



**National Childcare
Accreditation Council Inc.**

Level 3, 418a Elizabeth Street
Surry Hills NSW 2010 Australia
Telephone: 61 2 8260 1900
Facsimile: 61 2 8260 1901
E-mail: qualitycare@ncac.gov.au
Web: www.ncac.gov.au
ABN: 82 270 247 664
ARBN: 110 877 524

Validation Evaluation Form Analysis

Validation Visits Conducted October / November 2006

The National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC) conducts an annual analysis of the *Validation Evaluation Forms* received from services having had a Validation Visit. The *Validation Evaluation Forms* demonstrate the satisfaction of services participating in the Child Care Quality Assurance (CCQA) systems with Step 3: Validation.

The results of this analysis inform Validator feedback and NCAC processes of continuing improvement in the revision of the standards of quality care, developments in the administration of the CCQA systems and the provision of resources to services, families, Validators and key stakeholders.

Validation Visits October / November 2006

NCAC is responsible for the administration of the following CCQA systems:

- Family Day Care Quality Assurance (FDCQA) for family day care schemes
- Outside School Hours Care Quality Assurance (OSHCQA) for outside school hours care services
- Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS) for long day care centres

In May 2006, the Hon Senator Mal Brough announced a number of changes to the CCQA systems administered by NCAC. These changes included the introduction of unannounced Validation Visits to ensure that family day care schemes, outside school hours care services and long day care centres across Australia provide quality care to children at all times.

Unannounced Validation Visits commenced for child care services that submitted a *Self-study Report* from July 2006. Announced Validation Visits scheduled prior to July 2006 also took place during this reporting period. During October and November 2006, 622 Validation Visits were conducted as follows:

Validation Visits: 1 October – 30 November 2006			
	Announced Validation Visits	Unannounced Validation Visits	Total Validation Visits
FDCQA	17	1	18
OSHCQA	233	53	286
QIAS	36	282	318
Total	286	336	622

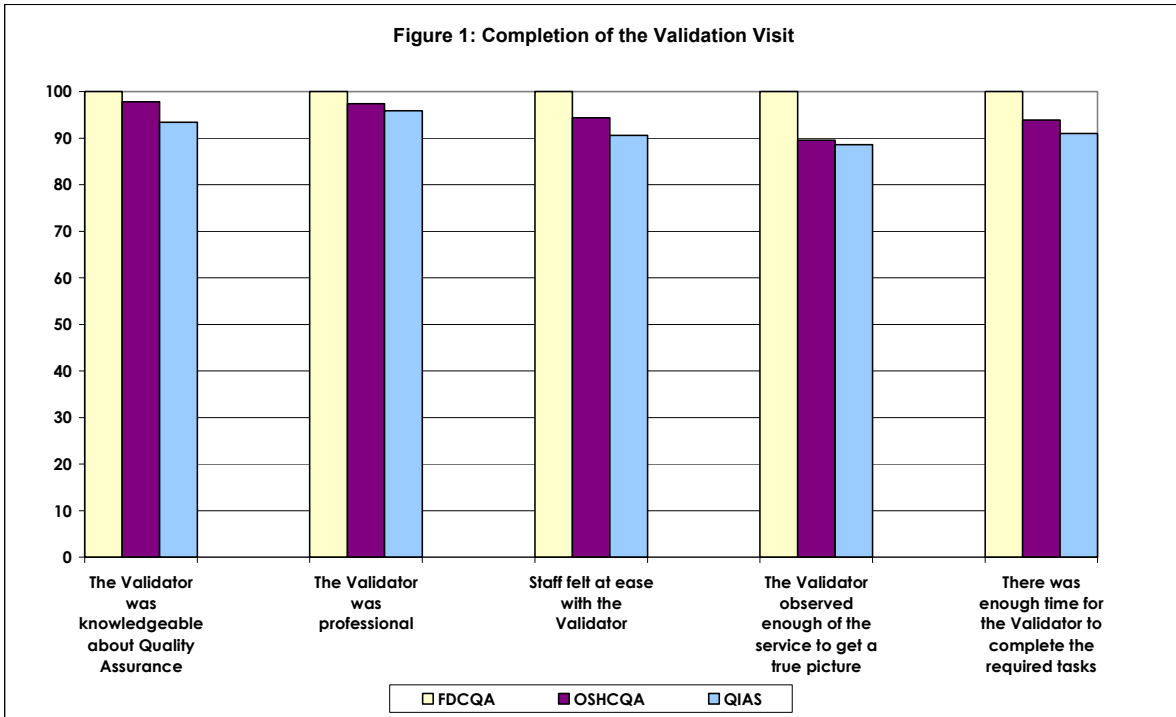
NCAC received *Validation Evaluation Forms* from **86%** of those services which had a Validation Visit during October and November 2006. A total of **535** services returned their *Validation Evaluation Forms* for this period, comprising 18 family day care schemes, 229 outside school hours care services and 288 long day care centres.

The following report summarises the responses collected from all *Validation Evaluation Forms* returned by services that received a Validation Visit during October and November 2006, and demonstrates that the majority of services participating in the CCQA systems had positive Validation experiences.

Perceptions of the Validator

NCAC aims to ensure that at least 85% of services are satisfied with CCQA processes. Services are asked a range of questions regarding the performance of their Validator and the completion of their Validation Visit.

On average, over a range of measures of the Validator's performance, more than **95%** of child care services indicated that they were satisfied with the completion of their Validation Visit (Figure 1).



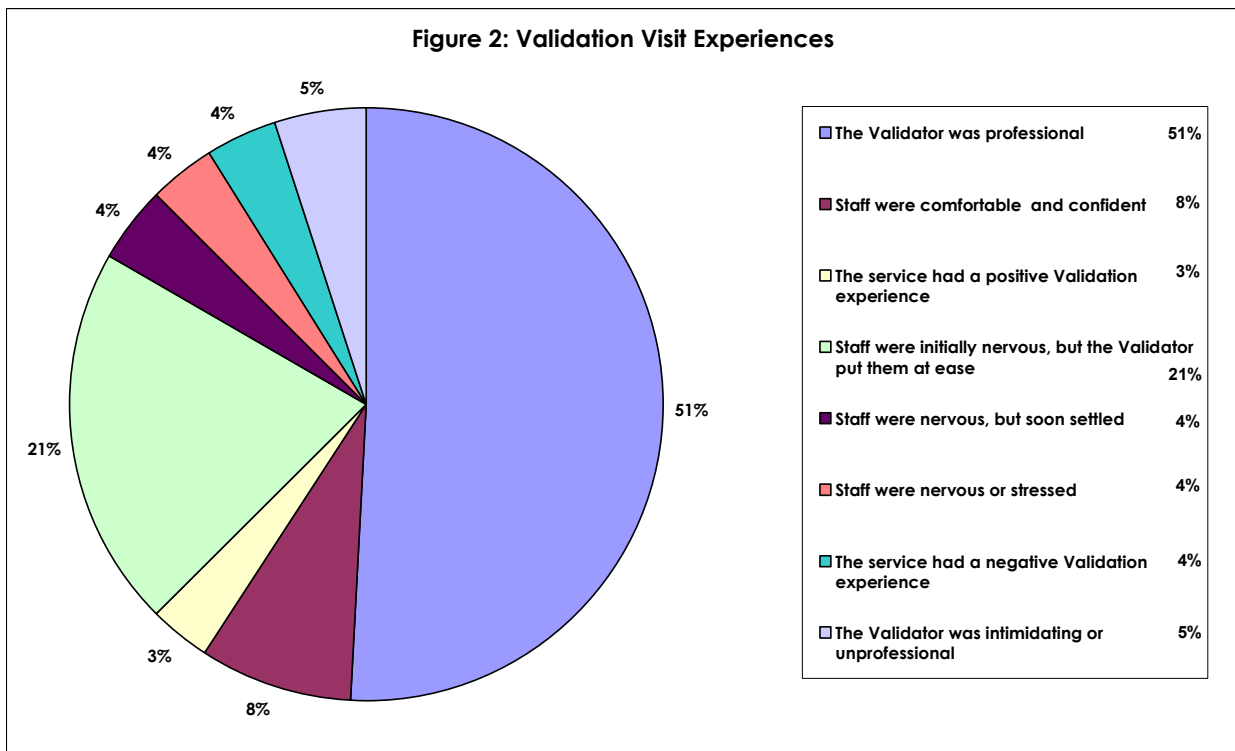
Those services which received an announced Validation Visit were asked to rate their Validator across a range of performance measures. On average, services rated the performance of their Validator as follows:

Performance of the Validator	
The Validator was punctual	92%
The Validator was courteous	99%
The Validator was prepared	99%
The Validator was objective	95%

Validation Visit Experiences

Those services undergoing an announced Validation Visit were asked to describe how the service felt about being observed, while those undergoing an unannounced Validation Visit were asked to comment on the performance of their Validator. 95% of respondents provided an answer to these questions.

Of those services which provided a response, 87% were positive towards their experiences at Validation. As demonstrated by Figure 2, 51% of respondents found the Validator to be of a professional standard. Comments indicated that Validators were knowledgeable, thorough, approachable and put staff at ease. 8% of all services were comfortable and confident throughout their Validation Visit, while a further 25% of services, while initially nervous, soon settled or were put at ease upon meeting their Validator. A further 3% of services stated that they had a positive Validation experience.



Notable differences in the data included:

- A higher proportion of outside school hours care services were likely to be comfortable and confident during a Validation Visit than family day care schemes or long day care centres.
- A higher proportion of family day care schemes reported their Validator to be professional, friendly and approachable than outside school hours care services or long day care centres.
- A higher proportion of long day care centres found their Validator to be intimidating or unprofessional during an unannounced Validation Visit, than family day care schemes or outside school hours care services.

Comments about service Validation Visit experiences

Family Day Care

VF646: The Validator appeared to have extensive knowledge of family day care and emergent issues facing the industry. All felt the Validator was a highly skilled professional - if only all Validators had the same professionalism, knowledge and interaction skills.

VF645: The scheme was apprehensive in anticipation of being observed, but once the Validator arrived she managed to put the staff, carers, parents and children at ease with her calm manner and very professional approach.

VF602: The carers were extremely nervous and worried. Overall, the scheme found the Validation Visit to be a very positive experience. The Validator was easy to talk to, able to put carers' minds at ease and very approachable. Unfortunately, most of the carers visited were very nervous and felt that the future of the scheme rested on their shoulders.

Outside School Hours Care

VC3342: The Validator was unobtrusive and observant. She asked questions and allowed us to see her assessments/reports. The process was smooth and transparent. She was approachable and showed she had passion for child care principles and concepts.

VC1686: The service was quite relaxed about being observed. We were quite prepared for the outcome, whatever it may be as we realised that this system is to help improve our service and to ensure that reflective practice is standard. We also know that if we fail that it does not mean that we are providing a poor service but that we need to assess our practices, altering accordingly.

VC2174: Obviously nervous as it was our first time. However, we felt prepared for the process. The Validator however did not make the staff feel comfortable. The Validator made the staff more nervous and showed no empathy to the situation.

VC1778: Terrified! We felt as if all policies and procedures were being followed correctly, but it's always difficult to have a stranger observing. However, the Validator made us feel much more comfortable with the process.

Long Day Care

VQ18260: The Validator's relaxed but professional manner reduced our high levels of stress and nerves linked to the new system of unannounced visits. We found the Validator to be a skilled observer who displayed a thorough knowledge and understanding of the validation criteria. The Validator's approach to the staff was helpful and non-threatening. We found her to be respectful and fair.

VQ18507: Overall we feel the performance of the Validator to be quite poor. She was quite negative in her interactions with staff. She seemed more concerned about challenging our documentation rather than watching and observing what occurs on a daily basis.

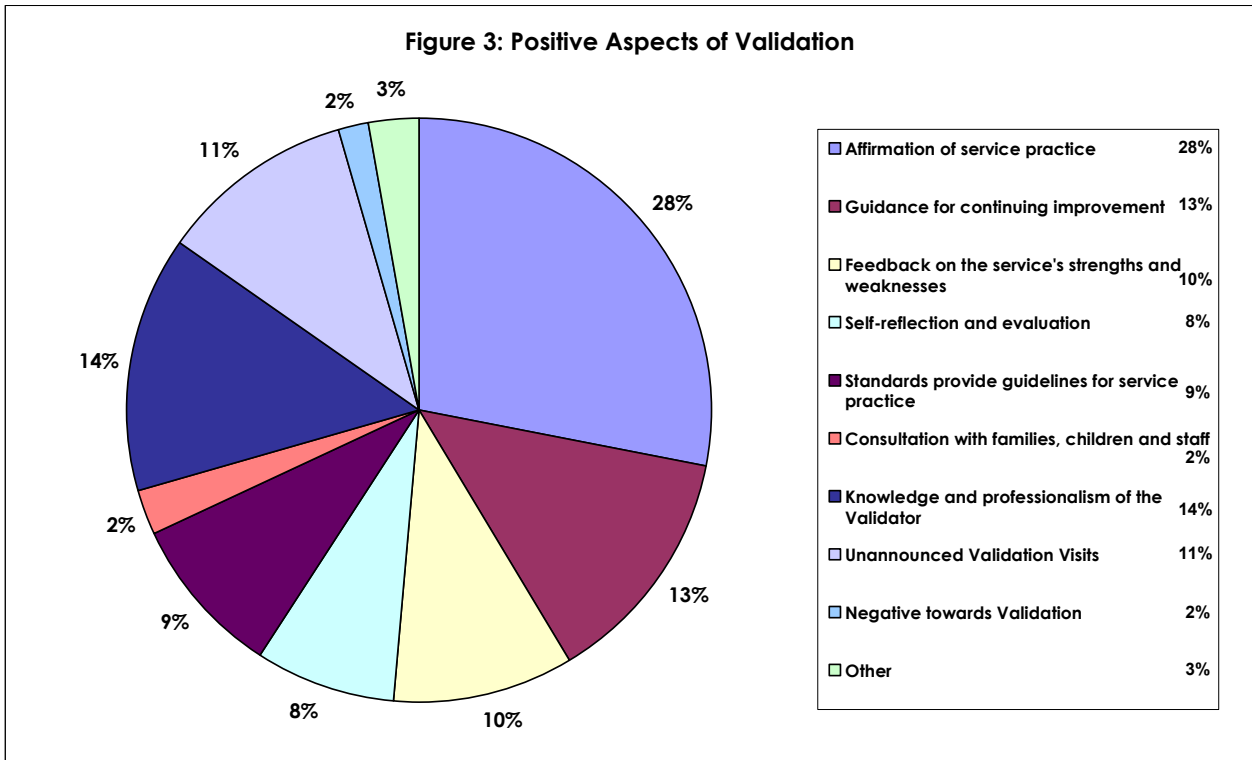
VQ18457: Overall the centre was happy with the conduct of the Validator, however, we believe more time should have been allocated to final report, in which [the] centre was not given enough time to show supporting evidence/documents of some high quality practices marked Not Occurring by the Validator.

VQ18184: At first all staff were quite nervous as some have never experienced the Accreditation process before. Throughout the day staff started to feel at ease as the Validator made all staff feel comfortable and natural throughout the course of the day.

Positive Aspects of the Validation Process

Services receiving an unannounced Validation Visit were asked to comment on the most positive aspects of Validation. 92% of services that received an unannounced Validation Visit responded to this question.

98% of those services which provided a response to this question were positive towards the Validation process (Figure 3). Most services identified Validation as an opportunity for recognition, guidance, evaluation and consultation. 11% of services noted positive responses to the commencement of unannounced Validation Visits, while 14% commented favourably on the professional standard of the Validator.



Notable differences in the data included:

- A higher proportion of long day care centres than family day care schemes or outside school hours care services provided positive responses regarding unannounced Validation Visits.
- A higher proportion of outside school hours care services than family day care schemes or long day care centres appreciated Validation as an opportunity to receive feedback on both the service's strengths and weaknesses.

Comments about positive aspects of Validation

Family Day Care

VF751: *Reassurance that we are doing well. Unannounced visits are great. It was a very positive experience for staff, carers and children.*

Outside School Hours Care

VC1041: *As there are no set regulations for [before and after school care] services the validation process is a particularly valuable experience to make services aware of what is required of them.*

VC118: *Identifying where improvements need to be made and seeing this improvement occur. The reassurance that we are doing the job right and providing a quality service to the community.*

Long Day Care

VQ18250: *I feel that the unannounced visit is a very positive aspect of the process as it has given staff and management confirmation that we do have a continual, consistently high quality service. The process as a whole was extremely positive and especially any contact that we had with NCAC was very positive.*

VQ18338: *Staff development and journey through the process, acquiring knowledge and skill to utilise each day. Parents are provided with a more inclusive role within the service as you provide them information about the Accreditation process.*

Suggestions for Improvement

All services were invited to provide suggestions as to how the Validation process could be improved. They were also asked to provide additional comments or feedback on their participation in CCQA. Responses to these questions have been combined, due to the similarity in the comments received. 76% of respondents provided a response to these questions, as follows:

Positive Aspects of Validation:

- 14% provided positive feedback regarding their Validation Visit, referring to QA processes, the professionalism of their Validator and improvements that have been made to the systems to date.
- 13% felt that CCQA and the Validation process provided a positive learning and evaluative experience for the service, staff and carers.

QA Processes:

- 17% provided general comments regarding QA processes. These included the streamlining of standards documents to avoid repetition, extension of the *Validation Report Discussion* and allowing Validators to provide suggestions for improvement at the service.
- 6% suggested that the duration of Validation Visits should be extended to provide more time to complete Validation.
- 4% felt that the documentation and time requirements of CCQA were excessive.

CCQA Changes:

- 9% raised concerns regarding unannounced Validation Visits, citing additional pressure placed on staff as a primary concern
- 5% were positive towards the changes to the CCQA systems, including the introduction of unannounced Validation Visits, Spot Checks and staff (non-peer) Validators.

NCAC Resources and Support:

- 9% suggested that Validator training should be improved to encourage greater consistency between Validators, to increase Validator objectivity and ensure that correct procedures are followed.
- 8% suggested that the communication and support provided by NCAC prior to a Validation Visit could be improved. Suggestions included the provision of additional QA training, information for staff about what to expect at Validation and a list of evidence required at Validation.
- 5% raised concerns regarding the *Validation Surveys*, suggesting that the *Validation Survey for Families* be made more user friendly and include space for additional comment, and that the *Survey for Children* be amended to meet the age requirements of school age children.

Other Comments:

- 8% provided justification of service practice for consideration at Moderation.
- 2% provided a range of other responses.

Suggestions for improvement of the Validation process

Family Day Care

VF647: *Our scheme feels very confident about our ongoing participation in the QA process - however, concern would relate to apprehension about interpretation of principles and quality indicators.*

VF714: *This was a very positive experience. By maintaining the standard of Validator we experienced this time, NCAC will ensure other schemes have a positive experience too.*

Outside School Hours Care

VC1747: *We were pleased to participate in QA. We work hard to provide families with a great centre and it is great to have benchmarks to strive for. QA is necessary for all centres to be accountable and provide the best service to all children in our care.*

VC2261: *Children's Surveys only provide a limited amount of useful feedback, even when completed one-on-one with an older child and staff member/adult. Also, many parents commented that they were guessing with some questions even though we have provided parents with factsheets, posters etc.*

VC169: *As coordinator I feel the experience of OSHCQA participation was very rewarding. It forces you to assess your practices and procedures in a very positive way. Although I was very scared 2 years ago of the process and workload, I have found it to be a very rewarding process and one which is promoting the quality and professionalism within OSHC services.*

VC1709: *I believe we should have more information about what to expect regarding the Validation Visit. We had many mixed messages from training sessions and network meetings about what we should and shouldn't do and what might or might not happen.*

Long Day Care

VQ17990: *It would be really helpful to receive clear information on what policies are required and how they should be reviewed.*

VQ18394: *We always find that this process not only focuses us on specific quality aspects about our centre and how we can improve but also brings the staff together as a team, all working together and supporting each other, sharing information and learning together.*

VQ17994: *It is felt by staff and families that too much written documentation is required. Families put their children into childcare to have all staff interact with their child, not for staff to produce reams of paperwork.*

VQ17777: *The Validation process can be improved if Validators strive to put staff at ease and make the Validation process more of a shared, positive experience for the centre staff, families, children and the Validator. Validators need to have a current working knowledge of what can be realistically achieved within the various early childhood settings.*

VQ17684: *I feel the Validation process has already improved if this Validator is an indication of the training they are now receiving. The time frame in which the visit is to take place could possibly be a little shorter.*

CCQA Changes

In May 2006, the Hon Senator Mal Brough announced a number of changes to the CCQA systems administered by NCAC. These changes included the introduction of unannounced Validation Visits, unannounced Spot Checks and non-peer Validators. Each of these changes will help to ensure that family day care schemes, outside school hours care services and long day care centres across Australia provide quality care to children at all times.

Feedback regarding the introduction of the CCQA changes was provided by some long day care services and outside school hours care services in their *Validation Evaluation Forms* as follows:

Comments regarding changes to the CCQA systems

Outside School Hours Care

VC1583: *We were given a window of 6 weeks in which to expect the Validation Visit. No matter how confident you may be about the delivery of your OSHC service, the time waiting for the Validator's Visit is extremely stressful. I feel a timeframe for the visit could be much shorter.*

Long Day Care

VQ18441: *Having unannounced Validation allows the centre to show the quality of their practice as it occurs daily and encourages centres to continually work toward quality improvement. Validation also provides centre staff with feedback at an industry level which assists with self-evaluation and professional development.*

VQ17877: *As a service we were really surprised at how much more relaxed staff were with the unannounced visit. This will be a huge reform for the child care industry. After going through an unannounced visit the process is less stressful and gives a better picture of how services really operate.*

VQ17744: *Our whole staff team think that unannounced visits are a positive change in the Accreditation process. We feel that this will certainly give a much more realistic picture of daily life/practice in long day care centres. We feel that peer evaluation (Validation) is of vital importance to the continued growth and professionalism of early childhood. Validators who are currently employed in early childhood are going to be more up to date and aware of the detail of current issues and practices in early childhood - this current knowledge is very quickly lost if you are not involved day to day.*

VQ18094: *We were exceptionally nervous about the unannounced visit BUT agreed wholeheartedly. We are very impressed with our first unannounced visit and very happy to participate. Whilst it has been and will continue to be hard work, it is wonderful that it is all about the children.*

VQ17963: *Not a 6 week wait period for Validation. I have been through accreditation since the very beginning. Staff are nervous as it is, and now making it unannounced for 6 weeks is far too long, it impacts on them and then can impact on children. I support the system and NCAC's intent, but believe even the 6 weeks is too long and should be reduced.*

VQ17687: *We strongly agree that general 'spot checks' between Validation Visits would help ensure processes are genuine and ongoing. Validation Visits could be given definite dates - this would lessen tensions for staff generally.*

Additional Information

Services are provided with the opportunity to attach additional information to the *Validation Evaluation Form* for consideration at Step 4: Moderation.

- 13% of respondents provided information regarding service practice in relation to the Indicators and Principles marked Not Occurring in their *Validation Report*.
- 1% of respondents raised concerns regarding the *Validation Surveys* for families and children.
- 86% of respondents did not provide additional information with their *Validation Evaluation Form*.

NCAC Support for Stakeholders

NCAC consistently seeks the views of the child care community about all aspects of CCQA. The constructive feedback provided by child care services on their *Validation Evaluation Form* informs the revision of the standards of quality care, developments in the administration of the CCQA systems and the provision of resources to services, families, Validators, Moderators and key stakeholders.

Current NCAC initiatives in response to the feedback provided in *Validation Evaluation Forms* include:

- The development of the *NCAC Policy Development Guide* and *Policy Templates* to assist services to achieve Satisfactory standards.
- Continuing improvement of Validator Training, particularly with the introduction of staff Validators, to ensure greater consistency and objectivity.
- The publication of articles in *Putting Children First*, NCAC's quarterly newsletter, to assist services as they progress through quality assurance, covering issues such as unannounced Validation Visits, inclusion and professional support for services, policy development and NCAC support and resources for services.
- The development of *Factsheets* and *Supplementary Resources* to assist services with issues identified in the *Validation Evaluation Forms*.