

Information paper

Review of the qualifications provisions for licensed services in Queensland

Child Care Act 2002

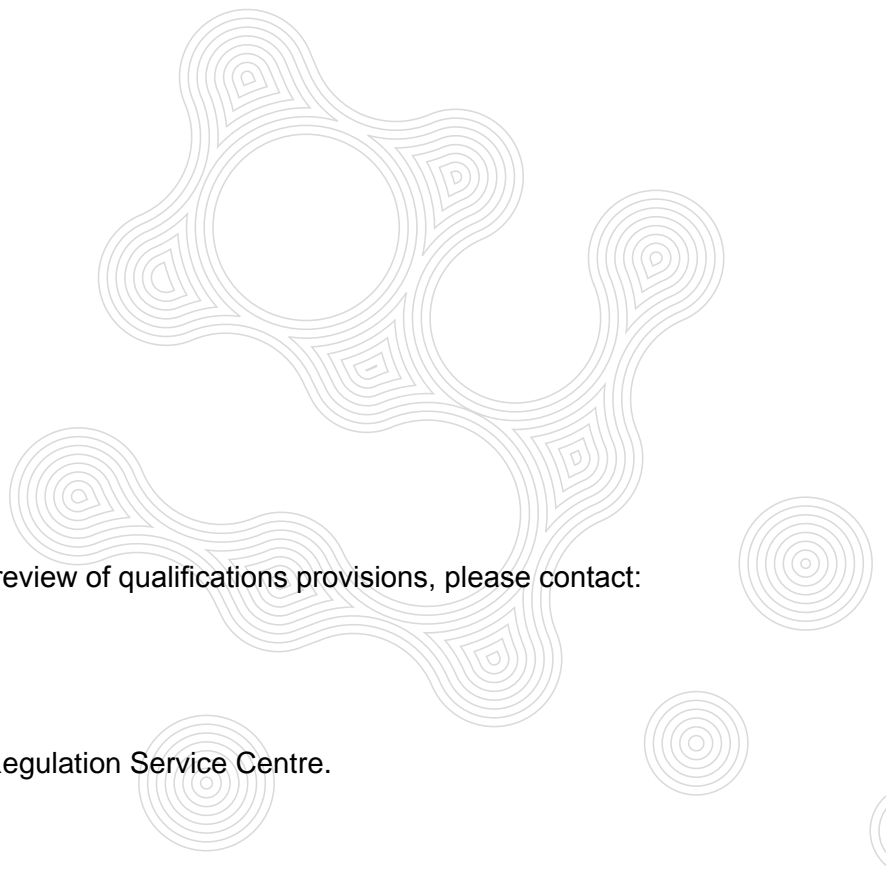
Child Care Regulation 2003



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For additional information on the review of qualifications provisions, please contact:
Department of Communities
Office for Children
Child Care Regulation Unit
Telephone: 3224 4557
or contact your local Child Care Regulation Service Centre.



Background

The growth in Queensland's population has been reflected by growth in the child care sector, with more than 2,560 licensed child care centres (including 584 school-age care services and 84 licensed family day care schemes) operating in Queensland at 30 April 2007. The 2007 report on government services states that 201,873 children attended approved child care services in Queensland in 2006.

The issue of quality child care service delivery has been raised in national and international policy agendas. The Council of Australian Governments has made a commitment to high-quality and integrated early childhood education and care services and improved early childhood development outcomes through the generation of reports, such as *Starting Strong II*, published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in 2006.

A common theme of the reports is the link between the quality of child care service provision, including the qualification levels of staff, and the long-term outcomes for children and families.

Achieving a balance between the requirement for qualified staff and the need to support services, especially in rural and remote communities can be difficult. The need for policy solutions that are workable within the sector and that support sustainable service delivery is critical. Acknowledging these issues and engaging with the sector to achieve an appropriate level of balance, is both vital and necessary to achieve high-quality education and care outcomes for all Queensland children.

In developing options to guide the future of child care service delivery and regulation, the context of service delivery in Queensland and current legislative arrangements must be appreciated. Child care in Queensland is delivered across a range of settings, in accordance with a number of models of service delivery.

The Department of Communities is committed to providing Queensland children and families with safe and suitable child care. This review of qualifications provisions is part of the department's broader commitment to continuous improvement in the area of child care service delivery, in order to provide a contemporary framework to support high-quality service provision for Queensland children and families.

The Department of Communities looks forward to further engaging with child care industry and sector representatives, training organisations, parents and the wider community to further progress the vital issue of the qualifications requirements for staff in centre and home-based services in Queensland.

Introduction

This information paper summarises the findings from the statewide consultation process of the review of the qualifications provisions outlined in the *Child Care Act 2002* and the *Child Care Regulation 2003* and outlines information about the review process and the key findings and recommendations. The Qualification Review Report was tabled in Parliament on 29 August 2007. If you are seeking further information relating to the qualifications review, the full qualification review report can be found on the Department of Communities website at: www.communities.qld.gov.au/childcare/cclegislation

Snapshot of Queensland child care services

Centre-based care services

As at 30 April 2008, the breakdown of centre-based services in Queensland includes:

- 1,421 long day care services
- 58 limited hours care services
- 345 kindergartens
- 584 school-age care services.

Of these centre-based services, 51 per cent were private (for profit) services, 46 per cent were community-based (not-for-profit) and three per cent were government-operated services.

Home-based services

The *Child Care Act 2002* and the *Child Care Regulation 2003* provides for the licensing and monitoring of home-based care, which is also known as family day care. In reviewing the qualifications provisions for staff in home-based care, the qualifications levels and types for carers and coordinators were reviewed.

As at 10 March 2008, there were 86 licensed family day care schemes in Queensland.

Investment in child care training

Over the past four years, the Department of Communities has implemented the Child Care Training Strategy and Plan, which is a joint initiative between the Department of Communities and the Department of Education, Training and the Arts to provide subsidised, flexible training to existing child care workers and to enhance the capacity of services to meet legislative requirements.

In August 2004, the then Minister for Communities approved the implementation of the Child Care Training Strategy and Plan to focus on identified high-need communities, particularly rural, remote and Indigenous communities. The training plan includes two specific components targeting child care training needs in Indigenous communities in far north Queensland and a teacher recognition program to assist qualified teachers to meet the qualification requirements of the Act. Approximately 3,200 people have graduated from the Child Care Training Strategy and Plan with either a Certificate III or Diploma qualification.

Since 2001, the Department of Communities funding to the Indigenous Remote Area Strategy, formally known as the Remote Area Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Child Care (RAATSICC), has facilitated the graduation of approximately 140 students (including trainees) across the Certificate III, Diploma, Advanced Diploma qualifications. The department also contributed nearly \$6 million to other training programs for existing workers in the industry and has subsidised 62 primary trained teachers to gain a qualification to work in child care services, including school-age care.

Through this initiative and other initiatives, the department is highlighting its commitment to investing in training to support individuals and the child care sector.

Review of legislation

The *Child Care Act 2002* (the Act) and the *Child Care Regulation 2003* (the Regulation) commenced operation on 1 September 2003. This legislation supersedes the repealed *Child Care Act 1991*, *Child Care Regulation (Child Care Centres) 1991* and the *Child Care (Family Day Care) Regulation 1991*.

The Act introduced the requirement for a minimum qualification for staff in centre-based services and the removal of the certificate of endorsement previously issued to enable unqualified staff to work in child care services. The Regulation outlines the qualification requirements for the positions of assistant, group leader and director in a centre-based service, the positions of group leader and assistant in school-aged care services and the position of a coordinator in a home-based service.

Section 172 of the Act requires a review of the qualification requirements to be conducted within three years of the commencement of the legislation and for a report on the outcome of the review to be tabled in the Legislative Assembly within four years of the commencement of the legislation. The report was tabled in the Legislative Assembly on 29 August 2007.

The consultation process

1. The department undertook community consultation between November 2006 and May 2007. This involved:
 - a consultation paper that was distributed to all licensed child care services in Queensland, inviting written submissions to the review
 - an online consultation via the Queensland Government's 'Get Involved' website
 - a total of 31 face-to-face consultation sessions held in 16 locations across Queensland including Emerald, Mt Isa, Mackay, Rockhampton, Toowoomba, Townsville, Cairns, Atherton, Ipswich, Logan, Gold Coast, Chermshire, Mt Gravatt, Brisbane City, Caloundra, and Bundaberg
 - a parent survey that was distributed to all licensed child care services in Queensland
 - meetings held with the Queensland Child Care Forum (which includes representatives from the child care sector, academics, other professionals and relevant government agencies).
2. Information about the Qualifications Review was available on the department's website and posters and press advertisements were produced to promote consultation and invite interested parties to provide feedback to the department.
3. A total of 797 responses were received, including 165 online responses, 77 written submissions, 214 surveys completed by parents and input from 341 participants at the statewide face-to-face consultation sessions.
4. Respondents included child care licensees, peak organisations, parents, child care staff, registered training organisations, community child care centres, community kindergartens and members of the public.

The findings and results of this report are based on:

- 77 written submissions
- 165 online responses, from the Get Involved website
- 31 face-to-face consultation sessions held in 16 locations across Queensland in March, April and May 2007, involving over 300 participants
- 214 surveys specifically designed for parents
- two teleconferences with regional departmental staff held across Queensland in April 2007
- consultation with government agencies.

Key findings

The following is a summary of the key findings of the review:

1. There is general support for the current levels of qualifications prescribed under the Act (that is, assistants at Certificate III level, group leaders at Diploma level, directors at Advanced Diploma and Degree levels etc).
2. There is general support for the current provisions that allow the engagement of carers without the relevant qualification, provided they commence and complete a relevant course within a certain period of time.
3. There is some confusion over the application of the provisions regarding commencement and completion of study. In particular, there is concern within the sector that some assistants are changing centres to avoid enrolling in a course relevant to their position, and as a result, remain unqualified.
4. There is concern over the level of experience of group leaders who may, under the current legislation, continue working in the position without having completed the relevant qualification for a significant period of time.
5. There is concern that in some centre-based services where potentially no group leaders hold the prescribed qualification, there is a deficit in programming skills across the centre.
6. There is concern about the level of staffing during rest periods in child care centres. In particular, the stress placed on staff during those periods and the perceived risk to children.
7. The nature of school age care poses significant challenges to recruiting and retaining a qualified, stable workforce.
8. There is general support for the range of qualifications acceptable for carers in school-age care services to be broadened to enhance the experiences available to children accessing those services and to further support recruitment to those sectors.
9. There is general support for the introduction of a qualification requirement for family day carers and a perception that formal study would assist carers in their position.
10. The wages and conditions of child care staff remain a vital concern to the industry and sector more broadly.

Other comments

In addition to the feedback collated from the consultation, some issues were raised that were outside the scope of the review. These issues related to the content and quality of training provided by registered training organisations, professional development opportunities, duplication of monitoring and quality assurance activities, child care worker wages and employment conditions. The department is in the process of providing this additional feedback to the relevant agencies.

List of recommendations

The department will undertake further consultations with relevant stakeholders prior to finalising the legislative proposals contained in the recommendations.

Recommendations contained in the report are outlined as follows:

Recommendation 1

- That the current qualification requirements for assistants in centre-based services remain the same.
- That the period of time for an assistant to enrol in study from the time of commencement in the role be reduced from six months to three months, under section 118 of the Regulation.

Recommendation 2

- That the current qualification requirements for group leaders in centre-based services remain the same.
- That the period of time for a group leader to enrol in study from the time of commencement in the role remains the same.
- That child care centres with a licensed capacity of less than 30 children must have at least one fully qualified group leader.
- That child care centres with a licensed capacity of more than 30 children must have at least two fully qualified group leaders.

Recommendation 3

- That the current qualification requirements for directors in centre-based services remain the same.
- That the period of time for a director to enrol in study from the time of commencement in the role be reduced from six months to three months.

Recommendation 4

- That the current qualification requirements for staff in school age care services, as prescribed under section 120 of the Regulation, be extended to include areas such as the arts, music, drama.

Recommendation 5

- That the current qualification requirements for coordinators in home-based services remain the same.
- That a requirement for family day carers to have commenced study towards a Certificate III within a transitional period of two years be introduced.
- That the experience of senior family day carers is recognised within the industry by providing that family day carers over 55 years of age are not required to meet the requirement to commence study within two years.

Recommendation 6

- That the current rest period provision for centre-based services in the Act be amended to require all services to comply with schedule 1 in the Regulation at all times throughout the day.
- That the staffing requirements as outlined in section 25 of the Regulation be reviewed to allow for increased flexibility during rest periods.

Recommendation 7

- That the legislative provisions in relation to prescribed finishing periods under sections 118 and 119 of the Regulation be reviewed to clarify the requirements.
- That a requirement be introduced to develop and maintain policies about monitoring the progress of employees through qualifications.

Recommendation 8

- That the Department of Communities conduct a policy review to streamline the process of determination of qualifications.

Additional information

- The Qualifications Review Report was tabled in Parliament on 29 August 2007.
- A link to the Qualifications Review Report and this information paper can be found on the Department of Communities website at: www.communities.qld.gov.au/childcare/cclegislation
- The Department of Communities is conducting a review of the Act and the Regulation which will provide further opportunities for sector consultation.

The Department of Communities looks forward to further engaging with child care industry and sector representatives to further progress the vital issue of the qualifications requirements for staff in centre and home-based services in Queensland.

Acknowledgements

The Department of Communities would like to acknowledge the cooperation and assistance from all parties who have contributed valuable feedback into this review process. Your views and experiences have been vital in informing the review and supporting and promoting safe and suitable child care in Queensland.

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