

Monitoring and assessment framework

Statutory out-of-home care and adoption

March 2025

Fact sheet

Monitoring and assessment framework

The Children's Guardian accredits designated agencies and adoption service providers and monitors their compliance with accreditation requirements. Our accreditation scheme aims to ensure that children and young people in out-of-home care and adoption arrangements receive appropriate standards of care. These standards of care are set out in the NSW Child Safe Standards for Permanent Care (the Standards).

When an agency is granted accreditation, the OCG monitors compliance with the Standards over the course of the accreditation period. A mix of agency self-reporting and onsite visits to review a sample of practice is used to monitor compliance requirements. At the end of an agency's accreditation period, the OCG reviews the information it has gathered through the monitoring program to inform a decision about whether to renew the agency's accreditation.

This approach gives the OCG important information about whether the agency is able to maintain good practice over the course of its accreditation cycle, and whether the agency has systems that allow it to pick up risks of gaps in practice and manage them.

Agency status update

The OCG will monitor agencies on an annual basis to understand how agencies' quality assurance systems are helping them to maintain compliance with their accreditation requirements, and to identify areas for practice improvement.

Annual monitoring will be done in two ways, over the course of an agency's accreditation cycle. Some years, the agency will be required to submit an Agency Status Update (ASU) which will set out what areas of practice improvement the agency is focusing on that year, challenges the agency may be facing and key changes in the agency.

On other years, OCG assessors will visit the agency to undertake an onsite assessment of the agency's practices. During these assessments, assessors will verify the information the agency has provided in its ASU is evident in practice. The information in the ASU forms part of the evidence the OCG relies on when making a decision to renew an agency's accreditation.

The OCG will contact your agency when an ASU is required, to discuss the process.

Monitoring visits

Agencies will receive at least two monitoring visits during their accreditation cycle. The information we gather will form part of the evidence we rely on to make a decision whether to renew an agency's accreditation.

Monitoring visits to agencies determine whether systems are in place to meet the requirements of the Standards, and whether these systems are consistently implemented. OCG assessors will visit agencies' offices and may also visit residential care units, where relevant.

Assessors ask agencies to explain the systems they have in place to meet the requirements of the Standards and describe how these systems work. During onsite monitoring visits assessors test the efficacy of the systems described. Assessors review a sample of records to see whether the system the agency has described can be seen in practice.

After speaking with staff and reviewing a sample of practice, assessors talk to the agency about what is observed in the records reviewed. If there are significant gaps in practice, assessors may ask the agency if there are other materials that should be reviewed to understand the agency's systems. If assessors have concerns about the safety, welfare or wellbeing of individual children they will

alert the agency immediately and make reports to the Child Protection Helpline where necessary.

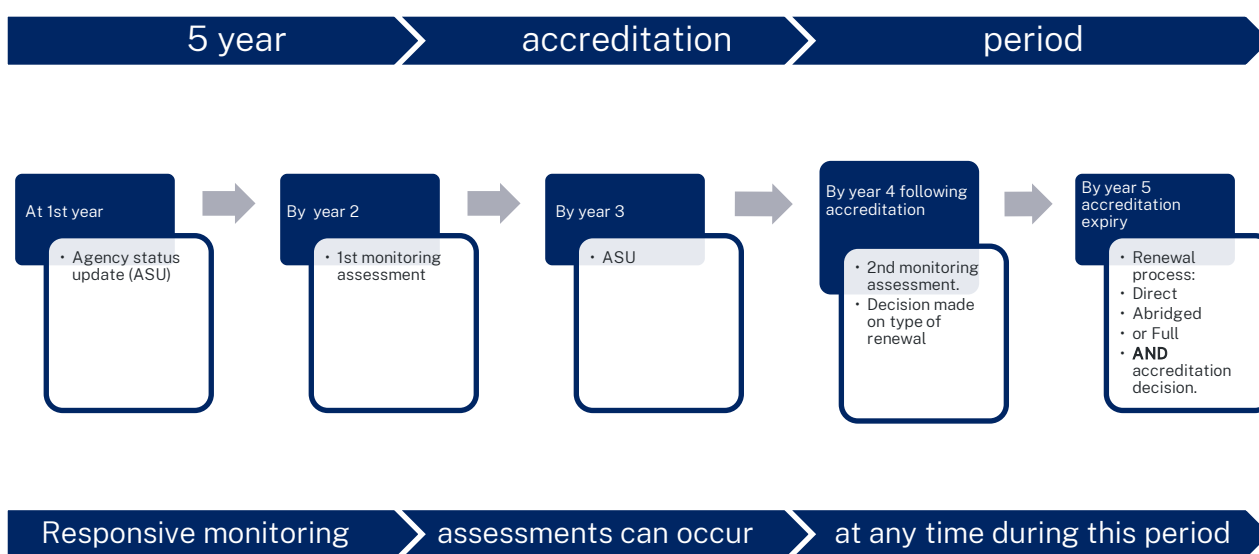
Responsive monitoring

The OCG may undertake a responsive monitoring visit to an agency at any time. These monitoring visits may happen if we have concerns about an agency’s compliance with the Standards or where there are conditions on an agency’s accreditation that need more regular monitoring.

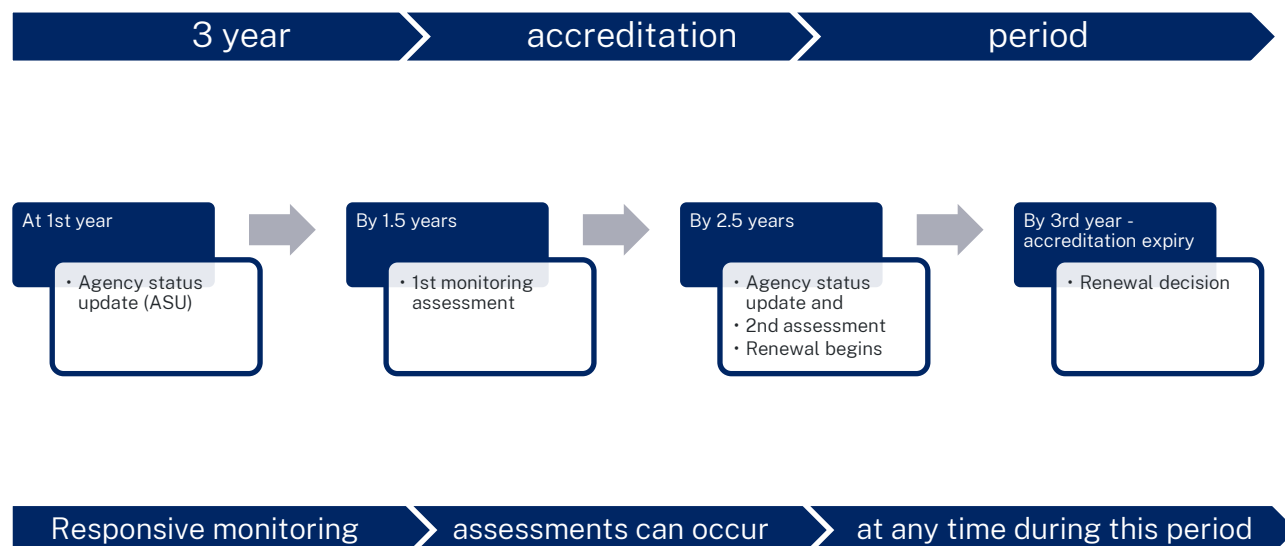
Accreditation cycles

The flowcharts below set out a typical accreditation cycle. Flowchart 1 sets out the process for an agency that is accredited for five years, and flowchart 2 sets out the process for an agency that is accredited for three years.

Flowchart 1 sets out the proposed process for an agency that holds full accreditation for 5 years



Flowchart 2 sets out the proposed process for an agency that holds full accreditation for 3 years.



Making accreditation renewal decisions

At the end of an agency's accreditation cycle, the OCG will review the information from the agency status update and monitoring visits to determine the accreditation renewal pathway.

Some agencies will not need to participate in a renewal assessment and may have their accreditation renewed directly based on the information gathered through the agency status update and onsite visits.

Direct renewal

Direct renewal may be considered where the agency holds full accreditation for five years and has consistently demonstrated that it has effective systems to ensure compliance with the standards. Under direct renewal the agency does not need an onsite assessment of practice. The decision to renew the agency will be based on information gathered in the agency status updates and the onsite monitoring visits. Agencies on a direct renewal pathway will not be required to participate in an accreditation renewal assessment.

Abridged renewal

Abridge renewal may be considered where the agency currently holds full accreditation and has had areas for improvement identified throughout the monitoring to renewal program that require changes to systems or practices. The abridged renewal process will include an onsite renewal assessment and will primarily focus on the areas for improvement or changes to systems and practices identified during the monitoring program.

Full renewal

Full renewal will apply to:

- agencies holding provisional accreditation and applying for full accreditation
- agencies fully accredited that have had ongoing gaps in practice or noncompliance with the standards and have shown little improvement in practice over the monitoring program.

Assessing systems to support practice

The OCG does not review the circumstances of every child in out-of-home care or adoption arrangements. Rather, the OCG considers whether an agency has systems in place that will help it deliver services that meet the requirements of the Standards.

A **system** is a series of interlocking processes that assist an organisation to deliver its desired outcomes. Systems serve a number of important functions in an organisation, including:

- providing a structure for staff to work within and understand their roles and responsibilities
- making sure important information flows within an organisation
- helping staff organise and prioritise their work
- helping an organisation build its philosophy of care into practice
- helping senior decision-makers to keep track of the agency's performance and ensuring key tasks are not forgotten or overlooked.

During onsite visits to agencies, the OCG will speak with agency staff to understand the agency's systems to support practice. Assessors will then review a sample of practice to see if the agency's systems are evident in practice.

Evaluation and continuous improvement of practice

An important part of an agency's systems to support practice are its evaluation and continuous improvement activities. The OCG is looking for evidence that an agency has processes to regularly review its own work and identify its areas of strength and areas for improvement. This includes systems to monitor the agency's ongoing compliance with the requirements in the Standards.

Agencies with strong systems to support evaluation and continuous improvement commonly have the following elements:

- They have an organisation-wide attitude that the agency is responsible for its own compliance and the quality of its services.
- They have an attitude that feedback – both positive and negative– is an opportunity to improve.
- They analyse information regarding risk, such as complaints, reportable conduct allegations and critical incidents, to identify trends and opportunities for improvement.
- They conduct regular reviews of a cross-section of work to consider whether the agency's policies and procedures are being properly implemented. This includes a regular review of a sample of children's or caregiver's files.
- Their file audits or file reviews do not only review whether a document is on file or if a task has been completed but also consider the *quality* of the work. For example, systems that consider whether a case plan has been developed with the participation of children and their carers and family are more likely to promote quality practice than systems that only check if a case plan is on file.
- They use staff supervision to review quality of practice and identify where there are support or training needs.
- Their policies and procedures are regularly reviewed and updated to reflect the agency's expectations regarding practice.