



Productivity Commission
Requests for information
- Response from eQIPd

About eQIPd

eQIPd is a small consultancy based in Ballarat, Victoria, and working nationally, specialising in early childhood education and care quality support, planning and community consultation. eQIPd mostly works with education and care providers and local government.

eQIPd standardised online parent and educator surveys

One of the services eQIPd provides is an online survey service for education and care services. eQIPd provides standardised parent and educator surveys using a template set of questions reflecting application of the National Quality Standards, and workplace engagement and satisfaction.

eQIPd runs the surveys on behalf of the education and care service and provides reports which benchmark to all other services which use eQIPd surveys. This provides a point of comparison for service leadership to identify how the service is performing compared to other services and supports quality improvement planning which is informed by the community it serves.

Figure 1 – Sample eQIPd Benchmarking Report for an ECEC Service



The rationale for eQIPd parent and educator surveys

eQIPd believes every child deserves access to high quality early childhood education and care.

This means no early childhood education and care provider should provide low quality early education and care. There is evidence that low-quality early childhood education and care is harmful and that this harm persists at least until age 15.¹

At the same time, eQIPd recognises that quality is a journey, and every organisation should have the capacity to hear from the people it serves. eQIPd is a safe, constructive, easy to administer tool which supports quality improvement. As Social Ventures Australia says, "client feedback provides valuable fuel for improving both client outcomes and financial sustainability" (for for-purpose organisations).²

¹ Vandell, D. L., Belsky, J., Burchinal, M., Steinberg, L., Vandergrift, N., & NICHD Early Child Care Research Network. (2010). Do effects of early child care extend to age 15 years? Results from the NICHD study of early child care and youth development. *Child Development*, 81(3), 737–756. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01431.x>

² Social Ventures Australia (2019) "Harnessing the power of client experience" page 4 https://www.socialventures.com.au/assets/sva_consulting_customer_feedback_report.pdf

These principles drive the idea of collecting, standardising and benchmarking data on parent and educator perceptions of quality at their service. The eQIPd survey strategy provides targeted information for education and care provider leadership to drive continuous improvement.

What eQIPd has learned to date

Over 20,000 parents and educators have completed surveys over the past few years, and data on its clients has shown the following highlights which may be of interest to commissioners:

Between 2017 and 2020, 65% of eQIPd clients were rated as Exceeding the NQS. According to the Report on Government Services 2020 the national average for this rating was 30%. The services which use eQIPd on an annual basis tend to regularly score well, as these services understand that the surveys are an organisational ‘health check’ where satisfaction is connected to quality.

Analysis of 2020 clients who had been assessed more than once) found that clients improved their quality rating at the next assessment, with an improvement rate of 88% for services initially rated as Working Towards the NQS and 27% for services initially rated Meeting the NQS. This was higher than the improvement rate for the rest of the sector.

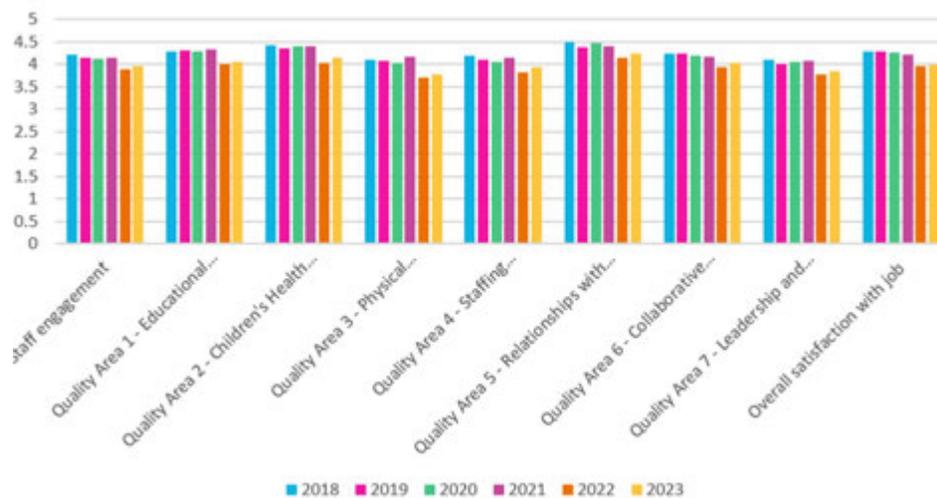
After engaging with eQIPd many services have steadily improved both their results and the quality of service provision, due in part to leadership reflecting on responses to surveys and making gradual changes to operations.

Some services that obtain a poor result in eQIPd surveys tend not to re-engage with or use eQIPd’s services again. Some focus on a marketing campaign which pays lip service to quality but delivers little, if anything, in terms of service improvement.

At a cohort level (ie not matching service to service, rather just one year of data to the next, we have also noted):

- Overall higher satisfaction from parents across all aspects from kindergartens and preschools compared with long day care
- Decline in educator perceptions of their service’s performance in all quality areas in the past two years (this maybe partly contributed to by a new cohort of clients using eQIPd surveys but is not the whole explanation).

Figure 2: Aggregated Teacher/Educator Staff Perceptions from eQIPd Staff Survey



Limitations

The eQIPd experience indicates that services which regularly collect parent and staff feedback, and hold themselves accountable to the standardised and benchmarked set of questions offered through eQIPd, understand and value quality provision.

In this way, the higher quality ratings of eQIPd clients compared with the rest of the sector may be a symptom of self-selection rather than the eQIPd service itself.

However, the improvement rate we have seen between eQIPd clients and the sector, as well as anecdotal evidence from clients indicates that the receiving of structured feedback around quality does support critical reflection and improvement. This is particularly applicable if the service leadership recognises the importance of quality, has adequate data literacy and can see the value of seeking and listening to feedback. This flows on to improved service provision, survey results and has a direct impact on improved ratings over time.

Request from PC: Provision of service ratings information for families

The Commission is seeking information on how service ratings information could be made more useful and more accessible to families. For example:

- *requiring services to display ratings information on their website*
- *changing how ratings information is communicated:*
 - *to specify which element/s of the National Quality Standard a service did not meet*
 - *to make clearer what is meant by a rating of Working Towards*
- *requiring services to inform:*
 - *prospective families of their current National Quality Standard rating*
 - *current families of a new National Quality Standard rating.*

Would these changes be desirable, and how would they best be implemented? Are there other options that should be considered? [Information request 8.1]

eQIPd response

The requirement for services to publish information about their quality rating is sensible but must include the date the service received the rating. In addition, a commitment from regulatory bodies to undertake Assessment and Rating visits to refresh ratings should be made, such that ratings are never more than two years' old. Analysis of the most recent ACECQA Snapshot data (Q1 2024) shows that most centre-based services have a 5 year gap between ratings, and over 2,000 services have not received a rating for 6 years or more, representing around 13% of the sector.

An old quality rating is of limited value when communicating information to families about the quality of the service; this is magnified if staff turnover is as high as it is reported to be. eQIPd is developing a workforce strategy for a local government council at present and we have observed low turnover in not-for-profit community-managed services and very high turnover in some, but not all, for profit services.

The other shortcoming of the Assessment and Rating process is the capacity for providers to 'game it' by loading the service with extra staff for the day of the visit by Authorised Officers. The courtesy of providing a notice period before Authorised Officers visit means unscrupulous services behave in a way which is not reflective of day-to-day operations.

Publishing performance information

More timely information about the quality of an education and care service should be available for families when choosing a service, or choosing to remain at a service.

However, this needs to be balanced by recognition that organisations are always changing.

Therefore, while eQIPd encourages services to publish their survey results or make them available, it doesn't publish these results in a MySchools type approach, mainly because services would not purchase the service for fear of a negative result.

eQIPd provides services with a clear road map for quality improvement. eQIPd surveys enable services to benchmark their performance to the sector, but in a way in which allows them to exercise their own discretion as to whether or not they publish these results within their communities.

An option for *Starting Blocks* could be for services to have the option to publish survey results to showcase performance.

Another option (at the risk of eQIPd losing a component of its business) is for Government to run standardised parent and staff surveys and publish the results on an annual basis, however there is a risk that services may also manipulate this process. Publishing key indicative data such as annual staff turnover could be an additional option, but again, care would need to be taken to mitigate the risk of manipulation of results that provide more favourable optics.

Commissioners may wish to examine the MySchool website and how that is being used in the community. Interestingly, it appears that most parents do not refer to MySchool when choosing a school (even when they live somewhere where they have choice of schools).

It may be that the value of MySchool instead lies in how it is used by some school leadership teams to see how they are comparing to 'like' schools – having an upward effect on student performance for those students lucky enough to be attending a school taking a data driven approach.

Thank-you for the opportunity to contribute and best wishes with formulating your final recommendations.

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