



NCAC

Quality Improvement and Accreditation System

Handbook



Fourth 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 1993

Second edition:
First published 2001

Third edition:
First published 2005

Fourth edition:
First published 2006

Copyright © 1st edition Australian Government 1993
Copyright © 2nd edition Australian Government 2001
Copyright © 3rd edition Australian Government 2005
Copyright © 4th edition Australian Government 2006

This work is copyright. Apart from any use permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, and/or for the purposes intended by the publisher, no part may be reproduced by any process without prior written permission from the National Childcare Accreditation Council Inc.

Designed by the National Childcare Accreditation Council Inc.

ISBN 0-9750664-9-8

Contents

Introduction	3
What is Quality Child Care ?	4
Why Quality is Important in Child Care	5
The 7 Quality Areas and 33 Principles	6
The QIAS Process	8
The Role of Families in the QIAS	11
QIAS Resources	12
Advertising Participation in the QIAS	13
QIAS and Complaints received by NCAC about Child Care Centres	13
Standards Required for Accreditation	14
Information about the Accreditation Status of Long Day Care Centres	14
QIAS Compliance Requirements	16
Funding of Child Care Benefit and Satisfactory Participation and Progress in the QIAS	17
QIAS and Licensing Legislation	18
The Accreditation Decisions Review Committee (ADRC)	18
The Development of the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS)	19
About the National Childcare Accreditation Council	20
More Information	20

Introduction

The Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS) aims to provide children in centre based care throughout Australia with high quality care that best promotes their learning and development in the vital early years. The broad objective of the QIAS is to ensure that children in long day care have stimulating, positive experiences and interactions that foster all aspects of their development. It does this by defining quality in long day care and providing a framework for measuring quality in a centre and to identify areas for ongoing quality improvement.

The QIAS is an Australian Government initiative linked to Child Care Benefit approval for centre based long day care. The QIAS is one of the Child Care Quality Assurance (CCQA) systems for Australian child care services administered by the National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC). Other CCQA systems include 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.

While there are voluntary accreditation systems for children's services in other countries, the Australian CCQA systems are unique on an international scale as they 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.

The QIAS is based on what is currently known about quality child care practice from both research and experience, and from wide-ranging consultations across the long day care field and the early childhood profession. The QIAS *Quality Practices Guide* (2005) details 7 Quality Areas and 33 Principles of quality care. It also includes Quality Indicators designed to guide the daily practices of long day care centres.

What is Quality Child Care?

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

A quality child care centre:

- Has a clear philosophy, agreed between the centre and families, which guide all activities at the centre
- 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
- Encourages families to become involved in the centre and fosters the relationship between 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. Child care centre staff 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 staff 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 stakeholders of the centre. The QIAS encourages each centre and its families to work together in their complementary roles to define a philosophy and goals to guide the program, the style of interactions and all other activities of the centre.

All long day care centres registered with NCAC to participate in the QIAS are required to implement systematic processes for continuing quality improvement. While each centre may determine how this will best be achieved, NCAC requires that centres demonstrate that:

- (a) they have ongoing quality improvement processes; and
- (b) these processes are informed by regular self-evaluation against standards outlined in the *QIAS Quality Practices Guide* (2005).

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.¹

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 the QIAS 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 the QIAS is to promote and ensure quality outcomes for the 367,140 children in long day care throughout Australia.²

¹Child care: 50 (weeks) x 50 (hours) x 5 (years) = 12,500 hours; Schooling: 40 (weeks) x 25 (hours) x 13 (years) = 13,000 hours

²2004 Australian Government Census of Child Care Services, Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (www.facsia.gov.au)

The 7 Quality Areas and 33 Principles

Quality Area 1 - Staff Relationships with Children and Peers

Principle 1.1: Staff interact with each child in a warm and friendly way

Principle 1.2: Staff guide each child's behaviour in a positive way

Principle 1.3: Staff initiate and maintain respectful communication with each child

Principle 1.4: Staff respect each child's background and abilities

Principle 1.5: Staff treat all children equitably

Principle 1.6: Staff communicate effectively to promote respect and professional teamwork

Quality Area 2 - Partnerships with Families

Principle 2.1: Staff and families communicate effectively to exchange information about each child and the centre

Principle 2.2: Staff encourage family participation and involvement in the centre

Principle 2.3: The centre has orientation processes for children and families

Quality Area 3 - Programming and Evaluation

Principle 3.1: The program reflects a clear statement of centre philosophy

Principle 3.2: Each child's learning is documented and is used in planning programs

Principle 3.3: The program assists each child to be a successful learner

Quality Area 4 - Children's Experiences and Learning

Principle 4.1: Staff encourage each child to make choices and participate in play

Principle 4.2: Staff promote each child's ability to develop and maintain relationships

Principle 4.3: Staff promote each child's language and literacy abilities

Principle 4.4: Staff promote each child's problem solving and mathematical abilities

Principle 4.5: Staff promote each child's enjoyment of and participation in the expressive arts

Principle 4.6: Staff promote each child's physical abilities

Quality Area 5 - Protective Care and Safety

Principle 5.1: Staff act to protect each child

Principle 5.2: Staff supervise children at all times

Principle 5.3: Staff ensure that potentially dangerous products, plants and objects are inaccessible to children

Principle 5.4: The centre ensures that buildings and equipment are safe

Principle 5.5: The centre promotes occupational health and safety

Quality Area 6 - Health, Nutrition and Wellbeing

Principle 6.1: Staff promote healthy eating habits

Principle 6.2: Staff implement effective and current food safety and hygiene practices

Principle 6.3: Staff encourage children to follow simple rules of hygiene

Principle 6.4: Staff ensure toileting and nappy changing procedures are positive experiences

Principle 6.5: Staff support each child's needs for rest, sleep and comfort

Principle 6.6: The centre acts to control the spread of infectious diseases and maintains records of immunisations

Quality Area 7 - Managing to Support Quality

Principle 7.1: Written information about the centre's management is readily available to families

Principle 7.2: Written information about the centre's management is readily available to staff

Principle 7.3: Staffing policies and practices facilitate continuity of care for each child

Principle 7.4: Management provides professional development opportunities for staff

The QIAS Process

The QIAS *Quality Practices Guide* (2005) outlines 7 Quality Areas that are described by 33 Principles of quality practice. It is the responsibility of child care services to remain up to date with QIAS publications and procedures. Centres participating in the QIAS 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 centres. The *Support Documents* are available on the NCAC website, and are posted to centres as they progress through the QIAS.

Step 1: Registration

The long day care centre registers with NCAC and pays an Initial Registration Fee and then an Annual Registration Fee to participate in the QIAS. Upon Registration the centre receives a *Certificate of Registration*. An initial supply of publications required for participation in the QIAS is also provided by NCAC. Centres are required to display the *Certificate of Registration* prominently.

All new long day care centres participating in the QIAS are required to submit a *Self-study Report* 18 months from the date of the centre's initial Registration with NCAC.

It is the centre's responsibility to advise NCAC in writing of any changes of Registration details such as changes to the administration, management or operation of a centre. This includes changes in management personnel including the director or coordinator (centre contacts), change of contact details, or the impending closure/relocation/amalgamation of the centre. Notification must be sent to NCAC on centre 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.

Centres 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 centre makes a self-assessment of the quality of its practices. This involves consulting with all centre staff and families.

During self-study, the centre evaluates the quality of its practice for each of the 33 Principles against standards outlined in the *Quality Practices Guide*. The results of the self-study process inform the centre's *Continuing Improvement Plan*.

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

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

Accredited centres are required to submit a *Self-study Report* to NCAC every 2.5 years. An Accredited centre'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 centres participating in the QIAS. This 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 long day care Validator, selected and trained by NCAC, visits the centre to validate its quality practices. The Validator's role is to observe practice and documentation in a centre to assess the quality of care experienced by children on a typical day. The centre 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 centre in its *Self-study Report* when allocating a Validator to the centre.

When a Validator has been selected to conduct the Visit, a letter will be sent to the centre advising the Validator's name and the duration of the Visit (depending on the size of the centre). The centre 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.

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

Following receipt of a centre's *Self-study Report*, NCAC will send original *Validation Surveys* to the centre. These need to be copied and completed by the director, staff and families. The letter accompanying the *Surveys* will advise the centre of the timeframe in which the *Surveys* must be circulated and then 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 centre and will range from one to four 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 centre 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.

Centres have an opportunity to comment on the Validation Visit in the *QIAS 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 QIAS Validators?

QIAS 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 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 centre feedback provided in the *Validation Evaluation Forms* and by any relevant verbal or written communication received from centres.

Step 4: Moderation

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

Moderators look at each centre as a whole, identifying patterns of quality care within the centre. Moderators also write a *Continuing Improvement Guide* for each centre. The *Continuing Improvement Guide* focuses on quality improvement and is based on trends in the 7 Quality Areas, evident in the centre'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 the QIAS.

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 the QIAS. A composite *Quality Profile (Profile)* is compiled by NCAC from information in the centre's *Self-study Report*, the centre's *Validation Surveys*, the *Validation Report* and the Moderation ratings. The *Profile* shows a composite of these various views of centre performance across the 7 Quality Areas of the QIAS 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 centre must achieve a rating of Satisfactory or higher in all 7 Quality Areas on the composite *Quality Profile*. Centres that do not achieve this standard are Not Accredited.

NCAC advises each centre 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 only specified, authorised centre representatives are the first to receive Accreditation Decision information.

Accredited centres are required to prominently display the *Certificate of Accreditation*. Each centre is also provided with a *Quality Profile Certificate* which shows the standards of quality achieved and includes the names of centre staff who completed a *Validation Survey* and participated in the QIAS process. All centres are required to clearly display the *Quality Profile Certificate* for families, staff and visitors.

An Accredited centre 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 centres are required to submit another *Self-study Report* six months from the date of the Accreditation Decision. Centres 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 centres 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 the QIAS*).

Provisional Accreditation may be granted in instances where Accreditation requirements can be met by minor adjustments. Centres 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; centres cannot apply for provisional Accreditation. A centre 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 centre registered to participate in the QIAS. 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 centres 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 centre without prior notice and observes the centre's quality practices.

Spot Check Visits occur at centres that have progressed through the QIAS and have been Accredited.

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

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

- The centre 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 centre will be required to rectify the specific area of concern within a specified period of time as outlined in correspondence from NCAC; or
- The centre's Accreditation period will be reduced and a *Self-study Report* required, followed by a Validation Visit and subsequent Accreditation Decision.

Services 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 the QIAS

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

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

As part of the Quality Assurance process, families are asked to complete a *Validation Survey*. All completed *Surveys* contribute to the centre's final Accreditation Decision.

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

It is important to use a wide 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*. Centres 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.

QIAS Resources

Required materials

There are three key publications provided to long day care centres registered to participate in the QIAS. These are designed to guide and assist services to identify their current quality practices, to plan for quality improvements in care practices and to fulfil the reporting requirements of the QIAS:

QIAS Handbook (2005) - provides an overview of the QIAS for use by families and staff. The *Handbook* has been translated into a number of community languages, available on the NCAC website (www.ncac.gov.au).

QIAS Quality Practices Guide (2005) - is the main tool for services. It outlines 7 Quality Areas that are described by 33 Principles that underpin quality in long day care. The QIAS 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 QIAS standards.

The *Quality Practices Guide* should be used to guide daily practice in long day care centres. Continuous self-study processes should be designed using the standards outlined in the *Quality Practices Guide*.

QIAS Self-study Report (2005) - is to be completed on behalf of the centre as a whole. The *Self-study Report* summarises self-study and continuing quality improvement plans undertaken by the service. Accredited long day care centres are required to submit a *Self-study Report* to NCAC every 2.5 years.

An initial supply of the above publications is provided to long day care centres registered to participate in the QIAS. Additional copies of these publications are also available for purchase from NCAC.

Supplementary materials

NCAC produces a range of supplementary materials to assist centres participating in the QIAS. These materials are optional and it is the responsibility of centres to access these resources.

Quality Practices Guide Supplementary Resource - this resource is intended for the personal reflection of centre 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 the QIAS and are posted to centres with correspondence from NCAC as they progress through the QIAS. The *Support Documents* are also available by telephoning NCAC or by accessing the NCAC website.

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 the CCQA systems. All centres registered to participate in the QIAS receive copies of *Putting Children First* as they become available.

NCAC Website (www.ncac.gov.au) - provides a range of information about the QIAS including an interactive QIAS information package or *Online Training Module*. The *Online Training Module* is an interactive training program that is beneficial to staff, families and child care students. It provides an overview of the standards and processes of the QIAS.

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 centres progressing through the QIAS.

NCAC Child Care Advisers - are available during business hours to provide telephone support to centres participating in the QIAS.

They can be contacted on 1300 136 554.

Advertising Participation in the QIAS

Only long day care centres who have registered with NCAC can publicly advertise their participation in the QIAS.

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

Individual staff cannot make claims that they are 'Accredited'.

Only centres which have successfully progressed through the QIAS, 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 centre advertising is not permitted.

QIAS and Complaints received by NCAC about Child Care Centres

As part of its role, NCAC manages complaints about centres participating in the QIAS. NCAC recognises that most complaints or concerns are best dealt with and resolved directly with the centre. Centres participating in the QIAS are required to develop and consistently implement clear procedures for handling suggestions, concerns, grievances or complaints. NCAC encourages complainants to discuss their concerns with centre staff and/or management.

NCAC will inform a centre of the issues raised in written complaints where they relate to the QIAS Principles. When information is received about a centre'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 child care centres are considered resolved when NCAC is satisfied that the centre's response to the issues of concern is adequate and where appropriate, advice received from the relevant authority confirms that licensing or child protection issues are resolved.

The centre's progress in the QIAS 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 centre must achieve a composite rating of Satisfactory or higher in all 7 Quality Areas. The *Quality Practices Guide* (2005) outlines Quality Indicators for each Principle. Centre management, staff and families are asked to rate each Principle from 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 centre practice

Satisfactory - means that all Satisfactory Indicators are evident in centre 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 centre'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 centre's typical practice

Information about the Accreditation Status of Long Day Care Centres

NCAC has developed the following Accreditation Status policy to assist in the administration of the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS). This Accreditation Status policy forms part of NCAC's QIAS policy that approved services must comply with.

New Registration

'New Registration' is the status applied to a long day care centre registered to participate in the QIAS and is working towards Accreditation for the first time. Centres given the status of 'New Registration' will be issued with a *Certificate of Registration*.

Accredited

'Accredited' is the status applied to a long day care centre with a *Quality Profile* that meets the standard required for Accreditation under the QIAS.

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

An 'Accredited' long day care centre is required to maintain practice at the

Accredited level and continue a process of self-study and quality improvement.

'Accredited' long day care centres 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 centre has not maintained practice at the standard required for Accreditation or met requirements outlined in the QIAS Compliance Requirements (see also page 16, *QIAS Compliance Requirements*).

Not Accredited

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

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

If a long day care centre 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 centre 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 long day care centre 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 the QIAS if:

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

and/or

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

The centre 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 long day care centre that has not met requirements outlined in the QIAS 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' long day care centre is reported by NCAC to FaCSIA, the department responsible for the approval of services for CCB purposes (see also page 16, *QIAS Compliance Requirements*).

The Secretary of FaCSIA may impose sanctions on a long day care centre that has failed to meet its QIAS obligations.

Compliant

'Compliant' is the status applied to a long day care centre now meeting the requirements of the QIAS following a period of non-compliance.

The Accreditation status will remain 'Compliant' until such time as the centre progresses through the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System Steps 2 to 5 and receives a subsequent Accreditation Decision.

Accreditation Withdrawn

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

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

1. The centre has serious licensing and/or child protection matters confirmed by relevant authorities.³
 - In this instance the centre's Accreditation will be withdrawn immediately upon NCAC receiving notification from the relevant authority
 - The centre 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 centre and the centre has not adequately responded to NCAC regarding the issues of complaint within eight weeks of NCAC's initial correspondence with the centre.
3. The centre had been progressing through Step 3: Validation to Step 5: Accreditation Decision of the QIAS 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 centre's Validation Visit.

When the issues of concern have been resolved to the satisfaction of NCAC, the centre's Accreditation status will become 'Compliant' (see definition of 'Compliant'). The centre 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 centre progresses through QIAS Steps 2 to 5 and receives a subsequent Accreditation Decision.

³State 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)

Quality Improvement and Accreditation System Compliance Requirements

Long day care centres 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 long day care centres participating in the QIAS. Non-compliance with the requirements will result in NCAC reporting the centre 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 centre to FaCSIA as non-compliant if it fails to comply with the following requirements:

Payment of Registration Fees

It is a requirement that:

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

Participation in Validation Visits

It is a requirement that:

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

- on the day(s) the centre regularly operates; and
- in the timeframe as specified in correspondence from NCAC.
- A centre must allow the NCAC Validator access to the service whenever the Validator arrives to conduct the Validation Visit.
- A centre must not hinder the process or completion of the Validation Visit.
- A centre 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 centre 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 centre must allow the NCAC Spot Check Validator access to the centre whenever the NCAC Spot Check Validator arrives, on the day(s) on which the centre regularly operates to conduct the Spot Check Visit.
- A centre must not hinder the process or completion of the Spot Check Visit.

A centre 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 centre.
- 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:

- Centres meet the standard required for Accreditation.
- Centres make improvements to the quality of care provided.
- Centres that are Not Accredited, have met the standards required for the majority of Quality Areas.
- Centres 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 the QIAS for CCB purposes

It is a requirement that:

- Centres comply with child care regulations and child protection legislation.
- NCAC will report a centre to the Department where the relevant state/territory child care regulatory authority has advised NCAC that the centre 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 centre is compliant with QIAS requirements.

Funding of Child Care Benefit and Satisfactory Participation and Progress in the QIAS

In order to remain eligible for continued Child Care Benefit (CCB) approval, long day care centres 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 CCB approval for long day care centres involves the centre's compliance with the requirements of the QIAS 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 (2005)*.

NCAC is required to report long day care centres that either fail to comply with or make satisfactory progress through the QIAS to the Australian Government department responsible for administering CCB.

The Secretary of the department may impose sanctions on a centre that has failed to meet its QIAS obligations. The sanctions may include suspending or cancelling a centre's CCB approval.

QIAS and Licensing Legislation

In Australia, each state and territory government is responsible for legislation under which child care centres are licensed. Licensing provides a legal 'floor' below which no centre is permitted to operate. It typically includes structural quality factors which are most readily measured, such as space, range of equipment, number and ages of children, number of staff and the length of their training in early childhood. Such factors *contribute* to quality. The QIAS builds on licensing standards to look at factors that *determine* quality. The emphasis of the QIAS is on staff practices and actual outcomes for children. It shifts the focus from meeting minimum standards to continuously striving towards higher standards of care.

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

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

centre outlining its request for review and all information NCAC considered when making its initial Accreditation Decision. NCAC will inform the centre 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 the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System

NCAC began administering the QIAS for centre based long day care on 1 January 1994. At this time the QIAS was based on 52 Principles of quality care. During the first six years of operation, some 4,200 centres progressed through the QIAS process a number of times.

An independent review of the QIAS was undertaken between March 1998 and March 2000. The original 52 Principles provided the foundation on which 10 Quality Areas and underlying Principles were developed and outlined in the *QIAS Source Book* (2001). The Australian Government Minister responsible for child care announced changes to the QIAS in November 2000 and instructed NCAC to begin administering the revised QIAS by 2002.

By late 2004 most long day care centres had progressed through the revised QIAS and NCAC determined the need to conduct a reclassification of the quality standards outlined in the *QIAS Source Book* (2001). In September 2004 stakeholders were informed about and invited to participate in the public consultation on these standards in NCAC's quarterly newsletter, *Putting Children First*. Two rounds of consultation were held yielding feedback from services, peak bodies, resource agencies, Moderators, Validators, specialists in child health and child safety and other interested parties.

The initial consultation period in October/November 2004 resulted in several substantial changes to the *QIAS Source Book*, including: a reduction from 10 Quality Areas to 7 Quality Areas; the renaming of the document as the *QIAS Quality Practices Guide*; and the mirroring of all Unsatisfactory and Satisfactory Indicators—that is, if an indicator of Satisfactory practice is not occurring, it is deemed to be Unsatisfactory practice.

NCAC field tested the draft *QIAS Quality Practices Guide* in early 2005 in selected long day care centres across Australia.

Data collected from the field test was analysed by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) to confirm the integrity of the standards. Some adjustments were made on the basis of this analysis and feedback gained through consultations led to some further refinements to produce a *Quality Practices Guide* which has both conceptual and research validity.

The *QIAS Quality Practices Guide* (2005) outlines quality indicators of care designed to provide information and guidance about the provision of quality care. The indicators of quality form the foundation of the Validation process which contributes to the Accreditation of a centre as a provider of quality child care.

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 QIAS Quality Indicators and standards required for Accreditation, please see the *QIAS Quality Practices Guide (2005)* or visit NCAC's website.

The *QIAS Handbook (2006)*, *QIAS Quality Practices Guide (2005)* and the *QIAS Self-study Report (2005)* are available for purchase from NCAC.

All information about the QIAS, 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.

Telephone: 02 8260 1900 or 1300 136 554

Fax: 02 8260 1901

Address: Level 3, 418a Elizabeth Street Surry Hills NSW 2010

E-mail: qualitycare@ncac.gov.au

Website: www.ncac.gov.au

