

National Applied Trial guidelines

Guidelines for the National Applied Trial of the Preschool Outcomes Measure (National Tool) in NSW

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1. Purpose

The National Applied Trial (NAT) of the Preschool Outcomes Measure Program is a grant from the NSW Department of Education (department) to early childhood education and care (ECEC) providers to facilitate ECEC service participation in the NAT.

These Guidelines outline details of the NAT Program's closed, non-competitive grant process, and will form part of the funding agreement with successful ECEC providers. The Guidelines set out the objectives, ECEC service eligibility and assessment criteria, grant value, opening, closing and application outcome dates, support available to applicants, the decision-maker(s) and others' roles in the grants process, reporting requirements and other details.

The department is the source agency of the grant. The Guidelines may be amended or replaced by the department from time to time. Providers must comply with the current version of the Guidelines, available in SmartyGrants.

1.1 Objectives

The key objectives of the NAT Program are to:

- trial, at scale, the latest iteration of the National Tool, which includes adaptive functionality, an updated mix of tasks, learning progressions and support resources;
- establish the reliability of the National Tool when used by teachers and educators instead of researchers; and
- gather feedback from teachers and educators across diverse settings about the useability of the National Tool in practice.

2. Context

The Preschool Reform Agreement (PRA) is a funding agreement between the Australian Government and States and Territories that supports the delivery of 600 hours of quality preschool for children in the year before school.

The Preschool Outcomes Measure is a key reform piece under the PRA. The Preschool Outcomes Measure consists of 4 parts: national learning progressions, a national formative assessment tool (the National Tool), alignment criteria for states and territories that already use a formative assessment tool, and professional learning. See section 3.2 below for further information on formative assessment.

The Preschool Outcomes Measure is being developed by the Australian Council of Educational Research (ACER) in partnership with Ninti One, an Indigenous owned professional services consulting organisation, and Goodstart Early Learning. The Preschool Outcomes Measure supports high-quality practice by equipping teachers and educators with access to an assessment tool to better understand and inform children's learning in the year before school.

The NAT Program is a department funded initiative on behalf of the Australian Government to trial a prototype of the National Tool in ECEC settings between June and

October 2025. The department is working with ACER to jointly deliver the trial in NSW. ACER will use feedback from the trial to inform the final design of the Preschool Outcomes Measure.

This is an opportunity for select teachers and educators to be part of the development of a formative assessment tool that works for all children in the year before school in NSW and nationally. The department is committed to working in partnership with the ECEC sector and will use the NAT Program to draw on the experience and expertise of the sector to inform the development and refinement of the Preschool Outcomes Measure.

As part of the agreement between the Australian Government, States and Territories, the National Tool will be used to explore children's learning in two domains in the NAT:

1. oral language and literacy, and
2. executive function.

Find out more about the Preschool Outcomes Measure and the NAT (including in other States and Territories) at the [Australian Government Department of Education](#).

2.1 Small-Scale Trial

The National Tool used in the NAT Program has been developed and refined based on findings and feedback from the Small-Scale Trial (SST) that was conducted from September 2024 to March 2025.

During the SST, ACER-trained facilitators visited preschool programs in participating States and Territories to trial an earlier version of the National Tool, with a focus on validating the quantitative measurement scales that underpin the qualitative learning progressions. A related purpose was to gather early feedback about the functionality and user experience aspects of parts of the tool.

New South Wales

In NSW, 346 children from 35 ECEC services participated in the SST in February 2025. These ECEC services represented metro and regional areas and different service types. Due to the timing of the SST and logistics, some ECEC services who expressed interest were not able to participate. ECEC services who expressed interest in the SST have been invited to participate in the NAT Program.

3. Trial Overview

3.1 Trial Description

The department is inviting a diverse range of ECEC services to participate in the NAT Program.

Participating services will use the National tool as part of their regular educational program and practice. The aim is to reflect and gather feedback on the functionality and user experience of the tool. Feedback will inform the final version of the Preschool Outcomes Measure. Participating in the trial will provide ECEC services with a valuable opportunity to shape the National Tool so that it suits the needs of all ECEC settings in NSW and is fit-for-purpose.

Data collected during the trial will be used solely to refine and improve the final version of the Preschool Outcomes Measure. It will not be used to rank ECEC services, teachers, educators or children or affect other existing funding of an ECEC service in any way.

3.1.1 Support to ECEC Services throughout the Trial

Funding

Eligible ECEC providers participating in the NAT Program will receive funding to support services during the trial. Funding will be distributed via a closed, non-competitive grant, meaning that once an invited ECEC provider expresses an interest on behalf of an ECEC service, the service is assessed for eligibility to participate and receive funding. This funding must be passed on in full to the participating service. See sections 4 and 5 below for further information on the process.

The NAT Program has a maximum grant amount of \$14,000 (excl GST) per participating ECEC service.

Professional development

Professional development and support for teachers, educators and leaders is an integral consideration in the development of a fit-for-purpose formative assessment tool for the ECEC sector.

In addition to funding for ECEC providers, participating teachers, educators and leaders will receive ACER delivered professional development prior to trial participation. More information on professional development is provided under section 3.3.4 (Professional Development for Trial Participants).

Funding Support

Eligible ECEC providers must have an existing 2025 Annual Funding Agreement with the department.

Support is available to assist providers to submit the department's 2025 Funding Agreement if one is not already in place. Please contact the department for support by:

- [calling 1800 619 113](tel:1800619113) or,
- [emailing nationalprojects.cgp@det.nsw.edu.au](mailto:nationalprojects.cgp@det.nsw.edu.au)

An officer within Early Childhood Outcomes will respond to your enquiry.

Additional information

Online NAT Program information sessions for centre directors, teachers and educators will be delivered on 28 May and 4 June. These sessions will be co-hosted by ACER and the department to share more information about the Preschool Outcomes Measure, the National Tool and the NAT.

Help desk

ACER will provide help-desk support for trial participants via the Preschool Support Centre. It will be available via phone and email from 8:30am to 5pm, Monday to Friday.

ACER will also provide a searchable online Helpdesk with articles, user guide materials and video demonstrations.

3.2 About Formative Assessment

Formative assessment is an ongoing and integral part of the assessment and planning cycle used in everyday practice under the National Quality Standard, Quality Area 1 (Standard 1.3), and the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) V2.0.

Formative assessment allows teachers and educators to gather and interpret information about a child’s learning, development and wellbeing. This informs teaching strategies and enables teachers and educators to design learning experiences that support best outcomes for children.

When used effectively, formative assessment strategies can document the different pathways that children take in their learning journeys and make the process of learning visible to children and their families, educators and other professionals.

3.3 Key Dates and Trial Details

Trial Stages	Activity	Date
Stage 1: Invitation process	Initial communications to targeted ECEC providers and services with information on the NAT Program	12 May 2025
For more information, refer to 3.3.1	EOI opens: targeted ECEC providers are invited to submit an application for ECEC service participation in the NAT	26 May 2025
	Optional information sessions are delivered for centre directors, teachers, and educators	28 May 2025
		4 June 2025
Stage 2: Expressions of Interest	EOI Opens	26 May 2025
For more information, refer to 3.3.2	EOI Closes	6 June 2025
	EOI outcome date	13 June 2025

Trial Stages	Activity	Date
	** funding process commences during this period **	
Stage 3: Onboarding	ACER to support ECEC services through onboarding process and ensure access to OARS and Moodle.	From week commencing 16 June 2025
	ECEC services to seek consent from parents and carer givers For more information, refer to 3.3.3	By 4 August 2025
Stage 4: Professional development for trial participants For more information, refer to 3.3.4	Professional development workshops including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two days of professional learning, held one week apart • Additional half-day professional learning workshop for leaders 	21 July -8 August 2025
Stage 5: Participation in the trial	Trial begins and participants use the National Tool For more information, refer to 3.3.5	11 August -12 September 2025
	Optional, self-paced professional development For more information, refer to 3.3.4	21 July –12 September 2025
Stage 6 Feedback	In addition to feedback that ACER will obtain from the way that teachers and educators use the tool, ACER will invite a small number of ECEC services to participate in feedback activities to collect educator and teacher feedback on their experience of the National Tool. For more information, refer to 3.3.6	By 30 September 2025

3.3.1. Invitation Process

The department will invite ECEC services that previously participated in or expressed interest in the SST or the Formative Assessment in the Year Before School Project. In this initial round of communication, an information sheet about the NAT Program, including the benefits of participating, FAQs and how to apply, will be included.

A formal invitation to apply will be sent to all targeted ECEC providers on 26 May. Interested ECEC providers are required to complete and submit the department's Funding Agreement online via SmartyGrants and ACER's registration via OARS platform.

ECEC providers have until 6 June 2025 to submit their application.

3.3.2. Expressions of Interest

Expressing interest is a two-step process:

(i) **Register participation via ACER's Online Assessment and Reporting System (OARS) platform**

ECEC providers can register by securely entering preschool and educator information and creating login accounts for each person who will be using the platform. The designated contact person at each ECEC provider will be required to agree to terms and conditions on behalf of their services when they first log into the OARS platform. This consent covers any details relevant to teachers, educators and children that they upload into the OARS platform.

Participants within successful ECEC providers will be given access to the OARS platform and all accompanying resources, including access to professional development and the National Tool for the remainder of the trial.

(ii) **Complete and return the department's Application Form via Smarty Grants.**

3.3.3. Communications to Parents and Caregivers

Please note that as part of the registration process, there will be an 'opt-out' method of gaining parental consent. Following registration, ECEC services need to disseminate information about the NAT Program to parents and caregivers and ensure that children whose parents have opted out are not involved in the trial.

Parents can choose to 'opt out' their child, who will not be included in any NAT Program activities or have any data collected as part of the NAT Program.

3.3.4. Professional Development for Trial Participants

Professional development before trialling the National Tool

Prior to trialling the National Tool, all participating educators will complete, at minimum, the mandatory professional development delivered by ACER. This professional development will ensure educators feel well prepared and supported, and facilitate the collection of reliable, consistent assessment data during the NAT.

Mandatory professional development: Completion of a 2-day professional development workshop is required before trialling the National Tool and will be delivered in multiple formats to suit different preferences:

- Option 1: Two-day face-to-face workshop with online follow up
- Option 2: Two-day (synchronous) online workshop with follow up

Professional development for leaders: An optional workshop will also be offered for site leaders, lead teachers, or others with responsibility for mentoring or supporting teachers and educators on-site throughout the NAT Program. This will be in addition to the mandatory professional development above.

Make up workshops: To accommodate participating educators who miss one of their scheduled professional development workshops, ACER will offer online cross-jurisdiction make-up workshops. Educators can attend make-up sessions for only the workshops they missed (e.g. only Day 2, or only Workshop 3 in the four-session model).

Topics covered in the professional development workshops include:

- orientation to the National Tool
- alignment between the National Tool and the EYLF, with a particular focus on the EYLF planning cycle and principles and practices of effective formative assessment
- the purpose and structure of the POM learning progressions, and navigating learning progressions in the POM platform
- definition and approach to (i) oral language and literacy and (ii) executive function within the National Tool
- ensuring inclusion in the NAT Program for children with diverse accessibility requirements
- understanding formative assessment findings in relation to children's current location along the learning progressions
- opportunities for practice and moderation (e.g. using a practice version of the POM formative assessment and videos of teachers and educators engaging children in assessment experiences).

Workshops will incorporate case study examples, video demonstrations, small-group discussion and reflection, and opportunities for practice.

Optional, ongoing professional development Educators will also have access to an online Preschool Learning Management System (LMS) site throughout the NAT Program. The purpose of the LMS content is to support educators to get the most out of their participation in the NAT Program as they reflect on their current approaches to formative assessment and planning to support children's learning, and to address the diversity of backgrounds, qualifications and experience levels among participants through differentiated follow up resources.

Through the LMS site, educators can engage with:

- information and resources relevant to the workshop content, for review or deeper engagement

- a series of short, optional, self-paced learning modules on topics relevant to understanding and supporting diverse children’s oral language and literacy and executive function.

3.3.5. *Participation in the Trial*

To participate in the trial, leaders, educators and teachers are required to:

- become familiar with the support resources for the National Tool and refer to them as required
- use the National Tool with the selected children who are in the year before school
 - Each preschool should aim to assess 10 children so long as it is reasonable and feasible. If capacity and resources allow it, preschools are welcome to assess more than 10 children.
 - Each assessment takes approximately 30 -45 minutes, with the opportunity for overlap when students are assessed in groups. The tool is flexible allowing teachers and educators to collect evidence at suitable times during a two-week assessment window. These tasks include observations, reflections and tablet related tasks.
- consider any invitations to host department staff and ACER researchers on-site to observe use of the National Tool in practice and to speak with leaders, educators and teachers about their experience of the National Tool.

3.3.6. *Feedback*

The NAT Program will generate valuable insights to inform the final design of the National Tool and professional development materials. Opportunities to collect teacher and educator feedback and ideas will be embedded into the way data is collected as part of educator and teacher use of the national tool, NAT Program fieldwork and consultation processes. In addition to informing ACER in developing the final version of the National Tool, the feedback collected will also support future decision-making by jurisdictions about the implementation of the National Tool.

Participants may be required to engage in feedback activities including:

- observations of the use of the National Tool by department staff and ACER researchers at a selected number of sites
- leaders, educators and teachers speak to ACER researchers about their experience of using the National Tool where convenient
- respond to questionnaires and attend focus group interviews.

Not all ECEC services will be asked to participate in all the feedback activities.

ACER will also collect feedback about the National Tool from the way that educators and teachers use the tool and the type of information that educators and teachers enter into the tool. This information will only be used to better understand how educators and teachers use the tool and develop it further to meet educator and teacher needs.

Post-assessment reflection will be embedded at the end of tasks as part of the professional learning sessions, as well as a NAT Program participant survey to collect

feedback on the user experience, child engagement, inclusiveness and appropriateness, enablers and barriers, and suggested improvements

3.4 Roles and Responsibilities of Trial Partners

The Department of Education is working with ACER to jointly administer this trial in NSW.

The department will be responsible for funding allocation and support, including:

- selecting and inviting ECEC providers and services to participate in the NAT program.
- providing support to ECEC providers submitting an application via SmartyGrants.
- dispensing funding.
- providing ongoing support regarding funding and guidelines.

ACER will be responsible for enabling and supporting use of the National Tool, including:

- registering ECEC providers and services and activate accounts in ACER's OARS system.
- providing professional development and webinars.
- providing ongoing support, including through ACER's helpdesk.
- collecting feedback via questionnaires and service visits at selected services.

4. Eligibility Criteria

The following eligibility criteria must be met to participate in the National Applied Trial.

- ECEC providers must have a 2025 Annual Funding Agreement with the department.
- ECEC services must have a current quality rating against the National Quality Standard. Services rated Significant Improvement Required or Not Yet Assessed are ineligible to participate.
- ECEC services must not have any unresolved matters with the NSW ECEC Regulatory Authority.
- ECEC providers must complete by 6 June 2025:
 1. The ACER registration via the Online Assessment and Reporting System
 2. The department's National Applied Trial (NAT) Guidelines for NSW application form via Smarty Grants.

5. Application and Assessment Process

5.1 Application Process

Invitations will be sent on Monday 26 May 2025 and will be open until Friday 6 June 2025.

ECEC providers wishing to participate in the NAT must complete the required application process between the opening and closing dates.

To apply for the NAT Program, ECEC providers must:

- Be eligible (Refer to section 4)
- Complete the ACER registration via OARS
- Complete the department's application from via SmartyGrants

Applicants must not provide false or misleading information. An application identified as containing false or misleading statements will be rejected.

Services will be eligible for a non-competitive grant of \$14,000 each to support their participation in the NAT.

5.2 Decision making

- The person responsible for approving the NAT program is the Deputy Secretary, Early Childhood Outcomes, NSW Department of Education.
- The decision to approve or decline a grant will be made by the Director, Cross Government Partnerships.
- Recommendations for decisions to approve or decline a grant will be made by Manager, National Projects.
- The grant will be administered by the department.
- The grant must be administered in accordance with the NSW Grants Administration Guide.
- Any conflict of interest is required to be declared and managed in accordance with the department's Code of Conduct, for department staff.
- All decisions in the recommendation and approval process must be documented. The Decision Maker's decision to approve or decline a grant must be recorded in writing. All records must be managed in accordance with the requirements of the *State Records Act 1998* (NSW).

5.3 Notification of Outcome

Applicants will be advised, in writing, of the outcome of their application. Notification of outcome will be sent by Friday 13 June 2025. Dates may be subject to change.

6. Financial Accountabilities and Requirements

6.1 Payments

The department will process one-off payments through Early Childhood Contract Management System (ECCMS) for community preschools and LDC services during the 2025 calendar year.

Funding of up to a total of \$14,000 (excl. GST) is available per service and must be spent by 31 October 2025 for all services, unless otherwise agreed to by the department.

Each Community Preschool and Long Daycare Service must demonstrate continued engagement in the trial and feedback activities, as outlined in the ECCMS Terms and Conditions, to receive all funding.

A provider must return any unspent funds if their participation in the trial is terminated for any reason.

6.1.1 Processing Payments

Approved providers that have applied for the grant, committed to participate in the NAT Program in 2025 and have been notified that their application is successful, will be required to accept the ECCMS Terms and Conditions of the Grant.

Those Terms and Conditions for the respective year and these Guidelines and other associated documents will form the Funding Agreement for approved providers receiving a grant payment under the NAT Program.

Grant payments will only be progressed for applicants that are registered in ECCMS and have accepted the Terms and Conditions of the NAT Program. *Early Childhood Outcomes Commissioned Programs – Funding Agreement – Terms and Conditions – 1 January 2025 to 31 December 2025 (2025 Terms and Conditions)* are accepted in ECCMS.

Providers should ensure that their ECCMS SP-Admin account holder can log into ECCMS successfully using their myGovID.

Providers are required to review the following pages in ECCMS:

- Main Service Provider page – ensure that service details and contacts are up to date on the Main Details, Contacts and Address tabs; and
- Each Funding Specification page – ensure that details and contacts are updated on the Main Details, Contacts and Address tabs.

If services are not registered in ECCMS, they are advised to contact the department for more information as soon as possible. The department will provide information and guidance supporting services to register.

6.2 Spending Rules

6.2.1 Eligible Spending

Participating ECEC services must use the funding (up to \$14,000 (ex GST)) only for costs of participation in the trial and related feedback activities. These costs could include, but are not limited to:

- tools or technology to support attending webinars and completing professional learning and training including internet access, tablets or other electronic devices
- educational resources to support educators and teachers administering the national tool
- backfill to relieve teachers and educators who are participating in professional development
- salary and wages for educators and teachers participating in the trial

- tools and technology to support engaging in feedback surveys, interviews and other related activities.

6.3 Recovery Guidelines

In accordance with the respective funding agreements entered into with the department, any unused funds under the trial may be recovered by the department. Circumstances in which unused funds may be recovered by the department are addressed in funding agreements with the participants.

6.4 Conditions of Participation

While participating in the trial, ECEC providers (and ECEC services where applicable) must:

- have accepted and comply with the Early Childhood Outcomes Commissioned Programs – Funding Agreement – Terms and Conditions – 1 January 2025 to 31 December 2025 (2025 Terms and Conditions)
- comply with regulatory requirements set out in the National Law and Regulations
- ensure quality of practice and service delivery is not reduced
- be willing and have the capacity to dedicate the required number of teachers and/or educators
- complete and submit relevant forms requested by the department, including data sharing agreements, privacy agreements, parental consent forms and financial accountability statement
- have access to appropriate devices and reliable internet. Services may use NAT Grant Funding to ensure they are able to meet this condition including through the purchase of a tablet (see 6.2 Spending Rules)
- obtain parental consent for all children who will be included in the trial.
- spend the allocated funds by 31 October 2025 in specified categories and complete a financial accountability by June 2026
- provide reporting data (See [Section 6.5 Reporting Requirements](#)), as needed
- take part in an audit of the program, if required.

6.5 Reporting Requirements

Approved providers are required to spend all funding received from the NAT Grant by 31 October 2025 in accordance with the terms of the grant.

Approved providers may be required to provide an update to demonstrate how grant funds have been spent across the applicable category/ies by providing the department with the following information:

- update on the number of additional hours of staffing that have supported the approved provider's participation in the NAT Program
- number of children that participated in the Health and Development Checks Program (through the approved provider)
- resources, technology and equipment purchased to support participation in the NAT

- the number of approved provider's staff that:
 - engaged in professional development related to NAT; and/or
 - engaged in online training modules

7. Privacy and Data Protection

All data gathered during the National Applied Trial will remain confidential and be used only for research and development purposes. It will not be used to compare or rank services, teachers, educators or children. A Human Research Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved the protocol for the NAT (ref. approval number HREC 0273).

8. Feedback and Complaints

We like to hear when things have gone well so we can continue to provide more positive experiences. ECEC services and providers can provide suggestions, concerns or feedback about this trial to the department, including complaints about the conduct of our staff, by following one of the steps below:

Complete the department's [Complaint, compliment or suggestion form](#).

Call: 1800 619 113.

Email: ececd@det.nsw.edu.au

9. Enquiries

For more information about the EOI process, trial guidelines and funding, please contact: nationalprojects.cgp@det.nsw.edu.au

For more information about the national tool and NAT, please submit a request to [Preschool Support Team](#).