



Hon Lizzie Blandthorn MP

Deputy Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council
Minister for Children
Minister for Disability

GPO Box 1774
Melbourne Victoria 3001
Telephone: 1300 607 665
www.education.vic.gov.au

BRI23123316

Jenny Atta
Secretary
Department of Education
jenny.atta@education.vic.gov.au

Dear Secretary

STATEMENT OF EXPECTATIONS FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AS REGULATORY AUTHORITY FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

I am pleased to provide you with the Statement of Expectations (SOE) in your role as the designated Regulatory Authority under the *Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010* and the *Children's Services Act 1996*, and their respective regulations; some powers, duties and functions of which you have delegated to the Quality Assessment and Regulation Division (QARD) of the Department of Education (department). This SOE replaces the SOE 2020-22 and applies from the date of this letter until otherwise amended or replaced.

Legislative framework

As Minister for Children, I am responsible for administering the *Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010* and the *Children's Services Act 1996*. This SOE should be read in the context of the objectives, obligations and functions outlined in these Acts which make the safety, health and wellbeing of children attending high quality early childhood education and care services paramount.

I acknowledge that QARD operates in the context of nationally applied laws and that QARD has joint responsibilities to implement the National Quality Framework (NQF) with the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, other state and territory Regulatory Authorities, and the Commonwealth Department of Education.

I note that QARD is also the integrated sector regulator for the Child Safe Standards, made under the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005*, as they apply to early childhood education and care services operating in Victoria.

This SOE outlines key governance and performance objectives aimed at improving the regulation of early childhood education and care services. In setting out these expectations, I acknowledge the important role of QARD in supporting the government's *Best Start, Best Life* reforms.

This guidance should also be read in the context of any other legislative and non-legislative obligations on QARD.

Emerging risks and priorities

Ensuring the safety, health and wellbeing of children attending early childhood services and improving their educational and developmental outcomes is core to Victoria's ambition to provide a great education for every child and young person. Quality in our early childhood services is critical to maximise the benefits of the Victorian Government's investment in the implementation of Three-Year-Old-Kindergarten and the introduction of the *Best Start, Best Life* reforms.

Through its visits and investigations into notifications and complaints, QARD plays an important role in ensuring that Victorian children attending early childhood education and care services are safe from harm and abuse. I expect QARD to continue to work closely with other Victorian regulatory partners on child safety and protection, including the Commission for Children and Young People, Working with Children Check Victoria, and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

I note the December 2023 *Review of Child Safety Arrangements under the National Quality Framework* report by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) included recommendations to strengthen provisions for child safety, health and wellbeing, including under the National Quality Framework. I expect the regulator to take a lead in communicating and implementing for Victorian NQF services agreed NQF-related reforms arising from consideration of this report.

Assessing and rating early childhood education and care services against the National Quality Standard (NQS) provides a measure of quality in the early childhood sector in Victoria. It also serves as guidance for parents and a prompt for services to improve their practice. I expect there to be a continued focus on this process with a view to ensuring the frequency and currency of service assessments and ratings remains at effective levels to address the growth in the sector and to work through the backlog of assessments and ratings caused by COVID-19 restrictions.

Based on the government's priorities and emerging risks, and in line with good regulatory practice, my expectations for QARD are as follows:

Priorities	Expectations
Ensure the QARD regulatory regime is fit-for-purpose	Continue to apply and identify opportunities to improve the implementation of risk-based strategies to effectively monitor service quality and compliance with the requirements of the National Quality Framework and the <i>Children's Services Act 1996</i> to deliver regulatory outcomes.
Target regulatory effort based on risk of harm	Develop and implement a 3-year regulatory strategy.

Priorities	Expectations
Support duty holders to comply with their obligations	<p>Provide clear and accessible compliance-related assistance and advice to the Victorian early childhood education and care sector.</p> <p>Ensure regulatory information for the sector on the QARD website is regularly reviewed and up-to-date.</p> <p>QARD maintain a responsive enquiry service.</p>
<p>Be transparent and accountable for activities performed</p> <p>Continuously improve QARD's regulatory operations</p>	<p>Focus on quality assessment and rating processes for service providers.</p> <p>Improve timeliness and efficiency of regulatory processes.</p> <p>Reduce processing timelines for new provider and new service applications.</p> <p>Reduce processing times on application transactions and regulatory processes.</p> <p>Introduce a service charter.</p>
Support duty holders to understand the value of compliance and harm reduction	<p>Engage with service providers and sector representatives to support the provision of high-quality services across the Victorian market.</p> <p>Work closely with other Victorian regulatory partners on child safety and protection.</p> <p>Lead the drafting, communication and implementation of NQF-related reforms arising from the <i>Review of Child Safety Arrangements under the NQF</i> for Victorian services.</p> <p>Support adherence to the Child Safe Standards in early childhood services by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> educating and guiding services about compliance with the Child Safe Standards monitoring service compliance with the Child Safe Standards and taking appropriate steps to address non-compliance, as the integrated regulator for the early childhood sector.

Planning, reporting and review

QARD should publish this SOE on the Victorian Government's website as soon as practicable after receipt of this letter.

I request QARD to incorporate these expectations into its business planning processes, including milestones for how QARD will meet these expectations. Progress in meeting these expectations should be reported publicly in QARD's annual report. The business plan should also include appropriate milestones to review the content of this letter and to advise me when it needs to be amended or renewed.

I further request QARD, in consultation with the department, to undertake a light touch review of the expectations in this letter as part of its annual reporting process and to advise me if there are any refinements recommended.

I look forward to QARD continuing to work towards achieving best practice in its critical role as the regulator of early childhood services in Victoria.

Yours sincerely



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