



NCAC

Family Day Care Quality Assurance

Handbook



Third Edition 2006

National Childcare Accreditation Council

Published by the National Childcare Accreditation Council Inc.,
Level 3, 418a Elizabeth Street, Surry Hills NSW 2010, Australia (www.ncac.gov.au).
ABN: 82 270 247 664
ARBN: 110 877 524

First edition:
First published 2001

Second edition:
First published 2004

Third edition:
First published 2006

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Designed by the National Childcare Accreditation Council Inc.

ISBN 0-9750664-4-7

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Introduction

Family Day Care Quality Assurance (FDCQA) aims to provide children in family day care throughout Australia with quality care that best promotes their learning and development in the vital early years. The broad objective of FDCQA is to ensure that children in family day care have stimulating, positive experiences and interactions that foster all aspects of their development. It does this by defining quality in family day care and providing a framework for measuring quality in a scheme and to identify areas for on-going quality improvement.

FDCQA is an Australian Government initiative linked to Child Care Benefit and Operational Assistance approval for family day care schemes.¹ FDCQA is one of the Child Care Quality Assurance (CCQA) systems administered by the National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC) for Australian child care services. Other CCQA systems include Outside School Hours Care Quality Assurance (OSHCQA) for outside school hours care services and the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS) for long day care centres.

While there are voluntary accreditation systems for children's services in other countries, the Australian CCQA systems are the first CCQA systems in the world to be linked to funding through legislation and to be funded and supported by a Federal Government.

FDCQA is based on what is currently known about quality child care from both research and experience, and from wide ranging consultation across the family day care field and the early childhood profession. The *FDCQA Quality Practices Guide (2004)* details 6 Quality Areas and 30 Principles of quality care. It also includes Quality Indicators designed to guide the daily practice of family day care schemes.

¹ For the purposes of FDCQA, the term 'scheme' includes carers, coordination unit staff and management

What is Quality Child Care?

Quality child care services provide more than just child care – quality family day care fosters the development of positive relationships between carers, children and families. It provides experiences for children that expand their thinking and language, helping them to learn and develop.

A good quality family day care scheme:

- Has a clear philosophy and goals, agreed between carers, staff, management and families, which guide all activities of the scheme,
- Appreciates, respects and fosters the individuality and the interdependence of all children, including children from diverse backgrounds and children who have additional needs,
- Considers the appropriateness of all experiences and activities affecting children's development, and
- Encourages families to become involved in the scheme and fosters the relationship between carers, staff and families so that they can support one another in their complementary roles.

Quality care draws on a sound base of knowledge about early childhood, including how children learn and develop. Carers providing the best level of care will know what are appropriate experiences for and appropriate expectations of children of different ages, and will be sensitive to the individual and cultural dimensions of development. Such carers will also know how to communicate with and build special bonding relationships with children. They will provide an environment in which there is a balance of stimulating planned and spontaneous experiences and a balance of active and restful periods, appropriate to each child's interests and needs.

Quality improvement is a collaborative process involving all stakeholders in the scheme. FDCQA encourages each scheme and its families to work together in their complementary roles to define a philosophy and goals to guide appropriate experiences for children, the style of interactions and all other activities of the scheme.

All family day care schemes registered to participate in FDCQA are required to implement systematic processes for continuing quality improvement. While each scheme may determine how this will best be achieved, NCAC requires that schemes demonstrate that:

- (a) they have ongoing quality improvement processes; and
- (b) these processes are informed by regular self-evaluation against standards outlined in the *FDCQA Quality Practices Guide* (2004).

Why Quality is Important in Child Care

In recent years, the number of children aged from birth through to primary school age being cared for outside their homes has increased dramatically. There has been an increase in the number of families in which both parents are working or, in the case of sole parents, where the parent is working. The changing and diverse needs of families in Australia, including the need for work-related and non-work-related care, are reflected in the increased demand for child care services. The average amount of time an individual child spends in care has grown enormously. Very young children can spend up to 12,500 hours in child care before starting school; that's only 500 hours less than the child will spend in lessons during the whole 13 years of schooling.²

The quality of care young children receive, and their learning experiences and relationships, particularly in their first few years of life, are critical in shaping their future. It is now widely accepted that we learn more in our first five years of life than in any other five-year period. Brain development research has shown that positive experiences early in life, such as those provided in high quality child care, promote children's development. Quality child care services play an important role in enhancing learning and achievement throughout children's lives. Quality child care can provide children with more positive lifelong opportunities and outcomes as well as reducing the likelihood of poor health issues in later life.

The importance of FDCQA to the provision of quality care is underpinned by:

- the growth in our knowledge about young children;
- the changing and diverse needs of families;
- the numbers of children in care; and
- the amount of time they spend in care.

The ultimate aim of FDCQA is to promote and ensure quality outcomes for the 89,300 children in family day care schemes throughout Australia.³

² Child care: 50 (weeks) x 50 (hours) x 5 (years) = 12,500 hours; Schooling: 40 (weeks) x 25 (hours) x 13 (years) = 13,000 hours

³ 2004 Australian Government Census of Child Care Services, Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (www.facsia.gov.au)

The 6 Quality Areas and 30 Principles

Quality Area 1 - Interactions

- Principle 1.1:** Carers and coordination unit staff interact with all children in a warm, friendly and respectful way
- Principle 1.2:** Communication between coordination unit staff and families is effective and supports the child's placement in care
- Principle 1.3:** Communication between carers and families is effective and supports the family and child to settle into care
- Principle 1.4:** Carers' personal and family arrangements provide a positive home environment that supports the provision of family day care
- Principle 1.5:** Relationships within the scheme value diversity, teamwork, mutual respect, understanding and professionalism

Quality Area 2 - Physical Environment

- Principle 2.1:** The indoor and outdoor areas of carers' homes and play session* venues are welcoming, comfortable and child-friendly
- Principle 2.2:** All children have access to a variety of interesting materials and equipment
- Principle 2.3:** Facilities used by the coordination unit are welcoming and accessible

Quality Area 3 - Children's Experiences, Learning and Development

- Principle 3.1:** Carers respond to the interests and abilities of all children in ways that support learning in a home environment
- Principle 3.2:** Coordination unit staff support children's learning through home visits and/or play sessions
- Principle 3.3:** Carers and coordination unit staff guide children's behaviour in positive ways
- Principle 3.4:** Carers and coordination unit staff promote resilience and social competence in all children
- Principle 3.5:** Carers and coordination unit staff promote physical competence in all children
- Principle 3.6:** Carers and coordination unit staff foster all children's language, literacy, curiosity, mathematical thinking and scientific exploration
- Principle 3.7:** Carers and coordination unit staff support all children's creative expression

* For the purposes of FDCQA, the term "play session" is used to describe the situation where two (or more) carers join together with their children for child focussed play experiences. Play sessions may be organised by the carers themselves or by coordination unit staff

Quality Area 4 - Health, Hygiene, Nutrition, Safety and Wellbeing

- Principle 4.1: The environments provided for children are safe
- Principle 4.2: Food and drink are nutritious and culturally appropriate
- Principle 4.3: The health and safety of all children are protected
- Principle 4.4: Nappy changing, toileting and bathing are positive experiences for children
- Principle 4.5: Children's needs for rest, sleep and comfort are supported
- Principle 4.6: Current State or Territory legislation relating to child protection and wellbeing is implemented consistently

Quality Area 5 - Carers and Coordination Unit Staff

- Principle 5.1: Recruitment, selection and orientation processes for carers and coordination unit staff encourage and support the provision of a quality service
- Principle 5.2: The scheme has a systematic process in place to monitor current practice and identify areas for continuing improvement
- Principle 5.3: Professional development opportunities are accessed by carers, coordination unit staff and others involved in management
- Principle 5.4: The scheme promotes occupational health and safety

Quality Area 6 - Management and Administration

- Principle 6.1: Management practices are ethical and operate within relevant legislation
- Principle 6.2: The scheme consults and works collaboratively with all stakeholders
- Principle 6.3: The scheme has an efficient, effective and ethical process for the management of records
- Principle 6.4: The scheme has simple and transparent grievance and complaints handling procedures
- Principle 6.4: Carers and coordination unit staff are effective advocates for their service within the community and actively seek to build links with other agencies to benefit children and their families

The FDCQA Process

The FDCQA *Quality Practices Guide* (2004) outlines 6 Quality Areas that are described by 30 Principles of quality practice. It is the responsibility of family day care schemes to remain up to date with FDCQA publications and procedures. Schemes participating in FDCQA are required to achieve and maintain the quality standards required for Accreditation, as outlined in the *Quality Practices Guide*, and progress through the five step process outlined below. For each of these steps, a *Support Document* has been developed to assist schemes. The *Support Documents* are available on the NCAC website, and are posted to schemes as they progress through FDCQA.

Step 1: Registration

The scheme registers with NCAC, then pays an Initial Registration Fee and an Annual Registration Fee to participate in FDCQA. Upon Registration the scheme receives a *Certificate of Registration*. An initial supply of publications required for participation in FDCQA is also provided by NCAC. Schemes are required to display the *Certificate of Registration* prominently.

All new family day care schemes must register to participate in FDCQA prior to funding approval by the Australian Government for Child Care Benefit and Operational Assistance.

All new family day care schemes participating in FDCQA are required to submit a *Self-study Report* 18 months from the date of the scheme's initial Registration with NCAC.

It is the scheme's responsibility to advise NCAC in writing of any changes of Registration details such as changes to the administration, management or operation of a scheme. This includes changes in management personnel including the coordinator (scheme contacts), change of contact details, or the impending closure/relocation/amalgamation of the scheme. Notification must be sent to NCAC on scheme letterhead by facsimile or mail and must be signed by an authorised contact person. NCAC is unable to accept changes by e-mail or telephone.

Schemes undergoing a change of management, sponsorship or ownership are required to pay a Change of Registration Fee.

Step 2: Self-study and Continuing Improvement

The provision of quality care for children requires continuous attention to self-study and quality improvement. In a continuous cycle, the scheme makes a self-assessment of the quality of its practice. This involves consulting with management, all scheme carers and staff, families and, where appropriate, with the children at the scheme.

During self-study, the scheme evaluates the quality of its practice for each of the 30 Principles against standards outlined in the *Quality Practices Guide*. The results of the self-study process inform the scheme's *Continuing Improvement Plan*.

All schemes are required to ensure that information about FDCQA is available to families and that all families are consulted during the scheme's self-study and Validation processes.

At specified times when the scheme's *Self-study Report* is due, the scheme's ratings for each Principle and its *Continuing Improvement Plan* for each Quality Area are summarised in the scheme's *Self-study Report*, which is submitted to NCAC.

Accredited schemes are required to submit a *Self-study Report* to NCAC every 2.5 years. An Accredited scheme's next *Self-study Report* is due by the end of the month specified on its *Certificate of Accreditation*.

The Australian Government funds a range of agencies to assist family day care schemes participating in FDCQA. This assistance may be in relation to self-study and continuing improvement and the delivery of quality services. These agencies provide a range of services including telephone information, training courses, bookshops and lending

resources. Contact details for child care professional support providers are available by telephoning NCAC or accessing the NCAC website (www.ncac.gov.au).

Step 3: Validation

A family day care Validator, selected and trained by NCAC, visits the scheme to validate its quality practices. The Validator's role is to observe practice and documentation in a scheme to identify the quality of care experienced by children on a typical day. The scheme does not need to do anything different or extraordinary on the day of the Validation Visit.

Wherever possible, NCAC uses the preferred specialist knowledge areas indicated by the scheme in its *Self-study Report* when allocating a Validator to visit the scheme.

When a Validator has been selected to conduct the Visit, a letter will be sent to the scheme advising the Validator's name and the duration of the Visit (depending on the size of the scheme). The scheme will not be notified of the specific day(s) on which the Visit will occur, but will be given a six week timeframe within which the Visit will take place.

Both the coordination unit and carers' homes will be visited by the Validator. Carers due to be visited by the Validator will be notified by coordination unit staff of the Validator's arrival on the day of the Validation Visit.

Prior to the Visit taking place, the Validator and the scheme have an opportunity to advise NCAC where a conflict of interest involving the Validator selected may exist.

Following receipt of a scheme's *Self-study Report*, NCAC will send original *Validation Surveys* to the scheme. These need to be copied and completed by the scheme carers, staff, families and school age children. The letter accompanying the *Surveys* will advise the scheme of the timeframe in which the *Surveys* must be circulated and returned to NCAC. The *Surveys* will not be collected by the Validator. Families have the option of returning the *Surveys* directly to NCAC.

The duration of the Validation Visit is based on the size of the scheme and will range from two to five days. For some Visits, NCAC may

schedule two Validators to undertake the Validation Visit over a shorter period of time.

The Validator does not make the Accreditation Decision. The Validator completes a *Validation Report* based on their observations of the scheme and its documentation against Quality Indicators outlined in the *Quality Practices Guide*. The Validator returns the *Validation Report* to NCAC at the conclusion of the Validation Visit.

Schemes have an opportunity to comment about the Validation Visit on the FDCQA *Validation Evaluation Form*. This will be taken into consideration during Step 4: Moderation and Step 5: Accreditation Decision, if received in time. Brief comments can be added to the *Validation Evaluation Form* which must be returned to NCAC within 7 working days of the Validation Visit.

Who are the FDCQA Validators?

FDCQA Validators are child care professionals who have met NCAC's Validator selection criteria and have successfully completed NCAC Validator Training. They have recognised qualifications and experience in the delivery of quality child care.

NCAC monitors and guides the performance of Validators through regular training, performance feedback and review sessions. The performance feedback and review processes for Validators are informed by documentation completed by Validators in *Validation Reports*, by scheme feedback provided in the *Validation Evaluation Forms* and by any relevant verbal or written communication received from schemes.

Step 4: Moderation

The process of Moderation helps to ensure that all schemes participating in FDCQA are treated consistently on a national basis. Moderators assess the quality of the scheme's practice, guided by information in the scheme's *Self-study Report*, the scheme's *Validation Surveys* and the *Validation Report*. When available, Moderators also consider information from the scheme's *Validation Evaluation Form*.

Moderators look at each scheme as a whole, identifying patterns of quality care within the scheme. Moderators also write a *Continuing Improvement Guide* for each scheme. The *Continuing Improvement Guide* focuses on quality improvement and is based on trends in the 6 Quality Areas, evident in the scheme's composite *Quality Profile*, which is explained below.

Who are the Moderators?

All Moderators hold an appropriate degree and are required to have had active involvement in children's services for at least 8 years, either as service provider, adviser, academic or administrator. Moderators must have a detailed understanding of and commitment to FDCQA. In addition to meeting set selection criteria, Moderators must also attend training and satisfactorily complete set assessment tasks.

Step 5: Accreditation Decision

The Accreditation Decision is made by NCAC and is the final step in FDCQA. A composite *Quality Profile (Profile)* is compiled by NCAC from information in the scheme's *Self-study Report*, the scheme's *Validation Surveys*, the *Validation Report* and the Moderation ratings. The *Profile* shows a composite of these various views of service performance across the 6 Quality Areas of FDCQA using protocols developed for NCAC by the Australian Council for Educational Research. The *Profile* uses four standards: Unsatisfactory, Satisfactory, Good Quality and High Quality.

To be Accredited, a scheme must achieve a rating of Satisfactory or higher in all 6 Quality Areas on the composite *Quality Profile*. Schemes that do not achieve this standard are Not Accredited.

NCAC advises each scheme of its Accreditation Decision in writing, by post. This information is not available from NCAC by any other means until at least five days after the posting date. This ensures that specified, authorised scheme representatives are the first to receive Accreditation Decision information.

Accredited schemes are required to clearly display the *Certificate of Accreditation*. Each scheme is also provided with a *Quality Profile*

Certificate which shows the standards of quality achieved and includes the names of coordination unit staff and carers who completed a *Validation Survey* and who participated in the FDCQA process. This *Quality Profile Certificate* is for display at the discretion of the scheme. An Accredited scheme is required to continue its self-study and continuing improvement cycle (see Step 2 above) until its next *Self-study Report* is due for submission. The Accreditation period is 2.5 years between submission of *Self-study Reports*.

Not Accredited schemes are required to submit another *Self-study Report* six months from the date of the Accreditation Decision. Schemes that are Not Accredited on consecutive occasions are required to submit another *Self-study Report* three months from the date of the Accreditation Decision.

NCAC reports schemes in these circumstances to the Australian Government department responsible for administering Child Care Benefit (see also page 17, *Funding of Child Care Benefit and Satisfactory Participation and Progress in FDCQA*).

Provisional Accreditation may be granted in instances where Accreditation requirements can be met by minor adjustments. Schemes eligible for provisional Accreditation are required to verify corrective action, otherwise they will be 'Not Accredited' and will be required to submit another *Self-study Report*. Provisional Accreditation may be offered by NCAC; schemes cannot apply for provisional Accreditation. A scheme which is offered provisional Accreditation and which adequately verifies corrective action within the required timeframe will have an Accreditation period of 2.5 years between submission of *Self-study Reports*.

NCAC is responsible for maintaining a public register of the Accreditation status, Accreditation history and contact details for each scheme registered to participate in FDCQA. This information is available by telephoning NCAC or by accessing the NCAC website (www.ncac.gov.au).

Spot Checks

Unannounced Spot Check Visits are scheduled by NCAC to take place at randomly selected schemes in the period between their receipt of an Accreditation Decision and their next *Self-study Report* due date. During the Spot Check Visit, the NCAC Spot Check Validator enters the premises of the scheme without prior notice and observes the scheme's quality practices.

Spot Check Visits occur at schemes that have progressed through FDCQA and have been Accredited.

It is expected that all Accredited schemes are providing quality care for all children at all times. It is therefore expected that all schemes are prepared to undergo a Spot Check Visit at any time during the day(s) and hours the scheme regularly operates.

Following the Spot Check Visit, if NCAC receives advice from the NCAC Spot Check Validator that the scheme is not maintaining the standard required for Accreditation, NCAC will seek one or more of the following:

- The scheme will be required to submit evidence to NCAC that it is meeting the standard required for Accreditation or that progress is being made in developing a continuing improvement process; and/or
- The scheme will be required to rectify the specific area of concern within a specified period of time as outlined in correspondence from NCAC; or
- The scheme's Accreditation period will be reduced and a *Self-study Report* required, followed by a Validation Visit and subsequent Accreditation Decision.

Schemes that fail to comply with NCAC's requests will be reported to the Australian Government department responsible for the approval of Child Care Benefit purposes. This department is currently the Department for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA).

The Role of Families in FDCQA

FDCQA encourages each family day care scheme and its families to work together to develop and review the scheme's philosophy, policies and procedures. This will help shape the children's experiences and the interactions between staff and children.

FDCQA encourages families and community members to become involved in the scheme's activities. This helps children to understand their community and to build their social skills.

As part of the Quality Assurance process, families and school age children are asked to complete a *Validation Survey*. All completed Surveys will contribute to the scheme's final Accreditation Decision.

Quality child care involves the development of a collaborative relationship between families, carers, staff and management, characterised by an active two-way exchange of information promoted by responsive and supportive carers and staff. The self-study process is a valuable tool for enabling families to become partners with carers, staff and management in examining the quality and continuity of their child's care. Families can provide suggestions and support to the scheme for making improvements to practices and policies.

It is important to use a variety of formal and informal strategies to keep all families informed and involved especially during the self-study process.

It is important that families are provided with opportunities to gain familiarity with the standards outlined in the *Quality Practices Guide*. Schemes can refer families to NCAC's website for this information and may consider purchasing additional copies of the *Quality Practices Guide* for use by families.

FDCQA Resources

Required materials

There are three key publications provided to family day care schemes registered to participate in FDCQA. These are designed to guide and assist schemes to identify their quality practices, plan for quality improvements in child care practices and to fulfil the reporting requirements of FDCQA:

FDCQA Handbook - provides an overview of FDCQA for use by families, carers and staff. The *Handbook* has been translated into a number of community languages, available on the NCAC website.

FDCQA Quality Practices Guide - is the main tool for schemes. It outlines the 6 Quality Areas that are described by 30 Principles that underpin quality in family day care. The FDCQA Principles are illustrated by Indicators of quality practice. The *Quality Practices Guide* also includes preambles to the Quality Areas and Principles, which provide a context and background for the FDCQA standards. The *Quality Practices Guide* should be used to guide daily practice in family day care schemes. Continuous self-study processes should be designed using the standards outlined in the *Quality Practices Guide*.

FDCQA Self-study Report - is to be completed on behalf of the scheme as a whole. The *Self-study Report* summarises self-study and continuing quality improvement plans undertaken by the scheme. Accredited family day care schemes are required to submit a *Self-study Report* to NCAC every 2.5 years.

An initial supply of the above publications is provided to family day care schemes registered to participate in FDCQA. Additional copies of these publications are also available for purchase through the NCAC Online Store or by completing a *Publications Order Form*.

Supplementary materials

NCAC produces a range of supplementary materials to assist individuals and schemes participating in FDCQA. These materials are optional.

Quality Practices Guide Supplementary Resource - this resource is intended for the personal reflection of carers and coordination unit staff undertaking self-study. There is no requirement that this document be submitted to NCAC or viewed by the Validator.

Support Documents - have been developed for each of the five steps of FDCQA and are posted to schemes with correspondence from NCAC as they progress through FDCQA. The *Support Documents* are also available by telephoning NCAC or by accessing the NCAC website.

FDCQA Factsheets - each *Factsheet* lists the Quality Areas and Principles it applies to and provides carers/staff with explanations, practical examples, issues to consider, questions to ask and further reading. *Factsheets* can be ordered through the NCAC website, or by joining NCAC's mailing list.

Putting Children First - is NCAC's quarterly newsletter. The main focus of *Putting Children First* is to provide information and assistance for children's services participating in CCQA. All services registered to participate in CCQA receive copies of *Putting Children First* as they become available. Carers can also join NCAC's *Putting Children First* mailing list.

NCAC Website (www.ncac.gov.au) - provides a range of information about FDCQA including an interactive FDCQA *Online Training Module*. The *Training Module* is an interactive program and provides an overview of the standards and processes of FDCQA.

The NCAC website also provides access to NCAC forms, *Factsheets*, *Support Documents*, previous issues of *Putting Children First*, publications, extracts and contact details for Inclusion and Professional Support providers which assist schemes progressing through FDCQA.

NCAC Child Care Advisers - are available during business hours to provide telephone support to carers, coordination unit staff and management participating in FDCQA. They can be contacted on 1300 136 554.

Advertising Participation in FDCQA

Only family day care schemes who have registered with NCAC can publicly advertise their participation in FDCQA.

Claims that a scheme is 'Accredited' when it has only recently registered, or is currently awaiting an Accreditation Decision must not be made.

Individual carers or coordination unit staff cannot make claims that they are 'Accredited'.

Only schemes which have successfully progressed through FDCQA, met the standard required for Accreditation and are in receipt of a current *Certificate of Accreditation* can claim to be 'Accredited'.

Use of the NCAC logo in any scheme or carer advertising is not permitted.

FDCQA and Complaints received by NCAC about Family Day Care Schemes

As part of its role, NCAC handles complaints about schemes participating in FDCQA. NCAC recognises that most complaints or concerns are best dealt with and resolved directly with the scheme. Schemes participating in FDCQA are encouraged to develop and consistently implement clear procedures for handling any concerns, grievances or complaints. NCAC encourages complainants to discuss their concerns with scheme carers and staff.

NCAC will inform a scheme of the issues raised in written complaints where they relate to the FDCQA Principles. When information is received about a scheme's practices relating to state/territory licensing regulations or child protection, NCAC informs the state/territory licensing authority or other appropriate authority of these concerns.

Complaints about family day care schemes are considered resolved when NCAC is satisfied that the scheme's response to the issues of concern is adequate and where appropriate, advice is received from the relevant authority confirming that licensing or child protection issues are resolved.

The scheme's progress in FDCQA may be affected if NCAC considers that the concerns raised in the complaint are not resolved.

More information about NCAC's complaints handling procedures is available by telephoning NCAC or on the NCAC website (www.ncac.gov.au).

Standards Required for Accreditation

To meet the standard required for Accreditation, a scheme must achieve a composite rating of Satisfactory or higher in all 6 Quality Areas. The *Quality Practices Guide* (2004) outlines Quality Indicators for each Principle. Scheme management, staff, carers and families are asked to rate each Principle according to a range of four standards – *Unsatisfactory*, *Satisfactory*, *Good Quality* and *High Quality*. On the right is the definition for each of the four response categories in relation to the standard of care for **each Principle**:

Unsatisfactory - means that one or more Satisfactory Indicator(s) are not evident in scheme practice

Satisfactory - means that all Satisfactory Indicators are evident in scheme practice

Good Quality - means that in addition to meeting all requirements for a Satisfactory rating, most Good Quality Indicators are also evident. While there may be some evidence of High Quality Indicators, Good Quality best describes the scheme's typical practice

High Quality - means that in addition to meeting all requirements for a Satisfactory rating, most Good Quality and High Quality Indicators are also evident. High Quality best describes the scheme's typical practice

Information about the Accreditation Status of Family Day Care Schemes

NCAC has developed the following Accreditation Status policy to assist in the administration of Family Day Care Quality Assurance (FDCQA). This Accreditation Status policy forms part of NCAC's FDCQA policy that approved services must comply with.

New Registration

'New Registration' is the status applied to a family day care scheme registered to participate in FDCQA and is working towards Accreditation for the first time. Schemes given the status of 'New Registration' will be issued with a *Certificate of Registration*.

Accredited

'Accredited' is the status applied to a family day care scheme with a *Quality Profile* that meets the standard required for Accreditation under FDCQA.

An 'Accredited' family day care scheme is issued with a *Certificate of Accreditation* and a *Quality Profile Certificate*. The scheme is required to display both certificates prominently.

An 'Accredited' family day care scheme is required to maintain practice at the

Accredited level and continue a process of self-study and quality improvement. 'Accredited' family day care schemes are required to submit a *Self-study Report* to NCAC every 2.5 years. NCAC may require a *Self-study Report* to be submitted earlier in cases where the scheme has not maintained practice at the standard required for Accreditation or met requirements outlined in the FDCQA Compliance Requirements (see also page 16, *FDCQA Compliance Requirements*).

Not Accredited

'Not Accredited' is the status applied to a family day care scheme with a *Quality Profile* which does not meet the standard required for Accreditation under FDCQA.

A 'Not Accredited' family day care scheme is issued with a *Quality Profile Certificate* which it is required to display prominently.

If a family day care scheme is given the status of 'Not Accredited' on a first occasion, it is required to improve practice and submit a *Self-study Report* to NCAC six months after the Not Accredited decision.

If the scheme is 'Not Accredited' on a second or subsequent consecutive occasion, it is required to improve practice and submit another *Self-study Report* to NCAC three months after its most recent Accreditation Decision.

If a family day care scheme is 'Not Accredited' it will be reported to the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA) for failure to make satisfactory progress in FDCQA if:

- the scheme does not meet the standard required for Accreditation on two or more consecutive occasions;

and/or

- the scheme is 'Not Accredited' and has not met the standards required for the majority of Quality Areas.

The scheme will be required to meet the standards required for Accreditation and make improvements to the quality of care provided.

Non-compliant

'Non-compliant' is the status applied to a family day care scheme that has not met requirements outlined in the FDCQA Compliance Requirements including failure to:

- pay initial or annual Registration fees
- submit a *Self-study Report* as required
- participate in a Validation Visit and Spot Check

A 'Non-compliant' family day care scheme is reported by NCAC to FaCSIA, the department responsible for the approval of services for CCB purposes (see also page 16, *FDCQA Compliance Requirements*).

The Secretary of FaCSIA may impose sanctions on a family day care scheme that has failed to meet its FDCQA obligations.

Compliant

'Compliant' is the status applied to a family day care scheme now meeting the requirements of FDCQA following a period of non-compliance.

The Accreditation status will remain 'Compliant' until such time as the scheme progresses through Family Day Care Quality Assurance Steps 2 to 5 and receives a subsequent Accreditation Decision.

Accreditation Withdrawn

'Accreditation Withdrawn' is the status applied to a family day care scheme whose Accreditation status has been rescinded by NCAC.

This status is applied to an Accredited scheme in any of the following circumstances:

1. The scheme has serious licensing and/or child protection matters confirmed by relevant authorities.⁴
 - In this instance the scheme's Accreditation will be withdrawn immediately upon NCAC receiving notification from the relevant authority
 - The scheme will be notified that the Accreditation status is withdrawn
 - The matter will be considered resolved when NCAC receives written confirmation of resolution from the relevant authority
2. NCAC has received a written complaint about the scheme and the scheme has not adequately responded to NCAC regarding the issues of complaint within eight weeks of NCAC's initial correspondence with the service.
3. The scheme had been progressing through Step 3: Validation to Step 5: Accreditation Decision of FDCQA at the time a licensing, child protection, complaint or other issue became evident which resulted in a delay in the Accreditation Decision for more than six months after the date of the scheme's Validation Visit.

When the issues of concern have been resolved to the satisfaction of NCAC, the scheme's Accreditation status will become 'Compliant' (see definition of 'Compliant'). The scheme is required to submit a *Self-study Report* within one month of resolution or on the date the *Self-study Report* normally falls due, whichever is soonest. In this case, the Accreditation status will remain 'Compliant' until such time as the scheme progresses through FDCQA Steps 2 to 5 and receives a subsequent Accreditation Decision.

⁴State and territory governments are responsible for child protection legislation and legislation under which child care services are licensed. Contact details for state/territory child protection and licensing authorities can be found on the NCAC website (www.ncac.gov.au)

Family Day Care Quality Assurance Compliance Requirements

Family day care schemes must comply with a number of conditions in order to remain approved for Child Care Benefit (CCB) purposes. The following information provides particulars about the main requirements applicable to family day care schemes participating in FDCQA. Non-compliance with the requirements will result in NCAC reporting the scheme to Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA). More information regarding compliance requirements is available from the NCAC website (www.ncac.gov.au).

NCAC will report a scheme to FaCSIA as non-compliant if it fails to comply with the following requirements:

Payment of Registration Fees

It is a requirement that:

- A scheme pays the Annual Registration Fee, during the period 1 July to 30 September each year, as specified on the Annual Registration Tax Invoice.
- Where an existing scheme changes registration, the scheme completes a *Change of Registration Form* and pays the required Change of Registration Fee.

Submission of the Self-study Report

It is a requirement that:

- A new scheme undertakes self-study and submits a complete *Self-study Report* to NCAC within the required timeframe as specified on the scheme's *Certificate of Registration*.
- An Accredited scheme undertakes self-study and submits a *Self-study Report* to NCAC within the required timeframe as specified on the scheme's *Certificate of Accreditation*.
- Where a scheme is Not Accredited for the first time, the scheme must undertake self-study and submit a *Self-study Report* to NCAC within six months of the date of the initial Accreditation Decision for the scheme.
- Where a scheme is Not Accredited for the second or subsequent time the scheme must undertake self-study and submit a *Self-study Report* to NCAC within three months of the date of the Accreditation Decision for the scheme.

Participation in Validation Visits

It is a requirement that:

- A scheme must undergo a Validation Visit.
- A scheme must allow the Validation Visit to occur:

- on the day(s) the scheme regularly operates; and
- in the timeframe as specified in correspondence from NCAC.
- A scheme must allow the NCAC Validator access to the scheme whenever the Validator arrives to conduct the Validation Visit.
- A scheme must not hinder the process or completion of the Validation Visit.
- A scheme must:
 - treat NCAC officers and Validators with respect;
 - provide NCAC Validators with complete, accurate and current information; and
 - cooperate with and assist Validators in relation to any queries or questions they may have.
- A scheme must not cause the Validation Visit to be terminated due to the harassment or mistreatment of NCAC Validators.

Participation in Spot Check Visit

It is a requirement that:

- A scheme must allow the NCAC Spot Check Validator access to the scheme whenever the NCAC Spot Check Validator arrives, on the day(s) on which the scheme regularly operates to conduct the Spot Check Visit.
- A scheme must not hinder the process or completion of the Spot Check Visit.

A scheme must:

- Treat NCAC Spot Check Validators with respect.
- Provide NCAC Spot Check Validators with complete, accurate and current information as requested by the NCAC Spot Check Validator.

- Cooperate with and assist NCAC Spot Check Validators in relation to any queries or questions they may have.
- Provide NCAC Spot Check Validators with access to all areas within the scheme.
- Not cause the Spot Check Visit to be terminated due to the harassment or mistreatment of NCAC Spot Check Validators.
- Provide further information, evidence or documentation requested by NCAC following the Spot Check Visit.
- Take action specified in the written report provided by the Spot Check Validator within the specified timeframes.

Satisfactory Progress

It is a requirement that:

- Schemes meet the standard required for Accreditation.
- Schemes make improvements to the quality of care provided.
- Schemes that are Not Accredited, have met the standards required for the majority of Quality Areas.
- Schemes that are Not Accredited, meet the standard for Accreditation on next subsequent occasion.

State/territory child care regulations and child protection legislation for compliance with FDCQA for CCB purposes

It is a requirement that:

- Schemes comply with child care regulations and child protection legislation.
- NCAC will report a scheme to the Department where the relevant state/territory child care regulatory authority has advised NCAC that the scheme has:
 - serious breaches of child care regulations; or
 - ongoing unresolved breaches of child care regulations; or
 - child protection concerns.
- When NCAC receives advice from the state/territory child care regulatory authority that the licensing or child protection issues are resolved, NCAC will advise the Department that the scheme is compliant with FDCQA requirements.

Funding of Child Care Benefit and Satisfactory Participation and Progress in FDCQA

In order to remain eligible for continued Child Care Benefit approval, family day care schemes must comply with a number of conditions including those specified in the *Child Care Benefit (Eligibility of Child Care Services for Approval and Continued Approval) Determination 2000* made under the *A New Tax System (Family Assistance) (Administration) Act 1999*.

Continued Child Care Benefit approval for family day care schemes involves the scheme's compliance with the requirements of FDCQA and a demonstrated commitment to maintaining a satisfactory standard of quality child care. This includes continuing improvement to the standard of care in accordance with the Quality Areas and Principles set out in the *Quality Practices Guide* (2004).

NCAC may report schemes that either fail to comply with or make satisfactory progress through FDCQA to the Australian Government department responsible for administering Child Care Benefit.

The Secretary of the department may impose sanctions on a scheme that has failed to meet its FDCQA obligations. The sanctions may include suspending or cancelling a scheme's Child Care Benefit approval. Schemes that have their Child Care Benefit approval suspended or cancelled will also lose their entitlement to Operational Assistance.

FDCQA, National Standards and Licensing Legislation

In Australia, state and territory governments are responsible for legislation under which family day care schemes may be licensed. National Standards for family day care were developed and agreed by Federal, state and territory governments in 1997 and were subsequently amended in 1999. The *National Standards for Family Day Care*⁵ are intended to provide the basis for a uniform national approach to the licensing of family day care.

In states and territories which have licensing regulations for family day care, licensing provides a legal 'floor' below which no scheme or carer is permitted to operate. It typically includes factors which are most readily measured, such as space, range of equipment, number and ages of children, number of scheme staff and the length of their training in early childhood. Such factors *contribute* to quality. FDCQA builds on these to look at factors that *determine* quality. The emphasis of FDCQA is on the practices of carers and staff and actual outcomes for children. It shifts the focus from meeting minimum standards to continuously striving towards higher levels of care.

In cases where NCAC is informed of licensing or child protection issues involving a scheme participating in FDCQA, NCAC will communicate with the appropriate authorities. NCAC considers these issues resolved when it receives advice from the relevant authority confirming that licensing or child protection issues are resolved. A scheme's progress in FDCQA may be affected if licensing or child protection issues are not resolved.

⁵ In states and territories where no licensing regulation exists for family day care, the *National Standards for Family Day Care* provide a baseline standard for schemes to implement to ensure the protection and safety of children in their care. Please refer to the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA) website (www.facsia.gov.au) for more information.

The Accreditation Decisions Review Committee

The Accreditation Decisions Review Committee (ADRC) is responsible for reviewing Accreditation Decisions made by NCAC. Members of the ADRC are appointed by the Australian Government Minister responsible for child care. The ADRC acts independently from, and makes recommendations to NCAC.

A scheme can apply to the ADRC for a review of its Accreditation Decision. In its review of a scheme's Accreditation Decision, the ADRC will consider written information from the

scheme outlining its request for review and all of the information NCAC considered when making the Accreditation Decision. NCAC will inform the scheme in writing of the final Accreditation Decision and will include a copy of the ADRC's recommendations.

More information about the ADRC and requesting a review of an Accreditation Decision is available on the ADRC website (www.adrc.org.au).

The Development of Family Day Care Quality Assurance

NCAC became responsible for the administration of Family Day Care Quality Assurance (FDCQA) on 1 July 2001. However, the development of FDCQA has been high on the agenda of the Australian family day care community since the mid-1990s.

In its pre-election *Certainty for Families* policy of February 1996, the Australian Government announced its commitment to quality assurance in family day care. From this commitment a significant amount of preparatory work was undertaken. During this time, work was also under way with respect to the licensing of family day care by state and territory governments. Key events in the development of FDCQA include the development of National Standards for family day care in 1997 and the establishment in 1998 of a Family Day Care Working Party on Quality Assurance, which was responsible for the development of a quality assurance model for family day care.

During 2000 and 2001, a model and self-evaluation tool to underpin the quality assurance system was developed. Eleven family day care schemes from across Australia were part of a six-month pilot of the proposed quality assurance system model and tools. The pilot program was represented by each state and territory to ensure that the uniqueness and diversity of family day care were represented.

A series of consultation meetings across Australia, facilitated by the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services, took place in May 2001 to inform the family day care sector of the proposed quality assurance system and to seek feedback on the system.

Since the implementation of FDCQA in July 2001, NCAC has been actively seeking the views of the family day care community about all aspects of the system.

The feedback provided by the family day care community contributed significantly to the process of reviewing the FDCQA *Quality Practices Guide* (1st edition, 2001).

In consultation with the National Family Day Care Council of Australia (NFDCCA), NCAC established a reference group of family day care service providers to work with NCAC staff on a revision of the first edition.

NCAC would like to thank the NFDCCA and the reference group for their work in helping to facilitate the production of the FDCQA *Quality Practices Guide* (2nd edition, 2004).

For more details regarding the development of FDCQA please refer to the Addendum to the FDCQA *Quality Practices Guide* (2004).

About the National Childcare Accreditation Council Inc (NCAC)

NCAC was established in 1993 to administer the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS) for long day care centres throughout Australia. In 2001 and 2003, NCAC also became responsible for the administration of Family Day Care Quality Assurance (FDCQA) for family day care schemes, and Outside School Hours Care Quality Assurance (OSHCQA) for outside school hours care services in Australia. Since its establishment, NCAC has continued to play a leading role in promoting and defining quality child care. NCAC receives funding from the Australian Government and the NCAC Board Chairperson and members are appointed by the Australian Government Minister responsible for child care.

NCAC is a national organisation and its Board members are selected from a range of states and territories and sectors within the child care profession and related fields.

NCAC aims to support and improve the quality of child care provided in Australian children's services and assist child care providers and families with the advice they need to help ensure that all Australian children receive high quality care.

The functions of NCAC include setting the standards required for Accreditation of family day care, long day care and outside school hours care services; administering the Child Care Quality Assurance (CCQA) systems for Australian child care services; and advising the Australian Government on the participation and progress of all services participating in the CCQA systems.

NCAC's aims and commitment to its customers are outlined in its *Customer Service Charter* which is available by telephoning NCAC or by accessing the NCAC website.

More Information

For information about FDCQA Quality Indicators and standards required for Accreditation, please see the *FDCQA Quality Practices Guide (2004)* or visit NCAC's website.

The *FDCQA Handbook (2006)*, *FDCQA Quality Practices Guide (2004)* and the *FDCQA Self-study Report (2004)* are available for purchase from NCAC.

All information about FDCQA, including *Support Documents* and copies of NCAC's newsletter *Putting Children First*, can be found on the NCAC website or can be obtained by contacting NCAC.

For more information, please contact NCAC.

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