

**ACCREDITATION IN CHILDCARE CENTRES:  
A PUBLIC POLICY ANALYSIS**

**The Quality Improvement and Accreditation System**

BY  
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A thesis (Type 2) submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree of  
Master of Education of the University of Canberra

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## ABSTRACT

This study provides a multi-perspective analysis of the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS) using current research findings into public policy implementation, to determine their influence and applicability to policy outcomes. The QIAS is a quality improvement accreditation system introduced into long day care centres in Australia by the Commonwealth Government in 1994. The key research questions were:

To what extent do current research findings into public policy implementation influence and apply to the QIAS policy outcomes?

What impact has QIAS had on children, parents and staff in long day care centres and the community?

Supporting factors for successful policy implementation and innovation were identified from the literature review. These were: input into the development of the policy; fit and adaptation; will; capacity (personal and resource capacity); pressure and support; training; and government mandate. The authors from which these factors were derived included Fullan (1991); McLaughlin (1987); McDonell and Elmore (1987); Parish and Arends (1983); Miles (1983); Huberman (1983); Hasenfeld (1983); Elmore (1979-1980); McLaughlin and Marsh (1978). In addition, Dunn's (1981) six criteria for policy recommendation: effectiveness; efficiency; adequacy; equity; responsiveness; and appropriateness were identified. The supporting factors and Dunn's (1981) criteria for policy recommendation are used as the conceptual framework of this study. Existing research into the QIAS program is also examined and used to inform the study.

To gain the multi-perspective approach of the study, data has been gathered from: practitioners, directors and staff in 20 Australian Capital Territory (ACT) long day care

centres; the Administrative Unit of the National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC); and a policy-maker involved in the development and implementation of QIAS.

Conclusions have been drawn in relation to the QIAS program and in terms of the implications for public policy implementation.

There is an overwhelming agreement by directors and staff in this study, that QIAS is both worthwhile and appropriate to the current needs of childcare. In addition, the vast majority of participants consider QIAS has improved the quality of childcare. There have been significant positive effects of QIAS for children, staff and parents. The government mandate, combined with adequate support are crucial factors in the successful implementation of QIAS.

The combination of the supporting factors for successful policy implementation, mentioned above and Dunn's (1981) criteria for policy recommendation, provided a framework for the analysis of the QIAS policy and a vehicle for policy evaluation.

Three areas with implications for future practice are identified from this study. These concern the need for direct access by staff in long day care centres to support and training programs; the increased involvement of parents in childcare; and the use of the QIAS development and implementation process, with some modifications, as a future model for policy implementation.

Three areas for further research are identified. These are the investigation of access issues for trained and untrained staff to support programs and the type of programs these staff would find most useful; the identification of the level and type of involvement desired by parents in their childcare centres; and the further use of the model developed in this study for public policy evaluation.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the following:

Dr Mike Gaffney, my thesis supervisor, for his expert advice, mentoring, support and encouragement at all stages of the development of this thesis.

The Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services for providing public reports on the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System.

The national office of the Australian Early Childhood Association, for their assistance in providing documents and background material on the development of QIAS.

All the participants in this study who gave so generously of their time: the directors and staff in ACT long day care centres; the policy-maker, who gave both time and resources; and the Administrative Unit of NCAC.

My husband for his assistance with data entry and editing of this document through all phases of its development.

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