



Family Day Care Quality Assurance

Handbook



Second Edition 2004

National Childcare Accreditation Council

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Introduction

Family Day Care Quality Assurance (FDCQA) aims to provide children in family day care throughout Australia with high 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 by providing a way to measure the quality of care provided by the 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 schemes¹. Since its inception on 1 July 2001, FDCQA has been administered by the National Childcare Accreditation Council Inc (NCAC).

While there are voluntary accreditation systems for children's services in other countries, the Australian FDCQA is unique on an international scale as it is the first quality assurance program for family day care services in the world to be linked to child care funding through legislation and to be funded and supported by a Federal Government. Successful Quality Assurance systems are also operating in Australian long day care centres and outside school hours care services². The revision of FDCQA for family day care will extend the range of information available to families as they make choices for care of their children.

FDCQA is based on what is currently known about quality child care practice from both research and experience, and from wide-ranging consultations across the family day care and other early childhood fields. The *FDCQA Quality Practices Guide* outlines 6 Quality Areas and 30 Principles of quality care. It also includes quality indicators designed to guide practices of family day care schemes.

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

² 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

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 their 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 the 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 the children in relation to their 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 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 individual interests and needs.

Quality improvement is a collaborative process involving all members of 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 with the NCAC 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 on-going 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 from birth through primary school age being cared for outside their homes has increased dramatically with the growth 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, which include 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 schooling³.

The quality of care young children receive, 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. Research on brain development 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, in providing more positive lifelong opportunities and outcomes and in reducing poor health in later life.

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 highlights the importance of FDCQA in the provision of high quality care for children in family day care schemes throughout Australia.

³ 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

While family day care is already recognised as providing children with quality care, the FDCQA system aims to have that care acknowledged by an Accreditation process. The ultimate aim of FDCQA is to promote and ensure quality outcomes for the 93 450 children in family day care in Australia⁴.

The Development of Family Day Care Quality Assurance

NCAC became responsible for the administration of Family Day Care Quality Assurance 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, the 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). NCAC is confident that family day care schemes will find the second edition an improvement on its predecessor and it marks the progress the field has made in a few short years.

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

FDCQA Publications

The *FDCQA Handbook* (2004) provides an overview of FDCQA and is a companion publication to the *FDCQA Quality Practices Guide* (2004) and the *FDCQA Self-study Report* (2004). These publications are designed to guide and assist schemes in planning for quality improvements in care practices and to fulfil the reporting requirements of FDCQA. An initial supply of these publications is provided to family day care schemes registered to participate in FDCQA. Additional copies of these publications are also available for purchase directly from NCAC, and are available for free download from the NCAC website (www.ncac.gov.au).

⁴ 2002 Census of Child Care Services, Department of Family and Community Services

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 6.5: 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 Accreditation Decisions Review Committee (ADRC)

The Accreditation Decisions Review Committee (ADRC) is responsible for reviewing Accreditation Decisions made by the NCAC. Members of the ADRC are appointed by the Commonwealth Minister responsible for child care. The ADRC acts independently from, and makes recommendations to the 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 information the NCAC considered when making its initial Accreditation Decision. NCAC will inform the scheme in writing of the final 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 by telephoning NCAC or on the NCAC website (www.ncac.gov.au).

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 services must comply with the *Child Care Benefit (Eligibility of Child Care Services for Approval and Continued Approval) Amendment Determination 2001 (No. 1)* made under the *A New Tax System (Family Assistance) Administration Act 1999*.

Continued Child Care Benefit approval for family day care services involves the service's compliance with the requirements of the FDCQA five step process and its demonstrated commitment to maintaining a satisfactory standard of quality child care, including continuing improvement to the standard of care in accordance with the Quality Areas and Principles set out in the *Quality Practices Guide (2004)*.

In accordance with the *Child Care Benefit (Breach of Conditions for Continued Approval) Amendment Determination 2001 (No.1)*, the NCAC may report services 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 service that has failed to meet its FDCQA obligations. The sanctions may include suspending or cancelling a service's Child Care Benefit approval. Services that have their Child Care Benefit approval suspended or cancelled will also lose their entitlement to Operational Assistance.

FDCQA 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 Commonwealth, State and Territory governments in 1997 and were subsequently amended in 1999. The *National Standards for Family Day Care** 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 the NCAC is informed of licensing or child protection issues in relation to a scheme participating in FDCQA, communication with the appropriate authorities will occur. 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.

*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 services to implement to ensure the protection and safety of children in their care. Please refer to the Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) *Child Care Services Handbook* (accessible on FaCS website www.facs.gov.au/childcare)

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. 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 in relation 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.

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 child care centres throughout Australia. In 2001 and 2003, NCAC also became responsible for the administration of the Family Day Care Quality Assurance (FDCQA) system 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 played and continues to play a leading role in promoting and defining quality child care. NCAC receives funding from the Commonwealth Government and the NCAC Chairperson and members are appointed by the Commonwealth Minister responsible for child care.

The NCAC is a national organisation and its 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 Australia's 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 the NCAC include accrediting Australian family day care schemes participating in FDCQA, Australian outside school hours care services participating in OSHCQA and Australian long day care centres participating in the QIAS; and advising the Commonwealth on the participation and progress of family day care schemes in FDCQA, services in OSHCQA and centres in the QIAS.

The 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 (www.ncac.gov.au).

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 (2004)*, *FDCQA Quality Practices Guide (2004)*, *FDCQA Self-study Report (2004)* and *FDCQA Validation Report (2004)* can be purchased from NCAC.