	86.7%
Average increase in elements 'Met'	8.0	12.1	4.7	11.7	**8.5**	**8.7**

State Regulated Services Pathway

Overview

The State Regulated Services (SRS) are a group of NSW-based services that are out of scope of the NQF. Out of scope services are regulated under the Children (Education and Care Services) Supplementary Provisions Act 2011 (NSW) and Children (Education and Care Services) Supplementary Provisions Regulation 2019 (NSW), these include Occasional Care, Mobile services, and Multipurpose Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS). State Regulated Services have only recently begun to be assessed and rated against the seven quality areas of the NQS.

The SRS Pathway was an independent extension of the Quality Support Program and was available to eligible State Regulated Services located in NSW. As part of the SRS Pathway, professional learning and support was designed and provided to support each service's capability in delivering quality children's education and care and in meeting the requirements of the NQS for the first time.

In Stage Five of the Dual Pathways Program, 38 state regulated services were invited to participate, constituting an independent sub-group of participants (exclusively in Stage 5). All 38 participating services completed the program,

 Tables 5 shows the characteristics of the services that completed Stage 5.

Table 5. Overview of the SRS services (n=38)

The vast majority of participants operated **mobile or occasional care services**.

Service type	Number	Proportion
Mobile services	18	47.4%
Occasional Care	18	47.4%
MACS	1	2.6%
Multi-purpose	1	2.6%

Almost three-quarters were **private not for profit community managed** services.

Provider Management Type	Number	Proportion
Private not for profit community managed	28	73.7%
State/Territory and Local Government managed	10	26.3%

Almost half are located in the **most disadvantaged** socio-economic areas.

| SEIFA	Number	Proportion
SEIFA Quintile 1 (most disadvantaged)*	18	47.4%
SEIFA Quintiles 2-4	13	34.2%
SEIFA Quintile 5 (most advantaged)	6	15.8%

*One service is excluded from the overall count as the service characteristics could not be retrieved from the NQAITS.

Outcomes

Out of all services that completed the program, 32 (84.2%) self-assessed their confidence (**Figure 3**) and knowledge (**Figure 4**) before and after participation.

    ✓ **SRS report boosted confidence for the next Assessment and Rating.**

**Figure 3. Participants' self-assessed confidence related to A&R activities (SRS)**
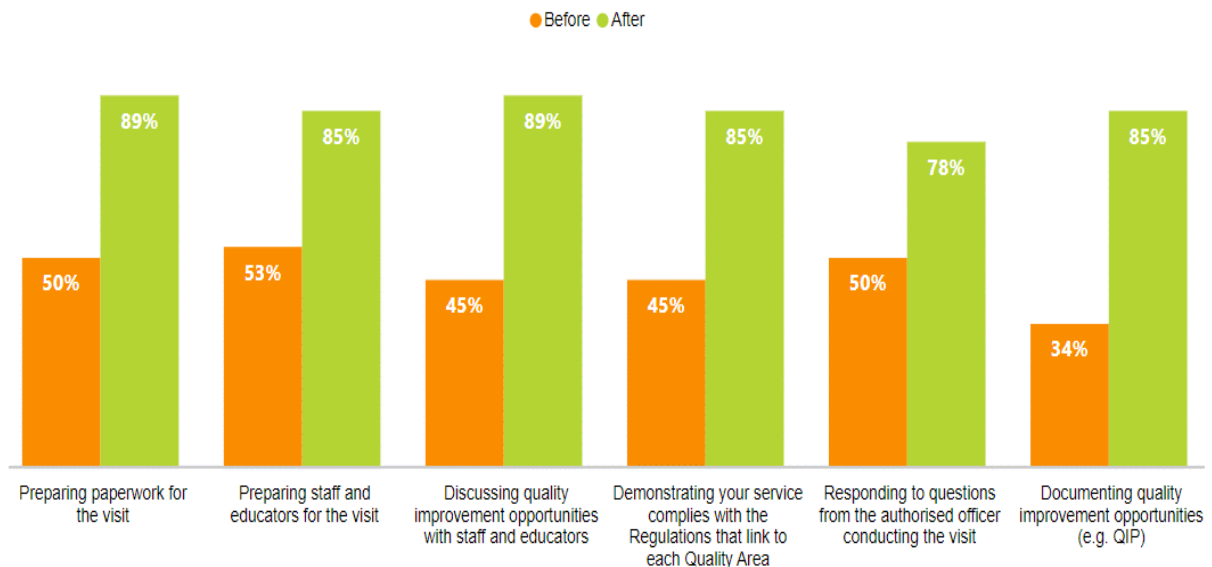
Overall, post-program self-assessment revealed that 96% of participants agreed or strongly agreed on feeling more prepared for the next A&R. **Figure 3** results highlight an average 35%-point score improvement in feeling confident with activities ensuring preparedness for service assessment.

After completing the program, participants self-assessed their understanding of NQS, policies and procedures, and staff and educators' morale (**Figure 4**), on average, almost 12%-points higher.

    ✓ **Enhanced NQS knowledge and higher staff and educators' morale.**

Figure 4. Participants' self-assessed knowledge and understanding of NQS, staff morale, and collaboration (SRS)
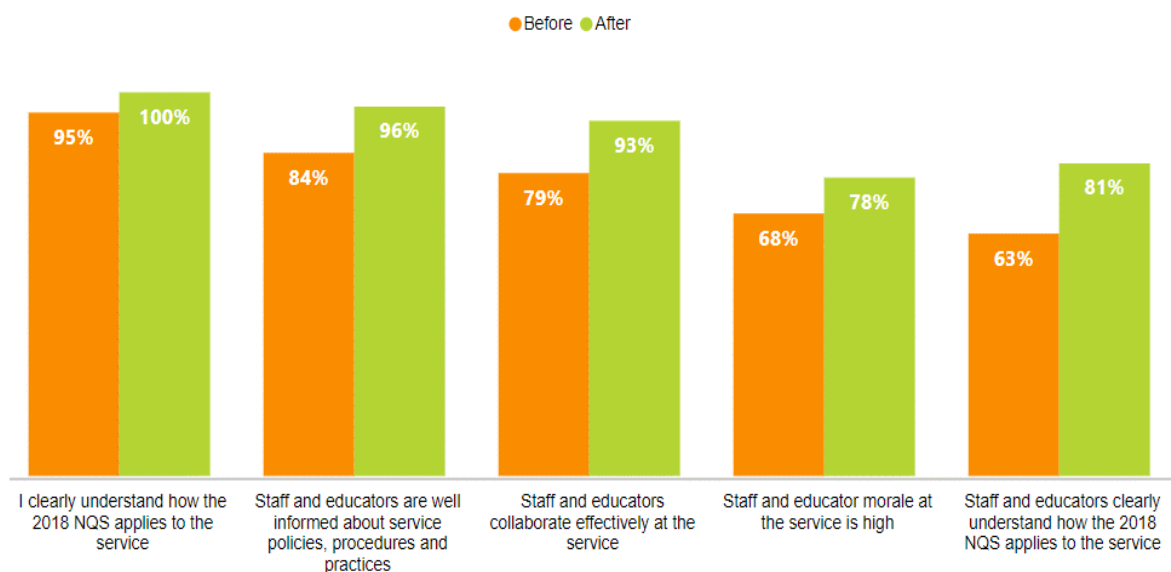
Compliance Support Pathway

Overview

Running exclusively in Stage Five, 199 approved providers were invited to participate in the Compliance Support Pathway. 166 services completed the program, with 30 services postponing to a later round and 3 services withdrawing their participation. Over 75% of services that completed the program (125 providers) took evaluative skills and capabilities questionnaires before and after the program. **Table 6** provides an overview of the services, which completed the CSP.

Table 6. Overview of the services completing the CSP (n=166)*

Majority of participants were rated **Meeting NQS** at the time of entry to the program.

Service rating (at the time of entry)	Number	Proportion
Exceeding NQS	23	13.9%
Meeting NQS	100	60.2%
Working Towards NQS	31	18.7%
Not Yet Assessed	12	7.2%

Majority of participants operate **private** for-profit services.

Provider Management Type	Number	Proportion
Private for profit	111	66.9%
Private not for profit community managed	20	12.0%
Private not for profit other organisations	16	9.6%
State/Territory and Local Government managed	12	7.2%
Catholic schools	4	2.4%
Independent schools	2	1.2%

Almost **three-quarters** were long day care services.

Service sub-type	Number	Proportion
Long Day Care	122	73.5%
Outside School Hours Care	34	20.5%
Preschool/Kindergarten	5	3.0%
Family Day Care	4	2.4%

Almost 25% are located in the **most disadvantaged** socio-economic areas.

SEIFA	Number	Proportion
SEIFA Quintiles 2-4	94	56.6%
SEIFA Quintile 1 (most disadvantaged)	41	24.7%
SEIFA Quintile 5 (most advantaged)	22	13.3%

*Nine services are excluded from the overall count as the service characteristics could not be retrieved from the NQAITS.

Outcomes

Based on questionnaire responses evaluating participants' skills and knowledge across broad regulatory requirements that relate to Quality Area 2 Children's Health and Safety and Quality Area 7 Governance and Leadership, the Compliance Support Pathway contributed to improved results after participation.

After participating in the 6-week tailored support program, participants scored on average 5.6%-points higher when solving hypothetical scenarios targeting their general knowledge of regulatory requirements.

Table 7 shows the number and average scores of services in each group of the CSP program. Due to the small sample size between the groups, improvement percentage point differences should be interpreted with caution. In addition, uneven distribution of services prevents the reliable evaluation of factors such as initial service rating or SEIFA effects on the outcome.

✓ **CSP enhanced skills and knowledge** of regulatory requirements.

Average score before the program   5.6%   Average score after the program

71.6% ●━━━━━━━━━━━━━━● 77.3%
Percentage point improvement

Table 7. Number and average scores of services in each group of the CSP program

Group	Participating	Evaluation completed	Average % Initial	Average % Final	Improvement (% point difference)
Group 7	16	9	57.3%	72.9%	15.6%
Group 2	16	15	69.9%	79.8%	9.9%
Group 10	27	14	75.1%	84.8%	9.7%
Group 4	15	11	56.4%	65.6%	9.3%
Group 3	21	20	68.3%	72.8%	4.5%
Group 8	25	19	74.1%	78.3%	4.2%
Group 1	5	4	75.0%	78.5%	3.5%
Group 6	9	9	83.0%	85.4%	2.4%
Group 5	16	15	81.9%	81.1%	-0.9%
Group 9	16	9	74.2%	72.8%	-1.4%

Highlights from the post-program reflections

Dual Pathways Program participants shared their reflections after their involvement in the program. An anonymous and voluntary program exit survey was sent to all, gauging the following indicators for evaluation purposes:

- ✓ Likelihood of recommending this program to another eligible service[3]
- ✓ Self-assessment of program usefulness for the next Assessment and Rating
- ✓ Self-assessment of confidence or knowledge gain (Stage 5 only).

Quality Support Pathway

After completion of the QSP program across Stages One to Five, 73% (519 participants) shared their involvement reflections, resulting in the following highlights:

- **97%** agreed or strongly agreed the QSP helped them feel more prepared for the next A&R
- **76% recommend QSP participation** to another eligible service (Net Promoter Score).

> **"We found the program was very helpful and motivating for our team. We reflected on many aspects of our service and feel like our next A&R will not be so overwhelming. One on one support with our facilitator was great and thought provoking."**
>
> Nominated Supervisor, Preschool

Compliance Support Pathway

After completion of the CSP program, almost two thirds of the participants (106) shared their involvement reflections, resulting in the following highlights:

- **90%** agreed or strongly agreed the CSP Pathway helped them improve their **knowledge of implementing management systems to support compliance**
- **89%** agreed or strongly agreed the CSP Program has helped them improve their **understanding of the National Law and Regulations**
- **85%** are likely or highly likely to **recommend CSP participation** to another eligible service.

> **"The program has given me knowledge about compliance and strategies to meet the standards. It has built my confidence as NS as it emphasises the importance of following regulations and what to prioritise."**
>
> Nominated Supervisor, Long Day Care

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[3] Likelihood of recommendation is operationalized through the Net Promoter Score for the QSP and SRS programs (0-10 Likert scale). The likelihood of recommendation for the CSP program is operationalized by reporting on accumulative 4 and 5 responses on a 5-point Likert scale (1-Not Likely to recommend – 5-Highly likely to recommend).

State Regulated Services Pathway

After completion of the program, 28 state regulated services shared their involvement reflections, resulting in the following highlights:

- **100%** agreed or strongly agreed the program helped **them feel more prepared** for the next assessment and rating and **enhanced their understanding** of the National Quality Standard
- **93%** agreed or strongly agreed the SRS Pathway has helped them improve their **understanding of the National Law and Regulations**
- **70% recommend SRS participation** to another eligible service (Net Promoter Score).

> **"Overall, the experience was fantastic, it put a lot of things into perspective, especially for a service that hasn't gone through assessment and rating before."**