



EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION & CARE

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN



INDEPENDENT
SCHOOLS
AUSTRALIA

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ABBREVIATIONS

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACECQA	Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority
ACCS	Additional Child Care Subsidy
AEDC	Australian Early Development Census
AIS	Association of Independent Schools
CCS	Child Care Subsidy
CCSS	Child Care Subsidy System
ECE	Early childhood education
ELC	Early learning centre
EYLF	Early Years Learning Framework
FaFT	Families as First Teachers program
FFC	Funding Follows Child
ISP	Inclusion Support Program
NP	National Partnership
LDC	Long day care
NECECC	National Early Childhood Education and Care Collection
NQF	National Quality Framework
NQS	National Quality Standard
NT DoE	Northern Territory Department of Education
OSHC	Outside school hours care
PRA	Preschool Reform Agreement
UANP	Universal Access National Partnership
VET	Vocational Education and Training
YBFS	Year Before Formal Schooling

Independent Schools Australia (ISA) acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and recognises continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging, and commit to the ongoing journey of reconciliation.

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1.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Providers of early childhood education and care operate in a sector where arrangements differ according to jurisdictions, sectors and types of early childhood services.

Research has clearly established the first five years of life as critical for building the foundations of brain development, life-long learning, well-being and health.¹ National investment in early learning is a priority for the Australian Government and state and territory governments with the goal of supporting early childhood development, reducing inequities, producing savings in health and education expenditures and improving Australian economic productivity.

Participation in high quality early childhood education and care builds strong foundations for learning and has a positive influence on the development of independence, life skills, a sense of belonging and school readiness.

1.1 EARLY CHILDHOOD SECTOR DATA

Early childhood education and care for children from birth to five years can take many forms and although there are several large-scale data sets available on the early childhood sector, the complexity of the sector means this data is often misunderstood or misinterpreted and there remains a limited overview of the early childhood education and care system.²

The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) August 2022 data report³ states there are 16,986 approved services across each state and territory including long day care (LDC), preschool/kindergarten, out of school hours care (OSHC), vacation care and family day care. Of these services, 50 per cent are LDC and 18 per cent are preschools. Three per cent (496)

of all providers are reported as being Independent schools.⁴

Based on data provided by the Associations of Independent Schools (AIS) on the number of early childhood services situated within Independent school settings across Australia, ISA estimates that the number of Independent schools offering early childhood services is higher than the ACECQA figure as some services fall in scope of school registration.

These services vary in scope from babies to school age with the majority of providers operating early learning services for three- to five-year-olds. Although early learning services vary between Independent schools, most schools that offer early childhood services provide a preschool program for the year before formal schooling. Some Independent schools operate two services, both LDC and sessional kindergarten/preschool, or may have OSHC available for both preschool and school aged children.

ABS figures for 2021 show that 39 per cent of preschool children were enrolled in government preschools, 59 per cent in non-government preschools and two per cent in more than one preschool. Of the 59 per cent enrolled in non-government preschools, nine per cent were enrolled in Independent preschools.

1 Georgie Carter-Smith, "Why Early Childhood Education Is Important to You," Melbourne Graduate School of Education, September 17, 2020, <https://education.unimelb.edu.au/news-and-events/news/2020/teaching/why-early-childhood-education-is-important-to-you>.

2 Australian Education Research Organisation, "Early Childhood Data in Australia," 2022, https://www.edresearch.edu.au/sites/default/files/2022-06/Early-childhood-data-scoping-report_AA.pdf.

3 ACECQA, "NQF Snapshot Q2 2022," 2022, <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/>.

4 ACECQA.

1.2 REGULATORY ARRANGEMENTS

The early childhood sector is governed by extensive national regulations that identify the responsibilities of providers and schools in providing quality early childhood education and safe care to young children.

ACECQA is the national body that administers the *Education and Care Services National Law* and *Education and Care Services National Regulations*, and implements the National Quality Framework (NQF)⁵ and National Quality Standard (NQS),⁶ against which early childhood education and school age care providers are assessed and rated.

The NQF was established in 2012 as a result of an agreement between all Australian governments working together to raise quality and drive continuous improvement and consistency in early childhood education and care settings.

The NQS sets the national benchmark for service providers defining seven quality areas; education program, health and safety, physical environment, staffing, relationships with children, partnerships with families and communities and governance and leadership. All early childhood services for children aged birth to five years must meet a minimum standard against these benchmarks and are regulated, assessed and rated. Services deemed at high risk of not meeting quality standards are prioritised for assessment.

In addition to the national legislation, regulations, frameworks and standards that apply to early childhood programs, there are two national learning frameworks, the *Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF)⁷ known as ‘Belonging, Being and Becoming’ for early childhood services and the *Framework for School Age Care in Australia*, ‘My Time, Our Place’. The EYLF is based on the principles of play-based learning and an environment which fosters and develops important foundational skills for young children. All early childhood services must base their education program on this learning framework.

The NQF sets out the minimum requirements for educator:child ratios and levels of qualifications for staff in early childhood settings and school aged care services, with requirements varying across state and territories.

1.3 FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS

Government funding for the early childhood sector is historically complex. Early childhood services are funded through a combination of parental fees, state and territory government funding and Australian Government funding.

The Australian Government is the main source of funding for childcare services, primarily through fee subsidies. LDC, vacation care and OSHC providers all receive the Australian Government Child Care Subsidy (CCS)⁸ to enable eligible families access to affordable early childhood education and care.

State and territory governments are primarily responsible for funding preschool and other early childhood services. The Australian Government provides a funding contribution to the provision of these services through national partnerships; the Universal Access National Partnership (UANP)⁹ and from 2022 through the Preschool Reform Agreement (PRA) (2022-2025).¹⁰

Not all families are eligible for fee subsidies, and many are required to make gap payments/fees for childcare and/or preschool, particularly in the Independent school sector.

5 Department of Education, Skills and Employment, “Early Years Learning Framework,” Department of Education, Skills and Employment Department of Education, Skills and Employment; February 4, 2021, <https://www.dese.gov.au/national-quality-framework-early-childhood-education-and-care-0/earlyyearslearningframework>.

6 Australian Children’s Education & Care Quality Authority, “National Quality Standard,” accessed October 14, 2021, <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/national-quality-standard>.

7 Department of Education, Skills and Employment, “Early Years Learning Framework.”

8 Services Australia, “Child Care Subsidy,” accessed May 5, 2022, <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/child-care-subsidy>.

9 Department of Education, Skills and Employment Skills and Employment, “Universal Access National Partnership,” Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2021, <https://www.dese.gov.au/preschool/universal-access-national-partnership>.

10 Department of Education, Skills and Employment Skills and Employment, “Preschool Reform Funding Agreement,” accessed October 28, 2021, <https://www.dese.gov.au/preschool/preschool-reform-funding-agreement>.

1.4 REFORMS

Enrolment in preschool is not compulsory, however the Australian Government has set ambitious targets under the new PRA to improve the quality and transparency of national preschool data. A Preschool Performance Framework is being developed to define outcomes and participation measures with performance indicators specified for each year of the PRA. The annual National Early Childhood Education and Care Collection (NECECC) is the primary data source for the monitoring of progress and the measurement of achievement against benchmarks under the PRA with data published through the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).¹¹

The PRA aims to reduce funding disparity across states and territories and ensure that funding follows the child. The Australian Government has determined reform strategies and implementation plans. The Appendix includes an overview of the three sections of the PRA 2022 Implementation Plans for each state and territory.

1.5 ISSUES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD AND CARE IN INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

Gaining a clear national picture of the early childhood sector in Independent schools is challenging as there are differences across the states and territories and types of services provided. This paper highlights issues affecting the Independent early childhood sector including:

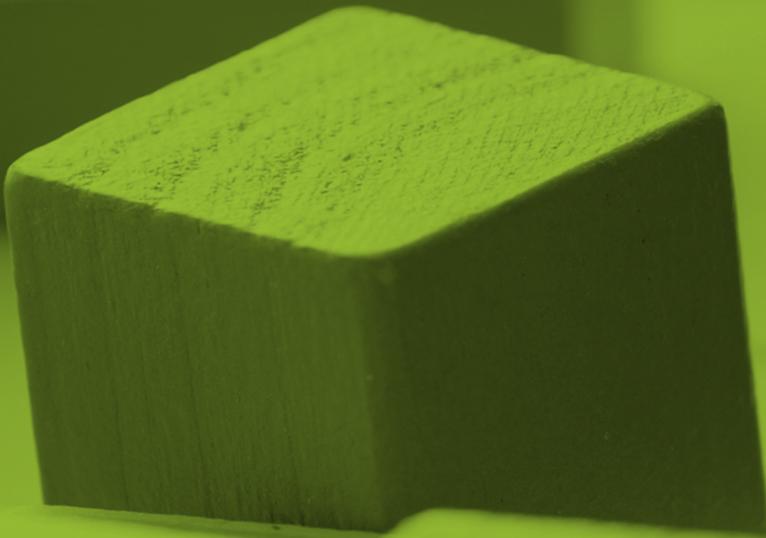
- support for equity groups
- availability of data
- early learning infrastructure
- workforce shortage
- funding equity
- regulatory burden
- COVID-19 impact.

Overviews of each state and territory in early childhood education and care (chapter 7) further highlight the complexity of the early childhood sector in Independent schools and include reflections on the impacts of COVID-19, staffing, regional and remote teaching, and curriculum.

¹¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, “Preschool Education, Australia, 2021 | Australian Bureau of Statistics,” accessed July 7, 2022, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/preschool-education-australia/latest-release>.

2.

INTRODUCTION



The early childhood sector in Australia is complex, diverse and growing. National investment in early learning is a priority for the Australian Government and state and territory governments.

Participation in early education provides young children with important opportunities for healthy development and the ability to acquire early learning-related skills to prepare them for school and beyond.

Early childhood education is not compulsory but provides positive experiences which benefit a child's physical, emotional, social and cognitive development. Children who attend preschool make friends, have a higher rate of self-care, attention and concentration and develop important skills for transition to school, as they learn independence, self-reliance and regulation.¹²

Prioritising national investment¹³ in early childhood education, increasing enrolment rates for three and four-year-olds, and increasing the number of hours of early childhood education provided per week will reduce inequalities in early childhood development. It is predicted that increased investment will produce savings in health and education expenditure¹⁴ across the lifespan of approximately 7-10 per cent return on investment, as well as improving Australia's economic productivity.¹⁵ The Australian Government is prioritising national investment with the new PRA being introduced from 2022 to improve early learning participation and outcomes for young children.¹⁶

Early childhood education and care also plays an important role in Australia's productivity, enabling parents to work. The Australian Government's initial

involvement in funding childcare was in 1972 when it provided funding for non-profit organisations (including local government bodies) to operate centre-based day care facilities for children of working or sick parents.¹⁷

There are benefits of Independent schools operating an early learning centre on site. Introducing families to the school community early can ease the transition to formal schooling, enable collaboration and information sharing between early childhood educators and primary teachers, and increase children's confidence in their school surroundings.¹⁸

This paper is an environmental scan of the early childhood sector in Australia, the provision of early learning in the Independent school sector and highlights issues relevant to Independent schools. The Independent school sector provides early childhood education and care in a range of early learning settings for children from birth to five years of age.

The paper presents an overview of early learning in Independent schools with a primary focus on the year before formal schooling. It also provides an analysis of early childhood education and care national data, information on the preschool reform agenda, regulatory requirements and the funding arrangements for early childhood education and care.

In addition, this paper includes an overview from each Association of Independent Schools (AIS), providing a picture of the early childhood sector in their own state and territory.

12 Kid Sense, "School Readiness," *Kid Sense Child Development* (blog), accessed October 28, 2021, <https://childdevelopment.com.au/areas-of-concern/school-readiness/>.

13 Susan Pascoe and Deborah Brennan, *Lifting Our Game: Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools through Early Childhood Interventions* (Melbourne, Vic.: Victorian Government, 2017).

14 Heckman Equation, "Invest in Early Childhood Development: Reduce Deficits, Strengthen the Economy," The Heckman Equation, 2013, <https://heckmanequation.org/resource/invest-in-early-childhood-development-reduce-deficits-strengthen-the-economy/>.

15 Carter-Smith, "Why Early Childhood Education Is Important to You."

16 Australian Government "Preschool Reform Agreement" accessed July 14, 2022, https://federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/sites/federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/files/2022-02/Preschool%20Reform%20Agreement_signed%20compilation_0.pdf.

17 Commonwealth Support for Childcare, Parliamentary Library e-brief, accessed on 13 September 2022, https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/Publications_Archive/archive/childcaresupport#:~:text=The%20Commonwealth%20Government%20funds%20two,gain%20access%20to%20childcare%20services.

18 Independent Schools Queensland, "Early Childhood & Kindergarten," accessed October 21, 2021, <https://www.isq.qld.edu.au/parents-community/early-childhood-kindergarten/>.

2.1 TERMINOLOGY

Diversity across the early childhood sector and terminology differences add to the complexity in developing a clear picture of early learning services in the Independent school sector. This section aims to define language and terms that will be used throughout this paper.

TABLE A: DEFINITIONS

TERM	DEFINITION
Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA)	Independent national authority that administers the National Law and National Regulations.
Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)	Includes early childhood services such as preschool and long day care, out of school hours care and vacation care.
Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)	National Curriculum Framework for birth to five-year-olds; 'Belonging, Being and Becoming'.
Framework for School Age Care in Australia	National Curriculum Framework for School Age Care - OSHC and vacation care for school-age children; 'My Time, Our Place'.
Long Day Care (LDC)	Usually operates at least 10 hours a day, Monday to Friday, for at least 48 weeks a year. Provides full or part-time care.
National Quality Framework	Overarching framework defining the regulations and administered by ACECQA.
National Quality Standards (NQS)	National benchmark prescribing seven quality areas.
Out of School Hours Care (OSHC)	Includes vacation care and may include preschool aged children, though mostly caters for school age children.
Preschool	For the purpose of this paper, means the Year Before Formal Schooling. (See Table B for terms in each state and territory).

The Year Before Formal Schooling (YBFS) has different names across state and territories. In this paper, it is referred to as 'preschool' except for the state and territory overviews in chapter 7 where each AIS uses their own jurisdiction's terminology.

Many Independent schools offer early childhood and care services such as preschool, long day care (LDC), and/or Out of School Hours Care (OSHC), including vacation care. Increasingly Independent schools, where they do not offer LDC, may extend

their OSHC and vacation care to include preschool aged students, although this increases regulatory burden.

The preschool year generally caters for four and five year old children, however in some states and territories three-year-olds are also included over a two-year program.

TABLE B: PROGRAM NAMES AND AGE ENTRY BY STATE AND TERRITORY

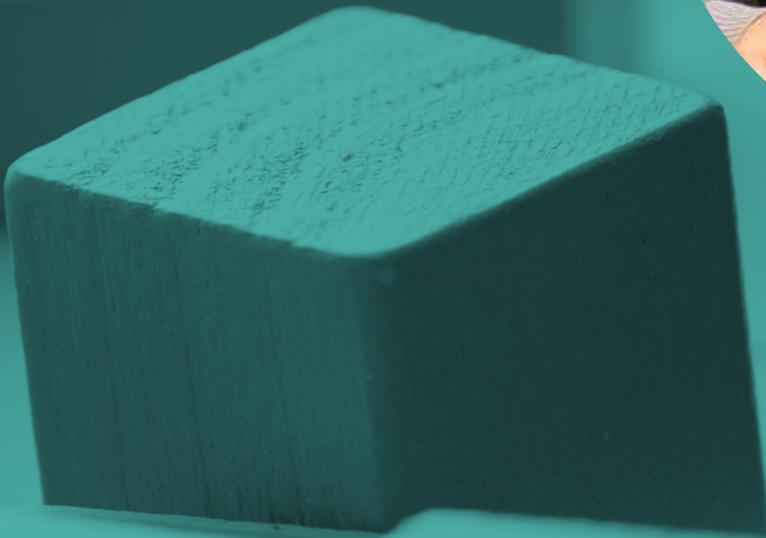
STATE OR TERRITORY	YBFS	AGE OF ENTRY	FIRST YEAR OF FORMAL SCHOOL
New South Wales	Preschool	Generally, four- and five-year-olds	Kindergarten
Victoria	Kindergarten	4 by 30 April	Prep
Queensland	Kindergarten	4 by 30 June	Prep
Western Australia	Kindergarten	4 by 30 June	Pre-primary
South Australia	Preschool	4 by 1 May	Reception
Tasmania	Kindergarten*	4 by 1 January	Prep
Australian Capital Territory	Preschool	4 by 30 April	Kindergarten
Northern Territory	Preschool	4 by 30 June	Transition

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

*Note: In Tasmania the first year of school is known as the Kindergarten year (followed by Prep then Year 1)

3.

EARLY CHILDHOOD SECTOR DATA SUMMARY



There are several large-scale data sets available on the early childhood sector, yet the complexity of the sector means this data is often misunderstood or misinterpreted.

Education authorities and policymakers have invested considerable resources into developing early childhood data sets to gain insights into the sector, but there is still a limited overview of the early childhood education and care system.¹⁹

There is insufficient disaggregated data collected on preschools in the Independent school sector to enable a detailed and accurate picture at the national or state and territory level. It is difficult to source comparative state and territory data for the Independent school sector on preschool attendance and retention, financial data, enrolment growth and types of Independent early childhood services. Where collections are based on data relating to government payments, data from providers that do not receive any government funding may be excluded, impacting on the completeness of the data collection.

Based on data provided by the AISs on the number of early childhood services situated within Independent school settings across Australia, ISA estimates that the number of Independent schools offering early childhood services is higher than the ACECQA figure as some services fall in scope of school registration. The services offered by Independent schools vary in scope from babies to school-age with the majority operating early learning services for three- to five-year-olds. Some schools operate two services, both LDC and sessional kindergarten/preschool or may have OSHC available for both preschool and school-aged children. Although early learning services vary between schools, those schools that do offer early childhood services all provide a preschool program for the year before formal schooling.

The new national Preschool Reform Agreement (2022-2025)²⁰ seeks to improve data collection. Current data available at the national level includes a range of data collected for different purposes:

- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).
- Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA)
- Australian Early Development Census (AEDC).

3.1 AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS

The ABS publishes *Preschool, Education* annually.²¹ This publication contains statistics on preschool programs in Australia and includes data on children enrolled in and attending preschool programs, and information on providers. The statistics are compiled from data collected through the National Early Childhood Education and Care Collection (NECECC). The NECECC was established in 2010 to improve the quality of early childhood education and care data required for reporting under National Partnership Agreements. The data for this collection is sourced from administrative data sets, including the Child Care Subsidy System (CCSS). This means that full fee-paying services may not be included in this data.

ABS figures for 2021 identify 216 Independent school sector preschools for four- and five-year-olds across all states and territories excluding Victoria, representing seven per cent of preschools and 15 per cent of non-government preschools.

¹⁹ Australian Education Research Organisation, “Early Childhood Data in Australia.”

²⁰ Australian Government “Preschool Reform Agreement” accessed July 14, 2022, https://federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/sites/federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/files/2022-02/Preschool%20Reform%20Agreement_signed%20compilation_0.pdf.

²¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, “Preschool Education, Australia, 2021,” March 23, 2022, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/preschool-education-australia/latest-release>; Australian Bureau of Statistics, “Childhood Education and Care, Australia, June 2017,” April 23, 2018, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/childhood-education-and-care-australia/latest-release>.

Due to the temporary closure of preschool program providers in Victoria as a result of COVID-19, 2021 service delivery data for this state was not published. Independent Schools Victoria report

there are 140 early childhood services, both LDC centres and preschools in the Victorian Independent school sector.

TABLE C: NUMBER OF EARLY CHILDHOOD PRESCHOOL PROVIDERS DELIVERING A PROGRAM TO CHILDREN AGED 4- AND – 5 YEARS, 2021

	STATES AND TERRITORIES								
	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	NT	ACT	AUST
Preschool									
Government	156	np	167	334	676	145	65	78	np
Non-government									
Community	622	np	389	4	0	0	0	0	np
Private for profit	3	np	0	0	0	0	0	0	np
Independent schools	20	np	30	11	122	27	3	3	np
Catholic schools	0	np	24	8	133	30	3	0	np
Total Non-government	645	np	443	23	255	57	6	3	np
Total preschool	801	np	610	357	931	202	71	81	np

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

According to the ABS data, in 2021, there were 8,922 enrolment episodes at Independent preschools of children aged four and five years. This represents five per cent of the total number of preschool enrolment episodes across all sectors and states and territories and represents nine per cent of the total number of enrolment episodes in

the non-government sector. ABS 2021 data does not identify the number of Independent school sector LDC preschool programs in the non-government sector. An episode means an instance of a child being enrolled in an early childhood setting.

TABLE D: PRESCHOOL ENROLMENT EPISODES BY SECTOR AND STATE OR TERRITORY, CHILDREN AGED 4 AND 5 YEARS, 2021

	STATES AND TERRITORIES								
	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	NT	ACT	AUST
Preschool									
Government	6,230	11,634	2,038	12,871	24,574	4,521	2,824	4,577	69,270
Non-government									
Community	30,952	34,761	15,698	234	0	0	0	0	81,646
Private for profit	122	143	0	0	0	0	0	0	266
Independent	824	2,476	983	334	3,586	500	49	169	8,922
Catholic	0	0	770	318	5,105	1,059	69	0	7,321
Total Non-government	31,899	37,378	17,454	886	8,694	1,554	117	169	98,150
Total Preschool	38,135	49,010	19,489	13,759	33,274	6,075	2,943	4,747	167,425
Preschool program within a centre-based day care									
Government	5,242	3,013	245	1,167	192	248	90	132	10,326
Non-government	77,092	54,187	47,260	9,884	10,963	3,081	1,405	4,847	208,724
Total centre-based day care	82,338	57,197	47,507	11,051	11,155	3,330	1,496	4,978	219,049
Total episodes of a preschool program	120,472	106,206	66,995	24,812	44,426	9,405	4,436	9,726	386,474

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

3.2 AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN'S EDUCATION AND CARE QUALITY AUTHORITY

Each quarter, ACECQA publishes a national report on early childhood education and care services operating under the National Quality Framework (NQF),²² providing data and analysis on the profile of the sector and the quality rating of services against the National Quality Standard (NQS).²³

This information can also be accessed via an interactive online snapshot.²⁴ The national snapshot provides information across each state and territory by approved service types, such as LDC, Preschool/Kindergarten, OSHC and Family Day Care covering 16,986 services. Of these services, 50 per cent are LDC and 18 per cent are preschools with three per cent of services (496) operating in Independent schools. Unfortunately, the types of services being provided by Independent schools cannot be disaggregated.

22 Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority, "National Quality Framework," accessed October 28, 2021, <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/national-quality-framework>.

23 ACECQA, "NQF Snapshot Q2 2022."

24 ACECQA, "NQF Interactive Snapshot Q2 2022," 2022, <https://snapshots.acecqa.gov.au/Snapshot/index.html>.

3.3 AUSTRALIAN EARLY DEVELOPMENT CENSUS

The AEDC data is a national collection of developmental stages achieved by children aged from birth to five years. The AEDC is collected every three years and provides important information for policy makers to improve the provision and funding of early learning services to improve outcomes for all children.

In 2021, AEDC data showed that just over 50 per cent of young children up to five years of age were identified as 'developmentally on track' for *all* five domains:²⁵

- Physical health and wellbeing
- Social competence
- Emotional maturity
- Language and cognitive skills
- Communication skills and general knowledge.

Although the majority of children were developmentally on track across *most* domains, inequalities in outcomes according to children's backgrounds still exist. It is concerning that the percentage of children who were on track across all domains decreased for the first time since 2009 from 55.4 per cent in 2018 to 54.8 per cent in 2021.²⁶ This could be attributed to disruptions caused by COVID-19 and participation levels in the AEDC.

In 2021, there were 22 per cent of children identified as developmentally vulnerable in more than one domain – a 0.3 per cent increase since 2018 – and government reforms aim to reverse this increase.

²⁵ Department of Education, Skills and Employment, "2021 Australian Early Development Census," Text, Department of Education, Skills and Employment, accessed August 1, 2022, <https://www.dese.gov.au/early-childhood/announcements/report-now-available-2021-australian-early-development-census>.

²⁶ Australian Education Research Organisation, "Early Childhood Data in Australia."

4.

REGULATORY ARRANGEMENTS



The early childhood sector is governed by extensive national regulations that identify the responsibilities of providers and schools in providing quality early childhood education and safe care to young children.

ACECQA is the independent national authority that assists state or territory regulatory bodies in administering the National Quality Framework (NQF) for early learning and school age care (OSHC and vacation care).

State or territory regulatory bodies assess and rate services to ensure quality across the sector and are responsible for:

- granting provider and service approvals
- quality assessment and rating of approved services according to the NQS
- promoting and monitoring continuous quality improvement of services
- investigation of complaints about approved services
- provision of regular feedback, review, audits and enforcement of compliance
- professional advice on the planning, design and establishment of new services
- acting as an advisory service for families, children’s services and the community in relation to early childhood education and care.

4.1 NATIONAL QUALITY FRAMEWORK

The NQF operates under an applied law system, comprising the *Education and Care Services National Law* and the *Education and Care Services National Regulations*. The *National Law* and the *National Regulations* set the NQS for children’s education and care across Australia. The *National Regulations* support the *National Law* by providing detail on a range of operational requirements for an education and care service as specified in the NQF.

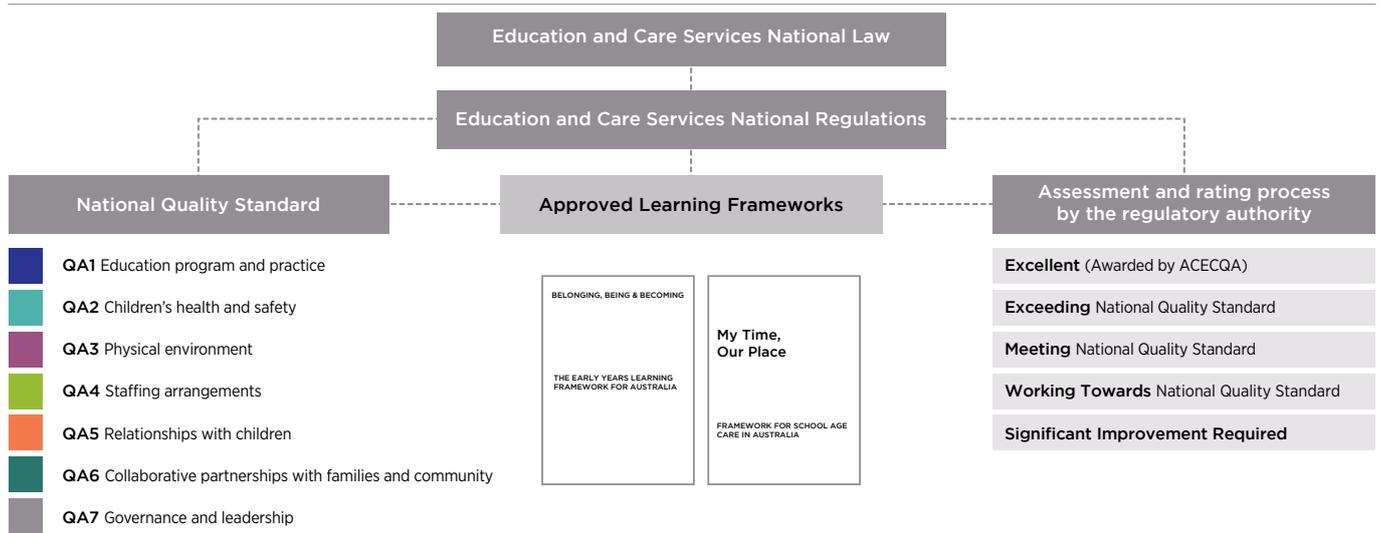
The NQF commenced in 2012 and describes the NQS, the application processes for provider and service approval, the process for the rating and assessment of services against the NQS, minimum requirements relating to the operation of education and care services, staffing arrangements and qualifications and jurisdiction-specific provisions.

The NQS sets the national benchmark by outlining seven quality areas, 15 standards and 40 elements that services and providers are assessed and rated against by their state or territory regulatory authority. The seven quality areas are:

- education program and practice
- children’s health and safety
- physical environment
- staffing arrangements
- relationships with children
- collaborative partnerships with families and communities
- governance and leadership.

It is expected that each service is on a continuous journey of self-assessment and improvement and Quality Improvement Plans must be updated annually.

TABLE E: NATIONAL QUALITY FRAMEWORK



Source: ACECQA Guide to the NQF

TABLE F: NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD RATINGS

NQS RATING	DESCRIPTION
Excellent	Service promotes exceptional education and care, demonstrates sector leadership and is committed to continually improving Awarded by ACECQA Services rated Exceeding NQS in all quality areas may choose to apply for this rating
Exceeding NQS	Service goes beyond the requirements of the NQS in at least 4 of the 7 quality areas, with at least 2 of these being quality areas 1, 5, 6, or 7
Meeting NQS	Service meets the NQS Service provides quality education and care in all 7 quality areas
Working Towards NQS	Services provide a safe education and care program There are 1 or more areas identified for improvement
Significant Improvement required	Service does not meet 1 of the 7 quality areas or a section of the legislation and there is a significant risk to the safety, health and wellbeing of children. The regulatory authority will take immediate action

Source: ACECQA Guide to the NQF

ACECQA’s national register publishes those services and providers with an ‘Exceeding NQS’ rating. A summary of ratings is available for provider management types. Of the Independent school providers (which comprise three per cent of all providers), 44 per cent have been rated as Exceeding NQS, 41 per cent as Meeting NQS and 14 per cent as Working Towards NQS.

This excellent result for Exceeding NQS (44 per cent) acknowledges the high quality of early childhood

education and care services provided by Independent schools, as the national average for an Exceeding rating is only 27 per cent. ACECQA data does not disaggregate for Independent school service provider types such as LDC, preschool, or OSHC and vacation care services.²⁷

27 ACECQA, “NQF Snapshot Q2 2022.”

4.2 CURRICULUM

NQF requirements make it compulsory for all early childhood services to deliver the national Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF),²⁸ ‘Belonging, Being and Becoming’, Australia’s first early-years national curriculum framework.

The curriculum is play-based and provides broad direction for early childhood educators to facilitate children’s learning from birth to 5 years of age, enhancing and extending each child’s learning and development. The EYLF aims to achieve the following five key educational outcomes to provide young children with opportunities to maximise their potential and develop a foundation for future success in learning;

- Children have a strong sense of identity
- Children are connected with and contribute to their world
- Children have a strong sense of wellbeing
- Children are confident and involved learners
- Children are effective communicators.

The EYLF recognises the importance of strong partnerships with families and the holistic development of important foundation skills such as communication and language (including early literacy and numeracy), social, emotional and physical development. The framework highlights the need for flexible, learning spaces to enable a strong focus on play so that young children can organise and make sense of their social contexts as they engage actively with people, objects and their environment.

Because the curriculum is broad-based with key guiding principles and outcomes, it enables Independent school sector preschools to work with complementary curriculum to guide their programming. There are several alternate approaches to early learning that are adopted by some Independent preschools such as Reggio Emilia,²⁹ Steiner³⁰ and Montessori.³¹ These approaches are based on the principles of

exploration, discovery and play, therefore align well to the EYLF. Any use of alternate curriculums must still meet the requirements of the EYLF.

Victoria has an approved alternate curriculum framework, the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework,³² which adopts a comprehensive approach to children’s learning and development and is similar in approach to the EYLF with the same five key outcomes as outlined above.

A pilot project to review the EYLF is currently underway and findings and feedback from the pilot will inform recommendations for consideration by Education Ministers.

4.3 STAFFING

The NQF sets the minimum requirement for early childhood teacher qualifications and educator:child ratios. These requirements vary between states and territories, as does teacher registration, pay and conditions.³³

The NQS, Quality Standard 4³⁴ aims to ensure the provision of qualified, experienced early childhood educators with the ability to develop warm, respectful relationships with children, create safe and predictable environments and encourage children’s active engagement in learning activities.

Under the NQF, all preschools must engage or have access to a degree-qualified early childhood teacher(s) based on the number of children in attendance at the service. It is an NQF requirement that at least 50 per cent of educators must have, or be actively working towards, an approved Diploma-level education and care qualification (or higher) in order to meet the relevant educator:child ratios in early learning services. All other educators required to meet the relevant educator:child ratios at the service, must hold or be actively working towards an approved Certificate III level education and care qualification.

Each state and territory has their own teacher regulatory or accreditation authority with requirements aligned to the Australian Professional

28 Department of Education, Skills and Employment, “Early Years Learning Framework.”

29 “Reggio Children - Reggio Emilia Approach,” Reggio Children, accessed May 16, 2022, <https://www.reggiochildren.it/en/reggio-emilia-approach/>.

30 Steiner Education Australia, “Steiner Education Australia,” Steiner Education Australia, accessed July 7, 2022, <https://www.steinereducation.edu.au/>.

31 Montessori Australia, “Montessori Australia: Supporting Education & Child Care,” accessed July 7, 2022, <https://montessori.org.au/>.

32 Victorian Department of Education and Training, *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework: For All Children from Birth to Eight Years* (Melbourne: Department of Education and Training, 2016).

33 ACECQA, “Educator to Child Ratios,” ACECQA, 2017, <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/educator-to-child-ratios>.

34 ACECQA, “Quality Area 4 - Staffing Arrangements,” ACECQA, 2017, <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/national-quality-standard/quality-area-4-staffing-arrangements>.

Standards for Teachers. Early childhood teacher registration is not mandatory under the NQF, however each jurisdiction has its own requirements as outlined in the table below.

TABLE G: TEACHER REGISTRATION/ACCREDITATION REQUIREMENTS

STATE/ TERRITORY	TEACHER REGISTRATION/ACCREDITATION REQUIREMENTS
ACT	No registration requirements for early childhood teachers in NQF settings that are not attached to an ACT school. ACT Teacher Quality Institute
NSW	From 18 July 2016 early childhood teachers working in approved centre-based settings must be accredited NSW Education Standards Authority
Northern Territory	Registration is not required for all early childhood teachers. However, preschools are attached to schools and as such require registration as a condition of employment. Teacher Registration Board of the Northern Territory
Queensland	The Queensland College of Teachers does not require registration for early childhood teachers in NQF settings. Some employers require teacher registration as a condition of employment. Queensland College of Teachers
South Australia	From 1 January 2014 all early childhood teachers must be registered, including those working in NQF settings. Teachers Registration Board of South Australia
Tasmania	Tasmanian kindergartens are part of Tasmanian schools and as such kindergarten teachers are required to hold teacher registration. Registration is not required for early childhood teachers in NQF settings that are not kindergartens or schools. Teachers Registration Board of Tasmania
Victoria	Since 30 September 2015 all ECTs employed or engaged in the role of an early childhood teachers in an early childhood and care service or Victorian Children's Centre must be registered. Victorian Institute of Teaching
Western Australia	Since 6 December 2012 all ECTs must be registered. Teacher Registration Board of Western Australia

Source: ACECQA Guide to the NQF

5.

FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS



Early childhood services are funded through a combination of parental fees, state and territory government, and Australian Government.

The Australian Government is the main source of funding for childcare services, primarily through fee subsidies, and state and territory governments are primarily responsible for funding preschool and other early childhood services, as detailed in the

table below. The Australian Government provides a funding contribution to the provision of these services, first through national partnerships (NPs) and from 2022 through the PRA.

TABLE H: SUMMARY OF ECEC FUNDING BY AUSTRALIAN, STATE AND TERRITORY GOVERNMENTS, 2020-21

		NSW	VIC	QLD	WA	SA	TAS	ACT	NT	AUST GOVT
Funded childcare services, for service types:	Centre based day care	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
	OSHC	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
	Family day care	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓
	In home care	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
Funded preschool services / programs, in:	Local government / community preschools	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗
	For-profit centre based day care	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗
	Not-for-profit centre based day care	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗
	Government school	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
	Non-government school	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗

✓ Government provides funding to at least one of these services.

✗ Government does not provide funding to any of these services.

Source: Productivity Commission, Report on Government Services³⁵

³⁵ Productivity Commission, Report on Government Service Provision, accessed 15 September 2022, <https://www.pc.gov.au/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2022/child-care-education-and-training/early-childhood-education-and-care>

Not all families are eligible for fee subsidies and many are required to make gap payments/fees for childcare and/or preschool, particularly in the Independent school sector.

5.1 COMMONWEALTH ASSISTANCE PAYMENTS

The Australian Government provides assistance payments to early learning and school aged care services including the CCS, Additional Child Care Subsidy (ACCS)³⁶ and the Commonwealth Inclusion Support Program (ISP).³⁷ These subsidies are available depending on each family's eligibility, but exclude preschools.

CHILD CARE SUBSIDY

The CCS is a payment available to LDCs, OSHC and vacation care services to reduce costs for families accessing care for their child/ren from birth to the end of primary school. The subsidy amount depends on each family's eligibility according to an activity test and income assessment. Under the CCS, eligible families must make any gap payments to the provider to cover the remainder of the fee.

ADDITIONAL CHILD CARE SUBSIDY

There are four different types of ACCS under the Child Care Safety Net (which aims to give the most vulnerable children a strong start while supporting parents into work) available to parents/carers if:

- an eligible grandparent receives an income support payment
- transitioning to work
- experiencing temporary financial hardship
- caring for a child who is vulnerable or at risk of harm, abuse or neglect.

In most cases, ACCS fully covers childcare fees. To be eligible for ACCS, the family must be receiving CCS and be able to provide evidence for the alternative care requirements and the associated circumstances for the need for this additional funding.

INCLUSION SUPPORT PROGRAM

ISP is a key component of the Child Care Safety Net. The ISP provides support for early childhood education and care services approved by the Australian Government for the provision of the CCS. The fund is to build service capacity and capability to include children with additional needs, so all children have genuine opportunities for access and participation to achieve positive learning outcomes.

The program also assists services to implement a quality, inclusive and equitable practice under the NQF and in accordance with the NQS and Approved Learning Frameworks.³⁸

5.2 STATE AND TERRITORY GOVERNMENT FUNDING

State and territory governments provide a range of funding for early childhood services in the Independent school sector and a number are detailed below in the state and territory (AIS) overview section of this report.

The distribution of state and territory funding, including the distribution of Australian Government national partnership funding through the states and territories, varies significantly between jurisdictions.

In June 2022, the Victorian and New South Wales Premiers announced plans to provide free preschool in the year before formal schooling. Victoria plans to start from 2025, with children able to attend a preschool program five days a week. New South Wales plans to commence from 2030. With the introduction of the Victorian State Government, *Best Start, Best Life* program, the next 10 years will see an increase to the 4-year-old pre-prep program to 30 hours.

While the funding announcement is welcome, both Victoria and New South Wales preschools, including Independent preschools will face extra pressure in providing the infrastructure and staffing to cope with growing numbers of children attending preschool for longer hours.

³⁶ Services Australia, "Child Care Subsidy."

³⁷ Department of Education, Skills and Employment, "Inclusion Support Program (ISP) Guidelines," accessed May 5, 2022, <https://www.dese.gov.au/child-care-package/resources/inclusion-support-program-isp-guidelines>.

³⁸ Inclusion Support Program Guidelines, accessed 13 September 2022, <https://www.education.gov.au/child-care-package/resources/inclusion-support-program-guidelines>

5.3 UNIVERSAL ACCESS NATIONAL PARTNERSHIP

Research shows enrolment in preschool and regular attendance is beneficial for healthy child development. To increase preschool participation, the Australian Government introduced the Universal Access National Partnership (UANP) agreement in 2008.³⁹

The UANP 2008-2021 was a commitment from the Commonwealth to provide funding to state and territory governments for quality preschool programs. This was to enable children access to at least 600 hours of early childhood education in the YBFS and to increase preschool enrolments, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children from vulnerable and disadvantaged backgrounds. This funding was distributed to the state and territory governments based on the principles that;

- every child, 12 months prior to full-time schooling, has access to a preschool program for 600 hours per year
- the preschool program must be accredited and delivered under the NQF
- funding is available across a diversity of settings in a form that meets the needs of parents and at a cost that does not present a barrier to participation.

The UANP funding benefited around 350,000 children each year and supported around 12,000 preschools and services nationally. Since the UANP was introduced, the proportion of children identified as developmentally vulnerable on one or more AEDC domains decreased from 24 per cent to 22 per cent.⁴⁰ Enrolment in preschool for 600 hours per year, per child, increased from 12 per cent in 2008 to 96 per cent in 2019.⁴¹

State and territory governments were responsible for the delivery of UANP funding to services, which has meant that the funding to Independent school sector providers has varied between states and territories, with some not receiving any UANP funding.

5.4 PRESCHOOL REFORM AGREEMENT

The PRA⁴², announced as part of the 2021–22 Federal Budget, locks in Commonwealth funding of \$2 billion over four years (2022 – 2025), to support 15 hours of preschool a week (600 hours per year for every child). This amounts to \$1,340 per child in 2022.

Work is being undertaken in 2022 by the state and territory governments to transition to the new funding arrangements. Although the overarching goals are the same, PRA Implementation Plans outline different objectives and actions for each state and territory (see Appendix). From 2023, every child enrolled in an approved preschool program, regardless of the preschool setting, will see the full benefit of Commonwealth funding. To support this reform, the Australian Government will spend an additional \$28.7 million to improve the availability, quality and transparency of national preschool data.

The PRA is intended to further the previous UANP agreement by identifying key outcomes measures, aiming for a nationally consistent methodology through the development of a new Preschool Performance Framework by 2024.

The PRA aims to remove cost barriers to improve child participation and attendance. It is intended that the PRA funding will follow the child and increase each year until 2025. AISs are working closely with state and territory governments to determine key issues and provide input to the measures being developed and how funding will be distributed.

39 Department of Education, Skills and Employment Skills and Employment, “Universal Access National Partnership.”

40 “Australia’s Children, The Transition to Primary School,” Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, accessed May 16, 2022, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/australias-children/contents/education/transition-primary-school>.

41 Ministers’ Media Centre, “\$2 Billion Funding Agreement to Guarantee Preschool for Aussie Kids,” Ministers’ Media Centre, May 13, 2021, <https://ministers.dese.gov.au/tudge/2-billion-funding-agreement-guarantee-preschool-aussie-kids>.

42 Australian Government “Preschool Reform Agreement” accessed July 14, 2022, https://federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/sites/federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/files/2022-02/Preschool%20Reform%20Agreement_signed%20compilation_0.pdf.

5.5 PARENTAL FEES

As noted previously, not all families are eligible for subsidies and many must make gap payments or pay full fees for childcare and other early childhood services in the non-government early childhood sector, including the Independent school sector.

As part of the *Report on Government Services*, the Productivity Commission reports on early childhood education and care services. In relation to parental costs for these services, the Productivity Commission notes there are various factors influencing early childhood education and care:

- Fees are set independently by early childhood education and care service providers and there is significant variation in fees across services.
- Costs are influenced by several factors including NQF approval requirements, award wages, and whether fees include charges for additional services such as nappies and meals, as well as localised issues such as, land values and rental costs, rates, and other localised costs of living.
- For preschool program costs, there are a mix of providers (community, private and government). Differences in charging practices can be due to commercial or cost recovery decisions made by individual services. Some preschool programs, particularly those offered at government preschool services, have no tuition fees.⁴³

⁴³ Productivity Commission Report on Government Services, accessed on 14 September 2022, <https://www.pc.gov.au/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2022/child-care-education-and-training/early-childhood-education-and-care#ecccscosts>

6.

ISSUES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE



The early childhood education and care sector faces several challenges.

The issues impacting early childhood services in Independent schools include:

- support to equity groups
- availability of data
- early learning infrastructure
- workforce shortage
- funding equity
- regulatory burden
- COVID-19 impact.

6.1 SUPPORT TO EQUITY GROUPS

Access to quality early childhood services for equity groups improves developmental outcomes for young children. AEDC data indicates that preschool participation reduces the number of children who are not ready to start school by about 10 per cent.

Preschool enrolment particularly benefits equity groups. In 2019, ninety-six per cent of children from disadvantaged families and communities were enrolled in 600 hours of preschool. This was a significant increase from 12 per cent in 2008.⁴⁴

However, enrolment rates do not always translate to full participation or maximum use of the 600 hours. In 2019, only 72 per cent of all preschool enrolments used the full 600 hours per year. Attendance rates were even lower for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and vulnerable and disadvantaged children.⁴⁵ Attendance data for equity groups in the early childhood sector in Independent schools is not available.

CLOSING THE GAP

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap's target to increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children enrolled in preschool education to 95 per cent by 2025 is on track.⁴⁶

In 2021, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children enrolled in a preschool program was 96.7 per cent, an increase from 76.7 per cent in 2016 (the baseline year).⁴⁷ However, the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children developmentally on track in all five AEDC domains reduced between 2018 and 2021.⁴⁸ This assessment should be used with caution as it is based on a limited number of data points, however, it raises concern, showing that enrolment in early childhood services alone is insufficient to close the gap.

Data on the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children enrolled in Independent preschools is unknown. Solutions to improve development across all five domains may lie in addressing community and family disadvantage; building greater cultural safety for families, children and staff in preschool communities; fostering positive relationships with families; and improving attendance rates.

CHILDREN WITH DISABILITY

Independent preschools are responsible under the NQS, Disability Discrimination Act and Disability Standards for Education, to provide learning and environmental adjustments for each child's identified needs and provide equitable opportunities for learning.

Funding availability for children with disability varies widely in each state and territory. Even for those states where inclusion funding is available, (Western Australia and Queensland) young

44 Department of Education, Skills and Employment Skills and Employment, "Preschool Reform Funding Agreement."

45 Department of Education, Skills and Employment Skills and Employment.

46 Council of Australian Government Coalition of Peaks, "Closing the Gap Targets and Outcomes," accessed October 14, 2021, <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement/targets>.

47 Productivity Commission, "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children Thrive in Their Early Years," June 29, 2022, <https://www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/dashboard/socioeconomic/outcome-area4>.

48 Productivity Commission.

children may not yet have a diagnosed disability or assessments to prove eligibility. The Nationally Consistent Collection of Data for students with disability, which informs the student with disability loading for schools, does not cover preschool programs, resulting in many Independent school sector preschools funding support for children with disability through other income sources.

Funding support for children with additional needs (disability, developmental delay, challenging behaviours, serious medical or health conditions and trauma) is available through the Commonwealth's Inclusion Support Program for LDC, outside hours school care, vacation care and family day care services but not preschool. Families must be eligible in order for a service to receive this funding.

CHILDREN FROM VULNERABLE AND DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS

Improving outcomes for children from vulnerable and disadvantaged backgrounds is a key focus under the PRA. All states and territories have specific Implementation Plan strategies to improve access for all children and increase participation in affordable, quality preschool programs.

The Socio-Economic Index for Areas is a summary measure of a range of socioeconomic variables associated with disadvantage such as low income, high unemployment and low levels of education.⁴⁹ In 2021, there were 56,922 children, or 16.8 per cent of four- and five-year-old children enrolled in a preschool program who were in the most disadvantaged category.⁵⁰

In 2021, 22 per cent of children were developmentally vulnerable in one or more developmental domains. This figure varies greatly between states and territories with Northern Territory having the highest number of developmentally vulnerable children at 39.2 per cent.⁵¹

CHILDREN FROM REGIONAL AND REMOTE AREAS

In 2021, there were 6,480 children aged four and five years enrolled in remote service preschool programs, and 86,821 children aged four and five years enrolled in regional preschool programs.⁵²

Current challenges for the provision of early childhood services in regional, rural and remote communities include affordability, variable quality of services, difficulties with access, lack of availability of services and ability to attract qualified staff.⁵³ Barriers to accessing preschool education in these communities can impact overall education and health outcomes.⁵⁴

6.2 AVAILABILITY OF DATA

Under the PRA, the Australian Government will provide specific performance targets to each state and territory to meet their commitment for longer term data collection. Funding will be influenced by the achievement of performance targets across jurisdictions.

The lack of detailed sector and state or territory data makes it difficult to draw longitudinal and comparative conclusions about early childhood education and care in the Independent school sector. Current issues impacting data collection in early childhood:

- The Independent school sector can find it difficult to understand the relationship between schools and early childhood services within the sector and in comparison to other providers. This makes understanding the true extent of the sector's involvement in the provision of early learning a complex undertaking.
- AEDC releases census data every three years on early childhood development, with the last release in 2021. However, this data collection combines all sectors together, making comparative analysis for the Independent sector difficult.

49 "Australia's Children, Population Groups," Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, accessed August 19, 2022, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/australias-children/contents/technical-notes/population-groups>.

50 Australian Bureau of Statistics, "Preschool Education, Australia, 2021."

51 "Australian Early Development Census," accessed October 11, 2021, <https://www.aedc.gov.au/>.

52 Australian Bureau of Statistics, "Preschool Education, Australia, 2021."

53 Department of Social Services, "Chapter 3 Early Childhood Education," 2021, <https://engage.dss.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Chapter-3-Report-on-remote-education-Early-Childhood.pdf>.

54 Department of Social Services.

- Current data sets lack important contextual information, limiting inferences that can be made about enablers of learning and development and ways to address equity issues.⁵⁵

6.3 EARLY LEARNING INFRASTRUCTURE

The PRA strategy to increase participation and attendance rates for preschool aged children will stretch existing preschool infrastructure in Independent schools. Moving from 15 to 30 hours per week preschool in Victoria and New South Wales and extending preschool access from one year to two in many states and territories means many Independent school sector preschools will have limited capacity to accommodate demands for increased hours and enrolments across their service.

State and territory government announcements have limited detail on capital funding availability, leaving many preschools unsure how they will have sufficient financial capacity to build the additional infrastructure required to meet demand.

6.4 WORKFORCE SHORTAGE

The 2021 Early Childhood Education and Care National Workforce Census⁵⁶ confirms the rapidly increasing demand for early childhood educators in centre-based care. From 2016 to 2021 the early childhood workforce in centre-based care increased by 34 per cent. The National Skills Commission's Skills Priority List shows that over the next five years, early childhood educators will be in the top ten in-demand jobs across Australia.

The early childhood teacher workforce is 98 per cent female with the average teacher age approximately 40 years old.⁵⁷ Entry level wages do not make early childhood teaching an attractive career change for potential employees who may have achieved seniority in another field.

In 2021, there were approximately 49,300 degree-qualified early childhood teachers across Australia. It is predicted the number of early childhood teachers will grow to 59,000 an increase of almost 10,000 teachers over the coming five years.⁵⁸ However, sector growth is projected to need another 34,000 new early childhood teachers.⁵⁹

In August 2022, the Australian Government met with states and territories, education peak bodies, principals and teachers to discuss teacher shortages and working conditions. This resulted in a combined commitment to developing a National Teacher Workforce Action Plan⁶⁰ to increase the number of people entering and remaining in the teaching profession.

This action plan will complement and be coordinated with the National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy to ensure teachers and educators across both early childhood and schooling settings are valued and supported as education professionals.

The National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy Implementation and Evaluation Plan⁶¹ aims to build a sustainable, high-quality, professionally recognised early childhood workforce, while recognising current pressures on the sector. Developed by ACECQA, in partnership with sector peak bodies and all state and territory governments, the Shaping Our Future⁶² national strategy will focus on five key areas over the next ten years (2022-2031):

- Professional recognition
- Attraction and retention

55 Australian Education Research Organisation, "Early Childhood Data in Australia."

56 Department of Education, "2021 Early Childhood Education and Care National Workforce Census Report" (scheme=AGLSTERMS.AglsAgent; corporateName=Department of Education, Skills and Employment; address=50 Marcus Clarke St, Canberra City, ACT 2601; contact=+61 1300 566 046), accessed August 29, 2022, <https://www.dese.gov.au/child-care-package/resources/2021-early-childhood-education-and-care-national-workforce-census-report>.

57 JobOutlook, "Early Childhood (Pre-Primary School) Teachers," accessed March 8, 2022, <https://joboutlook.gov.au/occupations/early-childhood-pre-primary-school-teachers?occupationCode=2411>.

58 Australian Government, "Education and Training, Labour Market Insights," accessed July 21, 2022, <https://labourmarketinsights.gov.au/industries/industry-details?industryCode=P>.

59 JobOutlook, "Early Childhood (Pre-Primary School) Teachers," accessed March 8, 2022, <https://joboutlook.gov.au/occupations/early-childhood-pre-primary-school-teachers?occupationCode=2411>.

60 The Hon Clare O'Neil MP, "National Action Plan on Teacher Shortage," accessed August 30, 2022, <https://minister.homeaffairs.gov.au/ClareONeil/Pages/national-action-plan-teacher-shortage.aspx>.

61 ACECQA, "National Workforce Strategy," ACECQA, September 30, 2020, <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/national-workforce-strategy>.

62 ACECQA, "Shaping Our Future: A Ten-Year Strategy to Ensure a Sustainable, High-Quality Children's Education and Care Workforce 2022-2031," n.d., accessed June 9, 2022.

- Leadership and capability
- Wellbeing
- Qualifications and career pathways.

TEACHER INCENTIVES

Teacher training incentive programs are available in many states and territories. The Australian Government offers heavily subsidised Certificate III and Diploma courses in early childhood education and care through JobTrainer.⁶³ Some states and territories offer scholarships and financial incentives to encourage upskilling, or to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators. The Australian Government provides Commonwealth Supported Places, a subsidy provided to pay a proportion of university or higher education provider fees for eligible students.

In response to the PRA inclusion of three-year-old children in preschool and to address the critical workforce shortage, the Australian Government and some states and territories are examining further incentives and scholarships to address workforce recruitment and retention as part of their early childhood workforce strategy.

6.5 FUNDING EQUITY

The amount of government funding per child to attend an early childhood education and care service varies, depending on the state, territory, sector and family subsidy eligibility. The PRA states that funding will follow the child regardless of setting, however funding for Independent school sector preschools will be aligned to jurisdictional PRA Implementation Plans and will vary across states and territories. See Appendix for detail.

Further, additional funding can often come with its own set of conditions and complexities. For example, in Victoria, the announcement by the education minister of ‘free’ three- and four-year-old early learning is causing concern in the sector as funding per child may not be enough to operate a quality Independent school sector preschool.

6.6 REGULATORY BURDEN

The regulatory burden on early childhood service providers is significant. In collaboration with state and territory regulatory authorities, ACECQA undertook an annual survey in 2013-2015⁶⁴ and again in 2017 and 2018, to measure approved providers’ perception of burden associated with administrative requirements under the NQF.

Key regulatory burdens have been identified that have remained consistent over time:

- Qualifications assessments
- Notifications
- Maintaining policies and procedures
- Documenting children’s learning
- Quality Improvement Plans
- Displaying service information
- Provider and service approvals
- Keeping records.

Perceptions of burden associated with Quality Assessment and Ratings visits increased over time from 2013 to 2018. During this period, the proportion of services that have been quality rated has risen from around one fifth to three quarters. According to survey respondents, the amount of paperwork required and workload of staff to prepare for a visit were in the top two burden ratings.

For the Independent school sector early childhood services, the regulatory burden can be particularly onerous, if the school leadership team lacks understanding of NQF regulatory requirements and this responsibility is delegated to the early childhood service staff.

63 Australian Government, My Skills “Job Trainer” accessed May 16, 2022. <https://www.myskills.gov.au/jobtrainer>

64 ACECQA, “Report on National Quality Framework and Regulatory Burden Wave III ACECQA,” 2015.

6.7 COVID-19 IMPACT

Since 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted staff, children, families and communities across Australia and though diminishing, its impacts are still being felt.

In 2020, the Department of Health in each state and territory introduced public health mandates which necessitated an immediate response from the early childhood education and care sector to follow public health regulations relating to staff vaccinations, essential workers, additional health, safety and cleaning requirements, close contact tracing and quarantine and isolation restrictions.

These measures impacted daily operational requirements for Independent school early childhood services, increased staff workload, pressure and stress, created workforce shortages and limited families in accessing services.

COVID-19 SUPPORT

In response to the growing pressure on early childhood education and care services to provide ongoing front-line care to children of essential workers and vulnerable families during COVID-19, the Australian Government introduced a temporary period of free childcare in 2020. During this time, all enrolled families were exempt from paying the CCS gap fee, making childcare free for families. Early childhood providers received a weekly 'business continuity payment' equivalent to 50 per cent of fees charged (up to the CCS hourly fee cap).

Gap fee

Until 30 June 2023, providers can waive the gap fee paid by families if:

- the child, or a member of their immediate household, is in isolation due to COVID-19
- the child is at a higher risk of severe disease from COVID-19
- the service, or a room at the service, is closed due to COVID-19.

The gap fee waiver is only in place for those families who are eligible for CCS, making it difficult for providers who are full fee-based to incentivise their service. Some families opted to keep their child(ren) out of care during the onset of COVID-19 due to fear of the virus as well as the fee requirement for some services.

7.

STATE AND TERRITORY AIS OVERVIEWS



Associations of Independent schools from all states and territories have been working together in the interests of overcoming challenges facing the early childhood services sector.

The AISs were interviewed in April 2022. These discussions included information about levels of support offered to Independent schools by each AIS in early childhood education and care, and information about the key issues, funding arrangements and opportunities for the Independent early childhood sector in each state and territory.

Overarching concerns included the complexity and onerous nature of the NQF, workforce shortages and the impact of COVID-19.

Opportunities identified by AISs include increased collaboration between AISs and ISA, professional learning, and engagement with state and territory governments and the Australian Government to represent the Independent early childhood sector.

Many early childhood services in the Independent school sector are situated on the school site and provide a positive transition pathway into formal schooling.

Many AISs provide a range of supports to Independent schools engaged in early childhood education and care, including advice on funding, regulations and teacher accreditation and registration, and offer valuable advice and support to schools when considering establishing a new early childhood education service or preschool.

7.1 AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY



There is a strong and healthy commitment by Independent schools in the ACT to early childhood education, and for many schools, preschool and early learning are seen as an integral part of the school community.

Most ACT Independent preschools and childcare centres operate at capacity. Most Independent schools in the ACT have early learning centres, including preschool (12 out of 18 schools). Early learning centres (ELC) in ACT Independent schools cater for children from birth to five-year-olds. Many Independent schools include preschool education for three-year-old children. ACT government funding is directed solely to the government preschool sector. ACT has the highest median cost for three-year-old preschool in the country yet attracts high participation.⁶⁵

The Association of Independent Schools of ACT (AISACT) provided targeted support to early childhood education and care schools during COVID-19. This included advice on JobKeeper and the CCS changes. These funding issues were a significant amount of work for AISACT as those schools with both childcare and preschool had different conditions. AISACT acted as a strong

⁶⁵ Kate Noble and Sarah Pilcher, "Families in Eastern States Pay around Twice as Much for Preschool than the Rest of Australia," *The Conversation*, accessed April 14, 2022, <http://theconversation.com/families-in-eastern-states-pay-around-twice-as-much-for-preschool-than-the-rest-of-australia-155218>.

advocate to health and education ministers about the needs of Independent schools during this time.

ISSUES

There is continued interest by the ACT government for early childhood education to be a part of the schooling sector. The education minister established an ACT Ministerial Early Childhood Advisory Council (AISACT had a representative on this committee) to help inform the development of the Set up for Success: An Early Childhood Strategy for the ACT which outlines ways the territory can enhance its early childhood education, including workforce, and access to three-year-old education. The ACT government is currently consulting with the early childhood and education sectors on the following topics:

- Developing an Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Strategy for the ACT, including educator professional standards, increasing coaching and mentoring opportunities, and establishing a professional learning fund.
- Recognising early childhood education in ACT law.
- Delivering the new PRA.

ACT Independent schools experience similar early childhood workforce issues of attraction and retention of educators as elsewhere in the country, however due to their ability to offer flexible working arrangements they are often considered as employers of choice. Furthermore, being in an entirely urban environment, the ACT does not have the barrier of regionality.

There are different conditions of employment between teachers in childcare and teachers in schools such as work hours, holidays and pay scales. This causes some tensions for some schools who offer both an early learning and preschool program.

Through the Set up for Success strategy, work is currently being undertaken by the ACT Teacher Quality Institute to investigate amending legislation regulating the teaching profession to include qualified early childhood teachers. In addition, work is being undertaken to look at the development of educator professional standards. AISACT has a strong relationship with teacher training providers including the University of Canberra and the Australian Catholic University.

Attendance is generally not an issue for Independent schools as parent/s and carers pay fees for enrolment and are therefore committed to send their child to school as often as they can.

Enrolment is driven by parent choice and there are no attendance requirements for four-year-olds. In the non-compulsory preschool year in the ACT (turning four by 30 April), the issue for some parents choosing to access 15 hours free preschool offered by the government sector (through the UANP) and combining that with paying for preschool at an Independent school setting, adds complexity for some Independent schools and families. Noting, the Independent school sector has never been included in the UANP funding in the ACT.

The regulatory requirements on ELCs and schools are onerous and complex. The aim of the NQF was to apply consistency and quality across Australia; however, it has added to the administrative burden on schools as it is in addition to the registration regulation requirements for schools.

Independent schools in the ACT provide a diversity of approaches which reflect the values and characteristics of each school. There are a range of curriculum and pedagogical approaches in how schools deliver the Australian Curriculum and the EYLF. Further, ELCs in Independent schools allow the child to be on a continuous learning journey from three years of age in the one school. This ensures a seamless transition between the various stages of education and greatly supports school readiness.

FUNDING

AISACT Member schools have not received any support under the UANP funding. The move to the new PRA is welcomed and the AISACT will undertake bilateral talks in preparation for its implementation in 2023.

However, there is no funding in the Agreement to support priority groups such as students with disability who therefore need to be supported by the business model of the main school. There is funding to support the inclusion of at risk and disadvantaged children in early childhood education, however applying for this funding is a very time consuming and is an area of ongoing concern for preschools in Independent schools. In general, there is currently little territory government funding to support early childhood education and care in Independent schools in the ACT. Capital works grants are available under the Better Schools for Kids program funded by the ACT government and several Independent schools have benefited from these funds.

OPPORTUNITIES

There were some general areas that AISACT

raised as opportunities for the Independent early childhood sector:

- Teacher registration recognition in every context, including early learning.
- Sector blind funding for all early childhood services and preschools, including the provision of three-year-old preschool programs.
- Support across all sectors to promote learning approaches and cross-sectoral relationships.

7.2 NEW SOUTH WALES



The Association of Independent Schools of New South Wales (AISNSW) provides some support to Independent schools with preschools, LDC centres and OSHC services. There are Independent schools that offer preschool or LDC programs in New South Wales. AISNSW does not collect information about which schools operate these services but estimates that more Independent schools in New South Wales operate LDC than preschool. The current funding arrangements from the New South Wales Department of Education in establishing a new preschool can be a barrier for schools wanting to open this service. Some schools offer preschool, which is run from the LDC but with term hours. Some schools also offer vacation care. These offerings are to meet the needs of parents and to be responsive to the needs of the community.

ISSUES

Attendance rates in the Independent school sector are very specific to the school context. There are issues with attracting and retaining staff across the early childhood sector but due to a lack of data, it difficult to ascertain whether Independent schools in New South Wales are experiencing the same level of staffing challenges as the government and Catholic sectors. There are scholarships available from the New South Wales Department of Education to upskill regional early childhood educators to obtain a degree. The number of teachers required in the early childhood sector more than double other jurisdictions due to the New South Wales specific legislative requirements

and support needed to broadly grow the early childhood teacher workforce. AISNSW does not have information about whether the early childhood teacher shortage experienced by the broader early childhood sector impacts Independent schools in the same way.

FUNDING

AISNSW provided support to schools on JobKeeper, the CCS and close contact tracing during COVID-19. AISNSW was heavily involved in contact tracing support, advising schools about their responsibilities in facilitating the changing requirements. AISNSW also provided advice about deep cleaning requirements.

OPPORTUNITIES

The New South Wales government offers a fixed amount of funding to support the establishment of new preschools. However, the process to obtain this funding is challenging for new not-for-profit (NFP) operators, which includes schools, and the regulatory requirements can be difficult to navigate. Opening a new NFP centre is rare in New South Wales and the numbers of these services have been dwindling, however with the NSW announcement for five days per week preschool by 2030, the Independent sector may be the largest sector interested in opening new NFP preschools, with local government probably the only other key sector.

Guaranteeing funding for new Not For Profit (NFP) preschools in NSW would be welcomed by the NSW Independent school sector. Improving transparency around the process for applying for New South Wales Start Strong preschool funding, obtaining timely approval, and providing on time funding for establishing new preschools is needed if the NFP preschool sector is to grow.

AISNSW identified several other areas for future development in early childhood:

- Supporting schools to use the AEDC data and investigating ways AISNSW can use this data in their work.
- Providing professional learning opportunities in early childhood.
- Continuing to engage directly with schools to support early childhood education.
- Continued involvement between the different AISs in early childhood education and care to build collegial relationships and a cross-jurisdictional understanding.

7.3 NORTHERN TERRITORY



The focus of Independent schools in the Northern Territory lies predominantly with Early Learning Centres (ELCs) attached to schools. ELCs often cater for three- and four-year-old children. From 2022, a small number of government schools in the territory are trialling preschool programs for three-year-olds in addition to the current four-year-old programs. Many of the ELC's in the Independent school sector have provided three- and four-year-old programs for students since their inception.

ISSUES

One of the key issues in early childhood education is around attracting and maintaining trained staff. ELCs located in remote communities would prefer to employ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in their programs as a way of promoting future educational pathways for their young people. This is extremely difficult in a remote context as the recruitment and retention of any workforce in a remote community is a challenge. There are several programs in the Northern Territory that support training, including school-based VET programs and on-Country university qualifications, however the number of trained staff exiting these programs is very limited.

The cost to meet the requirements of the NQF standards is prohibitive for many schools in the rural and remote context. The limited funding available to schools to establish an ELC makes it a challenge to establish new early childhood centres, therefore some schools have implemented a playgroup model to meet the need and interest of parents and carers in the absence of a formal ELC program.

School attendance is a key issue in the Northern Territory, particularly as it relates to remote communities. Attendance data received from the Northern Territory Department of Education (NT DoE) is aggregated across the three sectors, making it difficult for the Independent school sector to have a clear understanding of their overall position on this matter. The Association of Independent Schools NT (AISNT) does not track the attendance data of any Independent

early learning centre so there is no data currently available on attendance in these centres.

There is no national standard for literacy and numeracy assessment; the development of such a standard, should it occur, must be in collaboration with staff in schools and ELCs. In some Independent schools, children are assessed prior to entering transition (first year of formal schooling), however this data is site specific and not moderated or evidenced against a nationally agreed standard. There are NT DoE curriculum resources available for schools to use, however these are not mandated and schools utilise a variety of approaches as determined by the school. All curriculum choices by Independent preschools are within the NQF and EYLF.

FUNDING

There is no funding to accommodate the needs of students with disability in ELCs. The funding under the Schooling Resource Standard only applies to compulsory schooling years. Under this model there is no funding for ELCs, as it only comes into effect from transition. It is hoped that the new PRA will go some way to proving funding support for the three- and four-year program and students with disability in ELCs.

OPPORTUNITIES

Families as First Teachers (FaFT) is a program that delivers quality early learning and parent support programs to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young children and their families. It develops place-based programs to engage families and communities and build parents' capacity and engage them in the preschool program as the first teachers of their children. The aim of FaFT is to improve developmental outcomes for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children by working with families and children prior to school entry. There are a small number of FaFT programs in Independent Schools across the Northern Territory.

There may be an opportunity to offer a flexi-school model for a program for three- and four-year-olds to provide schools with access to resources, staffing, and programs without the cost of establishing a centre at the school. Such a program would involve a mobile unit visiting communities to show what engaging in early learning looks like, and how it can prepare children for school. A model currently in operation in the Northern Territory which could form the basis of such a model is the Life Education Healthy Harold program which travels between schools.

Vocational Education and Training (VET) in communities is one way the staffing issue may be addressed. Funding would be required to support Independent schools to move into this space as Registered Training Organisations with the ability to train young people with the qualifications to work in ELCs. Currently, VET in communities mainly focuses on hospitality, tourism and sports, which does not necessarily reflect the job availability and workforce need in the community.

Some Independent schools have bilingual programs. The establishment of these programs and other cultural programs need to be done in consultation with the community and must have community support and involvement to be successful. This may be an opportunity for ELCs to engage parents in the education of their child prior to the compulsory years of schooling.

7.4 VICTORIA



Independent Schools Victoria (ISV) supports outside hours school care OSHC, LDC and kindergarten (the year before formal school).

Three-year-old kindergarten has recently been introduced in the state with children in this age group exposed to 15 hours of sessional kindergarten. The Victorian Independent school sector has some 140 early childhood education and care services. Noting that these services are a combination of either a standalone or sessional 3 and 4-year-old kindergarten or LDC, or an integrated service with long day care and kindergarten sessions. These services are representational of the variety of school type, be it philosophically based (Montessori, Steiner or Reggio Emilia inspired) or faith-based.

ISSUES

COVID-19 has significantly impacted the Independent school sector in Victoria, with 270 days of lockdown since 2020. During its peak, ISV was meeting with both state and federal Ministers and their departmental heads, as often as twice a week, preparing schools and the early childhood sector for closures, mandates, ministerial

orders, and remote / return to learning. There are significant workforce shortages in the Victorian early childhood sector. ISV estimates 8,500 to 12,000 kindergarten teachers will be needed within the wider kindergarten sector.

The workforce shortage will become even more of a challenge with the announcement in June 2022 by the Victorian premier to move towards free preschool, which under the Best Start Best Life initiative will be increased to 30 hours by 2032. This will require more early childhood trained teachers, place more demand on current services infrastructure as well as the need for more kindergartens.

Data in Victoria is collected through the Kindergarten Information Management System annual collection, as well as the national census. ISV has limited access to this data and uses it to inform its work with schools in early childhood and in conversations with the Department of Education and Training and the Minister.

FUNDING

LDC and OSHC are both eligible for the CCS. The state government funds 5 to 15 hours of kindergarten for three-year-olds and 15 to 20 hours of kindergarten for four-year-olds. Fee income is also a strong contributor to income for the Independent sector. Fee income for kindergarten programs can range from \$2,500 to \$25,000 per year.

COVID-19 was a significant contributor to stress for Independent LDCs, where the CCS gap was waived. There was an impetus of “free childcare and free kinder” however, some families withdrew children due to fear of contracting COVID-19, or some families not being able to attract the funding. JobKeeper was in effect for many LDC, placing the sector under significant pressure. A centre could not attract JobKeeper if they stood down staff or accepted funding from another source. These funding changes meant that some services were at an operational loss.

OPPORTUNITIES

ISV notes that through the pandemic, cross-sectoral conversations are more common, seeing a strengthened appreciation of the complexity and type of services delivered within the sector. Further conversations have availed ISV the opportunity of being seen as a key stakeholder within the wider ECEC field. The Department of Education, Skills and Employment is now more deeply engaged in early childhood in the Independent school sector and understands the complexities involved. A review of

state funding with regards to the service category and type is needed to ensure that it is needs-based and meets the individual requirements of schools and their community.

ISV supports the ongoing work of the early childhood managers at AISs and would like to see a conference to support their continued collegial relationship. This could extend to the Independent early childhood sector more broadly, as it is a unique sector with individual characteristics; philosophical, faith-based and/or values-based, with vision and values that sit at the heart of the school.

ISV continues to advocate that the workforce needs to be culturally responsive to the needs of students. There are moves to fast-track incentives such as an 18 month upskilling program through peak providers such as Deakin University to assist in meeting the growing workforce demands. Workforce qualification is vital in supporting the implementation of three-year old kindergarten in both preschools and LDC, where degree-qualified teachers are a necessity to the program being accredited and ensuring the further professionalisation of the field.

Other areas of opportunity discussed by ISV:

- Review quality of practice – COVID-19 has raised options for what can be achieved online with children and communicating with parents in a different format.
- Raising the status of the early childhood profession.
- A strengthened and committed professionalisation of the Early Years Learning Framework and Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework.
- A play-based curriculum within the first years of schooling will be a focus within the ISV professional development schedule.
- Extrapolating data, how to use it, the purpose and audience.
- First 1000 days of life – children are getting ready for school from birth.

7.5 WESTERN AUSTRALIA



The Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia (AISWA) offers excellent support to schools and affirms that schools are doing the best possible work in catering to the early childhood sector.

AISWA supports the early years of schooling from pre-kindergarten to year two with a particular focus on kindergarten education and employs five early-childhood consultants with a FTE of 3.8, including an early childhood consultant in the Kimberley region.

Some schools have LDC licenses; however, this is not the core focus of AISWA. Schools who choose to run a LDC do so with the support of the CCS. Most schools have external providers for OSHC, so these are not covered by the work of AISWA.

Children in Western Australia can start school in Independent schools from three years of age. However, there is currently no funding for this age group, and they are also not eligible for CCS for their time at pre-kindergarten. As such, three-year-olds attending pre-kindergarten are either full fee paying or subsidised through the school. Several schools run a community-based playgroup for children building on community data from the AEDC to support the transition to school.

ISSUES

COVID-19 is affecting the staffing numbers in Western Australia, with many teachers away on leave due to being a close contact or contracting the virus. It is increasingly difficult to find staff, particularly in regional and remote communities. Unlike the government sector, there are limited incentives to work in remote locations as this is an expensive venture for many Independent schools. However, it is important to note that all sectors have difficulty in finding and keeping staff in remote areas.

There are key staff in AISWA who visit remote communities as consultants, supporting schools in early childhood, literacy, numeracy, leadership, languages, transition to boarding school, cultural awareness and governance. Increasing the cultural

competency of staff will have a flow on effect on student engagement and outcomes. There is an AISWA staff member who is working on cultural awareness in all schools. Many staff about to commence work in remote Independent preschools will undertake several days of cultural competency training on Country, peoples and cultural norms before moving to their community.

Aboriginal languages education is a key part of delivery in remote communities. There are courses aimed at training community members to be language teachers in the classroom. AISWA supports the teaching of home, traditional and Aboriginal languages in schools through the Aboriginal Independent Community Schools languages program. There are five Aboriginal Independent Community Schools with kindergarten children that teach Aboriginal languages. There are also metropolitan schools that embed Noongar language and culture across the curriculum. *There is also an AISWA staff member who is working on cultural awareness in all schools.*

As Independent kindergartens are all co-located with schools, transition to compulsory school is often embedded in their early engagement with the children. Students already use the school facilities, learn about school, and meet the teachers. It is considered that once you start kindergarten, you start school as this is the first token of enrolment.

The push of 'schoolification' is a concern for the early childhood sector in Western Australia, where some schools may promote formal learning over play-based learning. AISWA supports the use of the Early Years Learning Framework and its underpinning of play-based learning in kindergarten. At AISWA, the early childhood years are highly regarded in their professional learning support of play-based pedagogy and inquiry learning in the early years.

Ten years ago, the NQS was implemented from kindergarten to year 2 and applied with a school lens. At the time, kindergarten was exempt from the national regulations. Kindergartens in Western Australia are regulated by the Non-Government School Registration within the WA Department of Education. Within the Standards for Non-government Schools, principals are required to conduct an annual audit using the NQS.

FUNDING

School fees, state and Commonwealth funding are the main sources of funding for the Independent early childhood sector in Western Australia. Kindergarten is funded eleven hours by the state and four hours by the Commonwealth through the PRA. Currently, AISWA administers the PRA funding

to the schools. Funding from the state is based on need; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander schools and low-fee paying schools attract higher funding. An element of the PRA funding supports the early childhood consultancy unit at AISWA.

Under the new PRA, the focus is on attendance and engagement. Both LDC with kindergarten programs, and school-based kindergarten programs will be funded. In the past, the funding only went to school-based programs, across the three sectors (government, Catholic and Independent). The new PRA funding will require the collection of attendance data. The current challenge is to determine how to collect this data as the Independent school sector is not a system.

Children with disability at kindergarten are not funded through Commonwealth funding. However, the Western Australian government does fund students with disability in kindergarten, based on four sessions per week (FTE). Schools are in different categories depending on their school, the ability for parents to contribute, location, and other loadings, so a student in kindergarten in one school that has been granted low funding, may receive a different amount for a student in another school that also has been granted low funding.

OPPORTUNITIES

Developing collegiality and collaboration between AISs is important for AISWA. Ideas for future collaboration between AIS early childhood managers shared by AISWA include a study tour of different states and territories, a conference and advocacy work that recognises the diversity of the sector.

AISWA identified several ways they can continue to support the work of their Independent schools:

- Supporting the implementation of the PRA.
- Representation of and advocacy for Independent Schools on policy groups, reference groups, peak organisations and committees.
- Partnership with universities on research projects.
- Encourage schools to use the AEDC data for strategic decisions.
- NQS compliance.
- Implementing the revised EYLF and the NQF Approved Learning Frameworks.
- Professional learning opportunities for schools both face to face and online.
- Support schools with appropriate pedagogies for the early years.

- Network meetings; metro, regional, remote and special interests.
- Providing policy advice on early childhood matters.
- Support successful transitions to schools for children.
- Focus on supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in remote schools.
- Publications such as Playful STEM; using blocks in kindergarten to year two.
- Provision and support of the on-entry assessment; foundation into year one and two.
- Commitment to Reconciliation.

7.6 SOUTH AUSTRALIA



The Association of Independent Schools of South Australia (AISSA) supports ELC, preschools and LDC centres in many Independent schools. Most of the more than 40 Independent preschools are co-located within schools. Some schools also offer play groups to respond to the needs of families.

ELCs are viewed as an integral part of the community and culture within the school and are seen as a key step into school community life. In some instances, three-year-old and four-year-old children can attend preschool and some ELCs also cater for children from birth. Some Out of School Hours Care (OSHC) providers offer after school care for preschool children.

ISSUES

AISSA works closely with individual schools to support early learning through reference groups, professional learning and targeted programs. A key program developed by AISSA is a reference group for early childhood leaders across birth to year two. The aim of the group is to unpack teaching and learning and leadership in early childhood, including the connection between the Early Years Learning Framework and the Australian Curriculum. AISSA provides forums and ways for early childhood educators, teachers and leaders to connect and support one another.

COVID-19 reaffirmed AISSA as a key information source for Independent schools in SA. AISSA provided support on preschool staffing obligations, ensuring that there was consistent messaging on the requirements of managing COVID-19 so that preschools could maintain their responsibilities under the changing directives.

There are challenges in attracting qualified staff in early childhood settings. There is a need for improved salary and conditions and a raised profile for the profession in early childhood. Facilitating professional learning to support staff is a key focus for AISSA. Attracting staff that view early childhood as a long-term career will help raise the profile of early childhood whilst raising the profile of early childhood leaders would lead to growth in this area.

FUNDING

The South Australian government has made early childhood education and care a key focus and AISSA welcomes this initiative. There is funding available from the state government to support priority groups of children such as students with disability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

The UNANP funding has specific requirements, which are met by the Independent school sector.

OPPORTUNITIES

Nature play is a central focus of many Independent preschools as it has strong links to the Australian Curriculum and the NQF. This method is also focussed on learning beyond nature, with an integration of learning for the outdoors, connecting with nature in an authentic way. Many Independent schools are committed to developing outdoor learning spaces.

AISSA identified several other areas for future opportunities in the Independent school sector:

- Raising the profile of early childhood education and care in the broader education community.
- Increasing the status of staff working in early childhood, through improved access to further qualifications, professional learning, and increased salary.
- Developing a common language between school and early learning, that assists with transitions and teacher collaboration.
- Supporting transitions between preschool and reception as well as transitions for children during the pre-school day.
- Reviewing the teacher standards, noting that the current Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership standards do not cover early childhood education and care.

7.7 QUEENSLAND



Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) provides advocacy to a range of early childhood services including kindergarten, LDC and OSHC. As state and national funding is attached to kindergarten most of the support is targeted to the year before formal schooling. In Queensland, approved kindergarten programs are for children aged three-and-a-half to four-and-a-half, with some Independent schools offering pre-kindergarten programs to three-year-olds either in the kindergarten program or in their own class. Three-year-old child enrolments do not attract any funding from the Commonwealth, or the state.

Approved kindergarten programs, those that receive Queensland Kindergarten Funding Scheme subsidies, must be taught by a degree qualified teacher to attract funding. There are 38 kindergarten services that operate on Independent school sites and that run to a school timetable. There are also kindergarten programs delivered in 79 LDC services on Independent school sites. While resources and communications are provided to all services, in-depth support from ISQ for these programs varies depending on interest from member schools.

ISSUES

COVID-19 has been a significant issue for Independent school early childhood education and care services in terms of both funding and workforce. ISQ provided considerable support to services regarding CCS gap payment, JobKeeper and school and centre closures. ISQ facilitated Queensland funding for kindergarten services affected by closures and remote learning. The funding ensured that they could provide remote learning to families during state-wide lockdowns and reduce fees to low or no cost during certain periods.

Workforce during the pandemic has been and continues to be difficult. Vaccination mandates as well as close contact rules made it problematic for some programs to operate due to teacher and staffing requirements, particularly for those schools with religious or philosophical orientation. Some services were required to reduce rooms due to

staffing shortages. In general, access to qualified staff in regional and remote locations is an issue in Queensland, which became more apparent during the pandemic.

Teacher shortages in Queensland are amplified by the requirement to be a four-year trained early childhood teacher to be a registered teacher in Queensland. Teachers transferring from other states such as New South Wales, who may have a three-year degree, are unable to register in Queensland. While this does not prevent employment as an early childhood teacher it may impact a desire to remain in the sector. ISQ works collaboratively with other stakeholders to influence university delivery of early childhood teaching degrees. Many early childhood degrees cater from birth to 8-years-old and some higher education providers focus their curriculum on the primary years.

All kindergartens must follow one of the approved kindergarten curriculums. Independent school kindergarten programs use the Queensland Kindergarten Learning Guideline which describes a set of five learning and development areas aligned to the five broad learning outcomes identified in the EYLF. Some services also overlay their own curriculum approach such as Steiner and Montessori. Most Independent school kindergartens employ play-based learning. There can be some expectations from schools that kindergarten should be like Prep class in that it should reflect the learning style and curriculum taught in formal schooling. Having a shared language between the kindergarten and school is important to support the needs of the child and their families.

Attendance is less of an issue in Queensland than it was ten years ago, with a current attendance rate of over 95 per cent. In 2021 and 2022, funding was offered to pilot programs that encourage three-year-old enrolment in kindergarten. The project supports the delivery of intergenerational playgroup style programs. One Independent member school in receipt of this funding found it helpful to support the engagement of migrant families and enrolment of children in the following year, who may not otherwise have participated in a kindergarten program.

Transition to school is often smoother for children who attend a kindergarten program co-located with a school. Independent schools notice that children are more confident when starting in Prep, due to their familiarity with the environment. In Queensland, a transition statement is required to be developed for each child, which is used to let both parents and prospective schools know about the strengths of the child and any support to be considered as they move into formal schooling. These statements are shared with schools through an online portal with the parent's permission.

FUNDING

The current Queensland Kindergarten Funding Scheme is calculated on a base subsidy with additional subsidies for:

- low socioeconomic services
- Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia for attracting and retaining teachers
- support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's families
- health care card holders
- refugee students.

The aim of this funding is for no-cost or low-cost kindergarten. This scheme will end in 2023.

Funding for students with disability is distributed through the central governing body (ISQ in the Independent school sector) through an application process for either diagnosed or imputed disability. This funding is to cover the needs of the student and provide support to teachers through avenues like professional learning.

A new Queensland Kindergarten Funding Scheme will commence in 2023. While a similar base subsidy will apply to all enrolments, the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas subsidy will be dependent on a child's residential address. This could be challenging if students from disadvantaged backgrounds live in affluent areas and vice versa. Additionally, there will be an expectation on ISQ to manage the facilitation of funding, which is problematic as different kindergartens use different financial and child management systems. Some services use childcare systems and others might use school systems.

ISQ acknowledges that the government is doing what they can to ensure that children and families attract the level of funding that they need to access and participate in a kindergarten program.

OPPORTUNITIES

ISQ notes that collaboration with the state government and across sectors is an important feature of the work in early childhood in Queensland. ISQ is represented on a number of committees and groups where they represent the interests of the Independent school sector.

ISQ raised a number of opportunities for the Independent school sector:

- the Independent early childhood sector, and particularly ISQ as a leader in early childhood education

- appropriate pay and working conditions for early childhood professionals
- grow the capacity of ISQ to provide service-based support
- ISQ working with services to develop plans on the Kindy Uplift Pilot⁶⁶ to build educator capability, support inclusion and improve children’s learning and development.

7.8 TASMANIA



Independent Schools Tasmania (IST) supports all levels of early childhood education and care, from infants to grade 2. Early learning centres (ELCs) are predominantly standalone ventures catering for children from infants to pre-kindergarten. However, several schools have built their own centres on school grounds, allowing them to offer education and care to children prior to kindergarten.

In Tasmania, kindergarten caters for four-year-olds, and programs must be provided by a registered school. ELCs can only provide kindergarten if the facility or room from which they deliver kindergarten is licensed as a school through the Office of the Education Register. Early entry to kindergarten may be considered if the child is classified as being gifted, or if they are transferring from interstate and were previously attending a preschool.

Some schools in Tasmania provide full week programs, with flexible learning over five days. The way this is provided, and the associated fees, vary dependent on the school sector and school concerned. There has been a slow but progressive increase in the provision of five-day-per-week kindergarten programs in Tasmania, which is causing concerns within the ELC sector as this would detract from their part-time attendance of the current three-day-per-week model. Under the three-days-a-week model, families can choose to send their child to a ELC part time.

The attendance rate in kindergarten in Tasmania

is 100 per cent, meaning there are no additional programs for priority groups like Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. This attendance rate is outstanding given kindergarten is not compulsory. Due to the provision of kindergarten from school sites, there is a societal view within Tasmania that school begins at kindergarten.

ISSUES

The NQS is not required in kindergarten, but all sectors are working towards implementing it in all schools in the state. IST is supporting schools in the implementation, which it hopes will be completed by 2026. Due to the provision of kindergarten from school sites, Tasmania is generally strong regarding Quality Area one – Educational Program and Practice and Quality Area 7 – Governance and Leadership. The implementation of the NQS in kindergarten will likely strengthen the other Quality Areas.

Workforce is a significant issue in Tasmania due to training opportunities and isolation. Regional and remote areas struggle for staff but for some people all Tasmania is considered as regional. Many staff train where they live and stay to work in the local region. There is a shortage of qualified staff and the salary for staff is low. Although the birth to three-year-old ages is the most important for learning, the staff for these children tend to be the least qualified and poorly paid. It would be advantageous to have a qualified early childhood teacher in each ELC room, however the pay and working conditions between ELCs and schools vary greatly. Teachers are more likely to earn higher salaries at schools and attract school holiday leave. The hours of work are also aligned with the school day, rather than 7:30am-6:00pm or 7:00am – 6:30pm. There are no incentive programs to upskill the workforce in Tasmania.

ELCs often find it difficult to fill vacancies, however there is no collaboration between centres or sharing of relief staff. The perception of curriculum in ELCs is often based on the idea of ‘babysitting’ or play based activities, rather than play-based learning. However, many ELC staff are passionate about their work, and this is what drives them to stay in the sector. This passion in turn, professionalises the field.

The predominant curriculum approach to early learning in Tasmania can best be described as a Reggio-Emilia inspired play-based model. The dominance of this approach has seen a

⁶⁶ “Kindy Uplift Pilot,” text, Early Childhood Education and Care, September 1, 2021, <https://earlychildhood.qld.gov.au/funding-and-support/grants-tenders-and-funding/kindy-uplift-pilot>.

corresponding drop in teacher-led activities and direct instruction, with the subsequent possibility that some children are leaving kindergarten with limited exposure to areas such as phonics and counting. Although kindergarten is part of the school in Tasmania, it falls under the Early Years Learning Framework.

The AEDC is the main source of data for Tasmania as there is no local data collection. The state government sector has had a Kindergarten Development Checklist in place for numerous years and has only recently provided access to the other two sectors. IST is currently compiling a resource list of assessments used in each state and territory.

As the number of identified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students rise, so has the capability of schools to incorporate Aboriginal cultural knowledge into the curriculum. IST acknowledges that due to the relatively low number of identified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the sector, there might be scope for future training for staff to include cultural knowledge in their curriculum.

FUNDING

There is no state funding for kindergarten in Tasmania, with all money coming from the UNANP funding. There is no dedicated funding for students with disability as they are not covered under the UNANP funding. There was a one-off pool of funding to support students with disability but currently there is no funding.

The CCS covers both out of school hours care and early learning centres. There is not a significant range between ELC fees, and all centres have relatively high standards of care. Due to the wraparound funding model with some schools accessing UNANP for kindergarten and CCS for childcare at the school, there has been some confusion about the funding model. Some people believed that schools were 'double dipping'. IST suggests that consistency in the funding model by moving childcare funding under school funding would allow for a better funding model that provides for the diversity of students in the sector.

OPPORTUNITIES

Cross-sectoral relationships are an important part of the work of IST. Bringing advocates together would strengthen the support for teachers and workers, with a joint front when it comes to governmental change. Governments engaging with key stakeholders should be a feature of advocacy work.

8.

CONCLUSION



The challenges facing the early childhood services sector can be overcome with the right measures.

Early childhood education and care provides the opportunity for young children to foster a sense of belonging and develop important social, emotional, physical and cognitive skills. Challenges include funding complexity, workforce shortage, addressing needs of equity groups, regulatory burden and availability of national, sector and state and territory data.

The PRA is evidence of the Australian Government's continued commitment to investment in early childhood services with plans to reduce barriers that are interdependent, systemic and historical in nature. The improvement of national data sets will allow for deeper analysis of key elements to improve early childhood education and provide a better understanding of the needs of the sector. A range of measures across equity groups and new strategies to improve outcomes, access and participation for all children, are currently in development and will form the basis of the PRA.

Consistent and national funding under the new PRA is widely welcomed by the Independent school sector, as the funding is intended to follow the child, irrespective of sector. It is hoped this funding will meet the additional needs of children and provide affordable preschool for all children.

ACECQA ratings show that Independent schools deliver high quality early childhood education and care. The NQF defines standards for education programs and practice, safe and welcoming environments, staffing ratios and qualifications,

family partnerships and leadership. Regulatory requirements can be a burden but are considered important to maintaining quality early childhood education for children.

While COVID-19 and teacher shortages have, and continue, to impact the sector, significantly in recent years, preschools in the Independent school sector and other early childhood services continue to offer quality early childhood education and care, family and community support and provide smooth transitions to formal schooling.

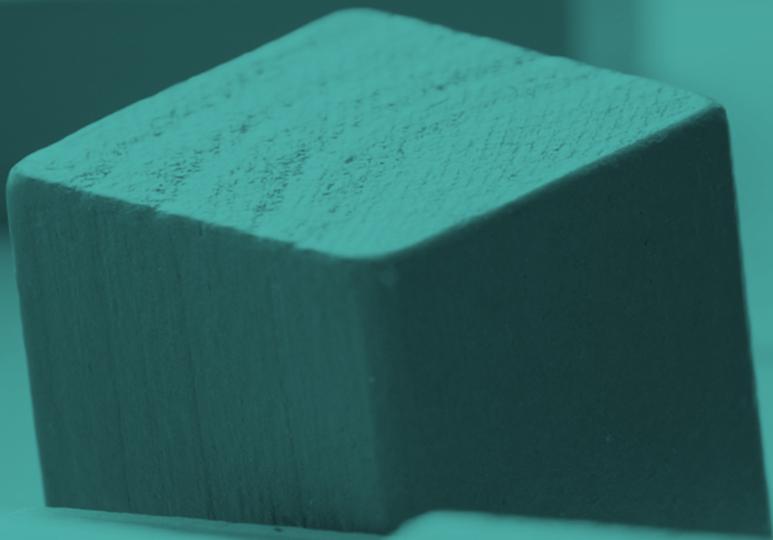
With long term commitment and investment in the right areas, challenges can be overcome. The Independent school sector is motivated to be part of solutions and has insights that can be useful to the whole early childhood sector.

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS AUSTRALIA

Independent Schools Australia is the peak national body representing the interests of the Independent schools sector. ISA's role is to advocate nationally for Independent schooling in Australia, represent the Independent schools sector to government and other organisations, and to promote the choice, diversity and contribution offered by Independent schooling.

Independent Schools Australia comprises eight-member state and territory Associations of Independent Schools and through these Associations, and acts on behalf of 1,187 Independent schools with some 667,000 students. Independent schools are a diverse group of not-for-profit, non-government schools serving a range of different communities. Many Independent schools provide religious or values-based education. Others promote a particular educational philosophy, international curriculum or interpretation of mainstream education. Many Independent schools have been established by community groups seeking to meet unique needs. Independent Catholic schools are a significant part of the sector, accounting for approximately seven per cent of the Independent sector's enrolments.

APPENDIX



The appendix includes an overview of the three sections of the Preschool Reform Agreement 2022 Implementation Plans for each state and territory:

- Program/activities, objectives and outcomes.
 - Funding allocation to assist in preparing states and territories for the implementation of the PRA in 2023.
 - Actions in relation to the PRA funding, attendance and outcomes measures.
- All states and territories have committed to supporting Funding Follows the Child and 600 hours of free preschool per year for all children with specific elements to address equity challenges for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children from vulnerable and disadvantaged backgrounds.

PRA STATE AND TERRITORY IMPLEMENTATION PLANS – 2022 PROGRAM/ACTIVITIES, OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

STATE	COMMONWEALTH CONTRIBUTIONS	600 HOURS OF FREE PRESCHOOL PROGRAM PER YEAR	PARTICIPATION - ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN AND CHILDREN FROM VULNERABLE AND DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS	COMMONWEALTH FUNDING ALLOCATION	STATE CONTEXT
ACT	Estimated YBFS Contribution \$9,248,666	Outputs	Facilitate learning and development and transition to school by maintaining universal access in affordable, quality programs for all children.	\$9.6m	ACT funds 12 of the 15 hours per week, 600 hours per year of preschool in government preschools. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children can access an additional 15 hours per week.
	Adjustment to Estimated YBFS Contribution N/A				
	Top-up to maintain 2021 levels \$405,810	Objectives	All children have access to high quality and free preschool.	Increased participation.	
	Implementation Project funding \$500,000		Outcomes	All children including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, vulnerable, and disadvantaged children have access and participate in free and quality programs.	
Total Budget \$10,154,476					

PRA STATE AND TERRITORY IMPLEMENTATION PLANS – 2022 PROGRAM/ACTIVITIES, OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

STATE	COMMONWEALTH CONTRIBUTIONS	600 HOURS OF FREE PRESCHOOL PROGRAM PER YEAR	PARTICIPATION - ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN AND CHILDREN FROM VULNERABLE AND DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS	COMMONWEALTH FUNDING ALLOCATION	STATE CONTEXT
NT	Estimated YBFS Contribution \$4,472,691	Cost does not present a barrier to meet the needs of parents and communities.	Accessible, quality programs with a focus for disadvantaged, vulnerable and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Delivery of strategies targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and disadvantaged and vulnerable children.	\$4m and \$0.7m respectively	NT funds 600 hours of free preschool for four-year-old children. This agreement contributes to increasing base preschool provision of 480 preschool to 600 hours.
	Adjustment to Estimated YBFS N/A	Outputs Support all children's early childhood education (ECE) attendance at any preschool setting (LDC, non-government, government).	Facilitate learning and development and transitions through access and participation, in affordable and quality programs, including Families as First Teachers (FaFT)		
	Top-up to maintain 2021 levels \$199,672				
	Implementation project funding \$1,000,000	Objectives Transition to school and development by improving attendance at quality programs.	All children have access to and regularly attend an affordable and quality ECE program.		NT have high levels of developmental vulnerability across all five domains of the AEDC. 23.4 per cent are vulnerable on two or more domains compared to 11.2 per cent nationally.
	Total Budget \$5,672,363				

PRA STATE AND TERRITORY IMPLEMENTATION PLANS – 2022 PROGRAM/ACTIVITIES, OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

STATE	COMMONWEALTH CONTRIBUTIONS	600 HOURS OF FREE PRESCHOOL PROGRAM PER YEAR	PARTICIPATION - ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN AND CHILDREN FROM VULNERABLE AND DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS	COMMONWEALTH FUNDING ALLOCATION	STATE CONTEXT
QLD	Estimated YBFS Contribution \$83,414,971	Outputs Implementing accessible and quality ECE programs that meet the needs of parents and communities particularly vulnerable and disadvantaged children.	Raise awareness of the value of participating in quality kindergarten programs.	\$83.414m and \$1.542m respectively	The size of Queensland and its diverse population provides a unique set of considerations for implementing the funding model.
	Adjustment to Estimated YBFS Contribution N/A				
	Top-up to maintain 2021 levels \$1,542,801				
	Implementation Project funding \$6,000,000	Objectives Transition to school by maintaining universal access to and participation in affordable and quality ECE programs.	Deliver strategies that target less likely to enrol or attend kindergarten.		Queensland model has been found to be lower cost than other jurisdictions.
	Total Budget \$90,957,772	Outcomes All children have access to and participate in an affordable and quality program regardless of setting) LDC, non-government, government).	Targeted cohorts that facilitate transitions, promote value, lift quality, improve outcomes.		The QKFS satisfies the funding obligations as it ensures all children can access quality and affordable kindergarten, provides a subsidy to where the child is enrolled regardless of setting.

PRA STATE AND TERRITORY IMPLEMENTATION PLANS – 2022 PROGRAM/ACTIVITIES, OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

STATE	COMMONWEALTH CONTRIBUTIONS	600 HOURS OF FREE PRESCHOOL PROGRAM PER YEAR	PARTICIPATION - ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN AND CHILDREN FROM VULNERABLE AND DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS	COMMONWEALTH FUNDING ALLOCATION	STATE CONTEXT
VIC	Estimated YBFS Contribution \$124,132,707	Outputs Quality, affordable preschool.	N/A	\$128.546m	Services charge family fees to meet the cost of running the program. Fees are set by the services.
	Adjustment to Estimated YBFS Contribution N/A	Objectives Facilitate learning and development.			
	Top-up to maintain 2021 levels \$4,413,779	Outcomes All children have access to and can participate in quality and affordable program.			In developing the plan, key factors include historic ownership, high participation rates, population growth and impacts of policy on access and participation.
	Implementation Project funding \$5,750,000				
Total Budget \$134,296,486					

PRA STATE AND TERRITORY IMPLEMENTATION PLANS – 2022 PROGRAM/ACTIVITIES, OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

STATE	COMMONWEALTH CONTRIBUTIONS	600 HOURS OF FREE PRESCHOOL PROGRAM PER YEAR	PARTICIPATION - ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN AND CHILDREN FROM VULNERABLE AND DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS	COMMONWEALTH FUNDING ALLOCATION	STATE CONTEXT
SA	Estimated YBFS Contribution \$27,353,000	Outputs	Continue additional funding to government schools. Continue grants payments to LDC and non-government sector.	Delivering programs that target participation in quality programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and disadvantaged children.	In 2022 the department will continue to support 600 hours of preschool: increased service provision, emphasis on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and disadvantaged children, childcare and non-government schools funding subsidies, subsidies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and disadvantaged children. Implementing the Early Learning Strategy.
	Adjustment to Estimated YBFS Contribution N/A				
	Top-up to maintain 2021 levels \$870,000				
	Implementation Project funding \$4,000,000	Objectives	Maintain universal access to and participation in affordable, quality programs for all children.	Improve participation and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and disadvantaged children.	
	Total Budget \$32,223,000				
		Outcomes	All children, including disadvantaged children, have access to, and participate in, affordable and quality programs.	All children have access to and participate in quality, affordable programs. All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in remote areas have access to preschool.	

PRA STATE AND TERRITORY IMPLEMENTATION PLANS – 2022 PROGRAM/ACTIVITIES, OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

STATE	COMMONWEALTH CONTRIBUTIONS	600 HOURS OF FREE PRESCHOOL PROGRAM PER YEAR	PARTICIPATION - ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN AND CHILDREN FROM VULNERABLE AND DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS	COMMONWEALTH FUNDING ALLOCATION	STATE CONTEXT
NSW	Estimated YBFS Contribution \$140,736,094	Outputs Implement accessible quality ECE programs.	Deliver strategies targeting the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children particularly in remote areas and vulnerable and disadvantaged children.	\$140.736m	State and Commonwealth currently funds government and community preschools, and LDC providers. Existing funding for 3-year-old preschool, community preschools, free preschool for community and mobile preschools and capital grants.
	Adjustment to Estimated YBFS Contribution N/A	Supporting enrolments and participation in accessible quality preschool regardless of setting (LDC, government, non-government)			
	Top-up to maintain 2021 levels \$85,502				
	Implementation Project funding \$6,000,000	Objectives Facilitate children's early learning and school transition			
Total Budget \$146,821,596	Outcomes All children have access to participation in quality and affordable preschool.	All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have access to participation in quality and affordable preschool.			

PRA STATE AND TERRITORY IMPLEMENTATION PLANS – 2022 PROGRAM/ACTIVITIES, OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

STATE	COMMONWEALTH CONTRIBUTIONS	600 HOURS OF FREE PRESCHOOL PROGRAM PER YEAR	PARTICIPATION - ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN AND CHILDREN FROM VULNERABLE AND DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS	COMMONWEALTH FUNDING ALLOCATION	STATE CONTEXT
WA	Estimated YBFS Contribution \$45,406,138	Outputs	Offered 600 hours kindergarten through government and non-government sectors.	\$34.727m and \$11.727m respectively	Champions affordable, universal early childhood education in the school sector.
	Adjustment to Estimated YBFS Contribution N/A		Programs designed particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, remote children and disadvantaged children to prepare children for kindergarten and promote enrolment and participation.		
	Top-up to maintain 2021 levels \$1,048,617	Objectives	Facilitate early learning and development and transition in affordable, high-quality programs delivered by degree-qualified teachers.	To facilitate student enrolment, attendance and preparation for kindergarten. To support and enhance the workforce regardless of setting.	State investment in infrastructure qualified teachers and resources.
Implementation Project funding \$1,000,000	Outcomes		All children have access to affordable, high-quality programs		
Total Budget \$47,454,755					

PRA STATE AND TERRITORY IMPLEMENTATION PLANS – 2022 PROGRAM/ACTIVITIES, OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

STATE	COMMONWEALTH CONTRIBUTIONS	600 HOURS OF FREE PRESCHOOL PROGRAM PER YEAR	PARTICIPATION - ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN AND CHILDREN FROM VULNERABLE AND DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS	COMMONWEALTH FUNDING ALLOCATION	STATE CONTEXT			
TAS	Estimated YBFS Contribution \$9,832,620 Adjustment to Estimated YBFS Contribution N/A	Outputs 600 hours of free kindergarten in government schools* Providing accessible and quality program Supporting all children's access regardless of setting (e.g., non-government, government, LDC).	Delivering strategies and actions targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and vulnerable and disadvantaged children.	\$9.8m and remaining PRA funding respectively. *Funding is also available to non-government schools to top-up delivery to meeting the PRA objectives	Ten hours a week of kindergarten are funded by the state, and the remaining 5 hours under the Agreement. Kindergartens are historically regulated as part of the school system rather than the early childhood education and care sector.			
	Top-up to maintain 2021 levels \$10,023					Objectives 95% or more enrolment. Learning and development and school transition by improving participation in affordable, quality ECE programs.	Facilitate learning and development and school transition by universal access to, and participation in, affordable and quality ECE programs.	Early learning is one of the four priority areas in the Department of Education strategic plan.
	Implementation Project funding \$350,000							
Total Budget \$10,192,643								

PRA STATE AND TERRITORY IMPLEMENTATION PLANS – 2022 FUNDING

State/ territory	Implementation project	Commonwealth funding	Actions	KPI	Timing
ACT	Scope and design of system and process capabilities to support cross-sectoral data collection.	\$0.5 million	Scoping collection systems and capabilities.	Data collection and systems capabilities scoped and designed.	Q1 to Q4 2022
	Preschool in the NT Review	\$0.75 million	Understand current situation of preschool delivery and funding. Best practice approaches for reform. Engage and consult with stakeholders.	Consultant engaged.	30 June 2022
NT			Consider final report and recommendations	Final report.	30 October 2022
			Develop strategic approach to the recommendations.	Strategy agreed.	31 December 2022
	Develop capacity to deliver PRA from 2023	\$0.25 million	Assess existing system capacity and proposed changes including Funding Follows Child (FFC). Implement approaches to support delivery of PRA.	Actions undertaken.	31 December 2022
QLD	Sector systems upgrades and support	\$2.5 million	Kindergarten enrolment and attendance data. Sector support through transition to attendance data reforms.	Transition to electronic systems. Robust and high-quality Enrolment and attendance data.	2022 to 2025
	Queensland Government systems upgrades	\$3 million	Upgrades to Queensland's management system.	Collection of improved enrolment and attendance data.	2022 to 2023
	Data collection management	\$0.5 million	Support development and implementation of new data reporting systems.	Transition to new national collection platform.	2022 to 2025
VIC	Attendance data collection	\$5.75 million	Commence scoping to collect attendance data. E.g., IT. Agree sample collection approach. Use unspent funds for preparing new state-based system.	Scoping complete 2022.	December 2022

PRA STATE AND TERRITORY IMPLEMENTATION PLANS – 2022 FUNDING

State/ territory	Implementation project	Commonwealth funding	Actions	KPI	Timing
NSW	Attendance evidence-base	\$1 million	Commission research and behaviour analytics on attendance data.	Report with actionable recommend- ations.	December 2022
				Program evaluation.	December 2023
	Boosting attendance	\$5 million	Grants/additional loadings to existing programs.	Evidence- based strategies developed	June 2023 July 2023
			Funding to preschools and LDC delivering 600 hours of programs.	Grants provided.	December 2023
			Evidence-based boosting attendance initiatives increasing access, enhancing cultural safety and support for ECE workers with children with additional needs and family and community outreach.	Data collected to support evaluation; learnings assessed.	December 2023
			Assist services to collect attendance baseline data.		December 2023
WA	Prepare for Funding Follows Child (FFC)	\$700 000	State-wide coordination of the implementation of the agreement.		30 June 2023
			Procurement document to execute communications strategy.	Agency engaged to determine options.	Feb-Oct 2022
			Contract entity to administer FFC.		Oct-Nov 2022
			Work in collaboration with ECE sector and Department of Communities to administer FFC.	Completes all requirements.	Ongoing
			Seed funding to the entity to become self-funded from the FFC from 2024.	Consult and collaborate with stakeholders.	Feb/March 2023
				Funding entity established.	
		\$300,000	Work with Commonwealth to agree details of the measures.	National meetings, communication with stakeholders, collaboration with non- government schools' sector, modifying sector systems	February 2023
			All sectors prepare for baseline attendance data.		

PRA STATE AND TERRITORY IMPLEMENTATION PLANS – 2022 FUNDING

State/ territory	Implementation project	Commonwealth funding	Actions	KPI	Timing
TAS	Establish project team	\$350,000	Establish project team, document reporting requirements and DoE system functions, develop new user requirements, IT system changes, support and contribute to the national decisions for the outcome measure, appoint IT contractors, implement enhancements, monitor and refine enhancements.	Project updates, project team established, national or bilateral policy and data measures, required IT enhancements.	March 2022 to August 2025
SA	Prepare for Funding Follows Child (FFC)	\$1.62 million	Move paper application process online for non-government sector and review and enhance back-end data systems, grants/payments management system replaced, new non-government funding arrangements, enhance acquittal process.	Paper application process replaced, non-government payment timelines reduced, procurement in place, new non-government funding arrangements in place, acquittal process documented.	End December 2022
	Attendance strategies and measurement	\$2.38 million	Replace manual sign in/sign out for government and explore opportunities for non-government preschools not covered under CCS, develop or enhance government administration systems and non-government attendance data systems.	Electronic system implemented and all sector attendance data complies with attendance measure.	Throughout 2022

PRA STATE AND TERRITORY IMPLEMENTATION PLANS – 2022 ACTIONS

Reform Element		State actions			
		ACT	NT	QLD	WA
Reform Element One: Implement Commonwealth Funding Follows Child (FFC)	Steps to ready the state to ensure Commonwealth Funding Follows the Child (FFC) can be implemented in 2023	Consult with service providers on funding mechanism, engage unenrolled children. Develop approach for FFC and acquittal mechanism Throughout 2022	Quantify the number of children in preschool at ELC and LDC. Enrolment policy development. Processes for distributing funds. Develop acquittal process. Preschool funding and resource review to deliver best-practice Throughout 2022	Current QKFS funding scheme satisfies the requirements From 2022	Consult with sectors and agencies. Co-design to administer funding. Implement reform in all sectors. Acquittals from 2023 through Commonwealth funding to each sector. Transparency of Commonwealth funding. Completed by April 2023
		Scope and consult on the data systems. Collaboratively develop measure implementation for baseline data. Throughout 2022	Collaboration with Commonwealth on baseline data and implementation. Develop internal systems. Throughout 2022	Work with Commonwealth on data aspects. Sector preparedness for data collection and reforms. Commence development of systems. From 2022	Work with Commonwealth on the details of the reform. End 2022 All sectors to prepare to provide baseline attendance data and measure attendance in 2024. Ongoing
Reform Element Two: Implement a new national preschool attendance measure	Work to ready the State to measure preschool attendance in 2024 and provide baseline data to the Commonwealth in 2023				

PRA STATE AND TERRITORY IMPLEMENTATION PLANS – 2022 ACTIONS

Reform Element		State actions			
		NSW	SA	TAS	VIC
Reform Element One: Implement Commonwealth Funding Follows Child (FFC)	Steps to ready the state to ensure Commonwealth Funding Follows the Child (FFC) can be implemented in 2023	<p>With the Commonwealth: agree of data source, work on data sharing protocols and mechanisms, agree on timeframe, agree on process for target cohorts, acquittals.</p> <p>Review existing funding programs and IT funding systems.</p> <p>Publish revised program guidelines for transparency.</p> <p>Develop strategies in response to why families do not engage with ECE.</p> <p>Incentive payments to services that enrol children not previously in ECE.</p> <p>End 2022</p>	<p>Continue funding mechanisms.</p> <p>Continue and expand annual promotion campaign.</p> <p>Project to collate and integrate financial and enrolment data.</p> <p>Develop acquittal process.</p> <p>Department for Education will publish information on the web on the amount of all sector Commonwealth contribution.</p> <p>Throughout 2022</p>	<p>Build on mechanism for all sectors.</p> <p>Support to students who unenroll or stop attending.</p> <p>Acquit funding for sectors.</p> <p>Deliver auditable report for all sectors.</p> <p>December 2022</p>	<p>Continually reviewing how to strengthen and enhance current contract management arrangements.</p> <p>Throughout 2022</p>
		<p>Use CCS data to understand attendance in LDC.</p> <p>Develop IT systems.</p> <p>Liaise with Dandolo on attendance report,</p> <p>Clarify process for working Commonwealth.</p> <p>End 2022</p>	<p>Undertake preparatory work to begin electronic sign-in.</p> <p>Implement funding.</p> <p>Throughout 2022</p>	<p>Establish governance arrangements and project team.</p> <p>Document reporting for PRA.</p> <p>Document current attendance reporting.</p> <p>Develop new user requirements.</p> <p>Document IT changes.</p> <p>December 2022</p>	<p>Undertake work with the Commonwealth on the development of the measure.</p> <p>Scope for new systems.</p> <p>Agree to approach for interim collection of attendance data.</p> <p>Throughout 2022</p>
Reform Element Two: Implement a new national preschool attendance measure	Work to ready the State to measure preschool attendance in 2024 and provide baseline data to the Commonwealth in 2023				

PRA STATE AND TERRITORY IMPLEMENTATION PLANS – 2022 ACTIONS

Reform Element		State actions			
		ACT	NT	QLD	WA
	Strategies to facilitate reschool attendance by children in the YBFS. For strategies related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children consistent with the Closing the Gap Agreement, engage those communities and/or representative bodies in the design process	<p>Government preschool programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.</p> <p>Engaging more specialised staff.</p> <p>Throughout 2022</p>	<p>Work with stakeholders to improve transitions and wellbeing</p> <p>Family choice in remote areas.</p> <p>Implement attendance strategies.</p> <p>Territory needs-based funding model for non-government preschools.</p> <p>NT Preschool Curriculum.</p> <p>Optimising funding and resources particularly for vulnerable children.</p> <p>Throughout 2022</p>	<p>Continue existing funding to increase access and improve effectiveness particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.</p> <p>Continue to increase participation and transition support for vulnerable children.</p> <p>Continue communication campaigns to encourage enrolment</p> <p>Co-design campaigns to create stronger connection with community</p> <p>From 2022</p>	<p>Public sector to review annual campaign.</p> <p>All sectors will review / develop campaign strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.</p> <p>March-December 2022</p>
Reform Element Three: Implement a new national Preschool Outcomes Measure	Plans for how the state will work with the Commonwealth to develop the preschool outcomes measure	<p>Work collaboratively with the Commonwealth.</p> <p>Throughout 2022</p>	<p>Work collaboratively with the Commonwealth.</p> <p>Throughout 2022</p>	<p>Work collaboratively with the Commonwealth.</p> <p>Throughout 2022</p>	<p>Work collaboratively with the Commonwealth.</p> <p>Throughout 2022</p>
Reform Delivery/Implementation	State-specific data and implementation issues and strategies for how these will be overcome in the context of assessing performance under the Agreement	<p>Measuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander targets.</p> <p>Measure of disadvantage.</p> <p>Children attending preschool across multiple settings.</p> <p>Throughout 2022</p>	<p>Work collaboratively with the Commonwealth on CCS, performance measure definition and collection, and national issue of children undertaking 2 years of preschool.</p> <p>Throughout 2022</p>	<p>Work collaboratively with the Commonwealth: Secure access to CCS data</p> <p>Resolve performance measure questions.</p> <p>Resolve data issues.</p> <p>From 2022</p>	<p>Acquittal of funding to be based on allocations to each sector.</p> <p>ICSEA to be used as supplementary data for disadvantaged children.</p> <p>As needed</p>

PRA STATE AND TERRITORY IMPLEMENTATION PLANS – 2022 ACTIONS

Reform Element		State actions			
		NSW	SA	TAS	VIC
	Strategies to facilitate reschool attendance by children in the YBFS. For strategies related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children consistent with the Closing the Gap Agreement, engage those communities and/or representative bodies in the design process	<p>Better understand patterns and opportunities for improvement.</p> <p>Commonwealth to share child-level attendance data for previous three years.</p> <p>Review existing programs and literature.</p> <p>Consult with key community groups.</p> <p>Co-design strategies that support attendance.</p> <p>End 2022</p>	<p>APY Lands targeted staff.</p> <p>Enrolment and attendance campaign.</p> <p>Project to improve government preschool accessibility.</p> <p>Project to improve enrolment, attendance and participation.</p> <p>Throughout 2022</p>	<p>Programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and specialist staff.</p> <p>Children and family health and wellbeing support including parent education and attendance support.</p> <p>December 2022</p>	<p>Work closely with stakeholders to promote participation, provide targeted funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and vulnerable students.</p> <p>Programs that provide additional support to vulnerable children.</p> <p>Throughout 2022</p>
Reform Element Three: Implement a new national Preschool Outcomes Measure	Plans for how the state will work with the Commonwealth to develop the preschool outcomes measure	<p>Work collaboratively with the Commonwealth.</p> <p>Throughout 2022</p>	<p>Work collaboratively with the Commonwealth.</p> <p>Throughout 2022</p>	<p>Work collaboratively with the Commonwealth.</p> <p>Share school-based screening and outcomes experiences.</p> <p>Throughout 2022</p>	<p>Work collaboratively with the Commonwealth.</p> <p>Throughout 2022</p>
Reform Delivery/Implementation	State-specific data and implementation issues and strategies for how these will be overcome in the context of assessing performance under the Agreement	<p>Finalise data sharing agreement to understand Centre Based Day Care patterns.</p> <p>Implement an interim attendance data collection measure.</p> <p>End 2022</p>	<p>Interim step to data collection through ABS.</p> <p>November-</p> <p>December 2022</p>	<p>Establish project team and governance arrangements to engage with governments.</p> <p>December 2022</p>	<p>Work collaboratively with the Commonwealth.</p> <p>Throughout 2022</p>



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