

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

A GREAT START FOR ALL VICTORIAN
PRESCHOOLERS



Cover:
Greenhills Kindergarten's
educator and AEU member
Emily Hollywood bringing
the best out of her preschool
students.
Photo: Meredith O'Shea



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FOREWORD

The *Lifting Our Game* report, endorsed by all Australian state and territory governments, confirmed the benefits of universal access to preschool education for all three- and four-year-old children.

There is compelling evidence for the difference 15 hours per week of early years education makes to the social, emotional and cognitive outcomes for students. For disadvantaged children, in particular, we will not reduce the achievement gap without ensuring access to early learning for at least two years.

Since its introduction in 2013, preschool funding for four-year-olds has been piecemeal and constantly under threat. Meanwhile, more than 50% of three-year-olds are missing out on preschool because of prohibitively high fees.

This document sets out the recommendations of the AEU Victorian Branch for further action by government to ensure two years of fully funded, high-quality preschool education for every child.



Meredith Peace

President
AEU Victorian Branch

KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Funding

- Resource a funding model for preschools that recognises and provides funding to cover the full cost of service delivery for all three- and four-year-old programs.
- In the interim, commit to increasing the Victorian government's contribution, staggered until it reaches 100%, to three- and four-year-old preschool provision, thereby reducing the cost barrier faced by families.

Two years of preschool

- All four-year-old children be fully funded for a minimum of 15 hours of early childhood education.
- All three-year-old children be fully funded for a minimum of 15 hours of early childhood education.
- Increase the funding for special needs through the new Kindergarten Inclusion Support (KIS) program.
- Increase the number of preschool field officers.

Workforce

- In partnership with the Commonwealth, support and resource the continuance of the National Quality Framework - in particular, the requirement for an additional degree-qualified early childhood teacher in services with enrolments of more than 60 children - by 2020.
- Resource mentoring relationships with additional non-contact time for mentors and provisionally registered teachers in order to meet VIT requirements.
- Fund the delivery and access to professional development and support for early childhood teachers and co-educators within the hours of attendance.
- Provide better access to appropriate ICT hardware and software support and resources for early childhood staff.
- Implement a system of portable long service leave and sick leave for early childhood teachers and co-educators.

Infrastructure

- Provide additional funding to ensure sufficient facilities are available to cater for population growth and the increased numbers of children attending due to the provision of both three- and four-year-old preschool.
- Continue capital works upgrades to ensure facilities are modern and fit-for-purpose.
- Encourage co-location of preschools within school campuses.
- Provide additional funding for ICT hardware.

Background

High-quality early childhood education makes a significant difference to improving outcomes for all children, with particular benefits for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Investing in quality early childhood education provides major social and economic returns. The research demonstrates that the positive impact begins at school and continues beyond school, with social and educational benefits multiplying throughout a person's life.¹

In 1952, there were only 166 kindergartens in Victoria, almost all built and managed by local communities. In 1972, the Whitlam government passed the *Childcare Act* and a subsequent investigation into early childcare and education recommended that funding should be used for training in early childcare education and that most funds should go to preschools.

This quickly led to a new funding plan to ensure every Australian child's access to preschool education.

By 1980, there were 1,125 kindergartens in Victoria. At this stage, preschools were fully funded and the education department played a greater role in staff management.²

With the increased participation of women in the workforce, the government also directed funding to long-day childcare centres.

In the early 1990s, the newly elected Kennett government cut preschool funding, which resulted in parents having to pay part of the costs. The funding split was 65% from government and 35% generated by parent fees.

In 2009, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed on the long-awaited *National Reform Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)*. In particular, the federal government announced plans to ensure that every four-year-old would have preschool education provided by fully qualified preschool staff by 2014. The initial funding agreement concluded in 2016. Since then, funding has only been renewed year by year and funds are currently only secured until the end of 2019.

At the moment, preschool programs for three-year-olds are not common and there is only minimal government funding provided, limited to the most vulnerable children through *Early Start Kindergarten*. Access to and participation in three-year-old – and, to a lesser degree, four-year-old – preschool remains a cost of living expense for many families.

1 Schweinhart et al, (2005), *The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40*, http://www.highscope.org/file/Research/PerryProject/specialsummary_rev2011_02_2.pdf

2 Garbutt, S (1995), *VicHansard*, p.1945, viewed on 27 July 2018, https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/volume-hansard/smaller/Hansard%2052%20LA%20V424%20May-Jun1995/VicHansard_19950531_19950601.pdf

Recent reform

Quality early childhood education is characterised by appropriate child–teacher ratios and group sizes; appropriately qualified and trained teachers and education workers; and enriching, well equipped, caring and secure environments in approved and accredited locations. All these should be defined and enforced by regulation.

Quality preschool education is further strengthened by providing quality transitions to school.

The AEU supports universal access to 15 hours of free preschool education for four-year-olds and three-year-olds. The longer term goal is to guarantee access for all children to 20 hours per week of high-quality, free preschool education for the two years prior to attending primary school.

National and state governments must commit to a shared early childhood education strategy that is focused on the educational needs and rights of every child. This means the recognition and affirmation of the cultural knowledge, language and values of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children from culturally diverse backgrounds. It also means that children with special needs and children from disadvantaged backgrounds must be provided with equitable access to high-quality, properly resourced early childhood education.


Preschool education has undergone significant reform – particularly in the past decade, due to the *National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care (NQF) 2009*, which introduced minimum qualifications, new staff–child ratio requirements, a new curriculum framework and national quality standards.

Under the former Ballieu/Napthine Liberal government early childhood education effectively came to a standstill, with protracted industrial negotiations on salaries and working conditions; funding levels that did not meet the needs of children, families and service providers; minimal investment in the workforce and infrastructure; and no clear policy platform to progress the sector.

The election of a Labor government in 2014 saw new priorities and objectives to advance the sector and outcomes for children, but there is much work still to be done.

Implementation of the *Education State Early Childhood Reform Plan* is underway, including school readiness funding for all preschools. This plan, which was accompanied by an historic investment of \$202.1 million in early childhood by the Andrews government, has been welcomed by the Australian Education Union and the members we represent. The first tranche of services to receive this boost to funding will occur in 2019, with further rollout in 2020 and 2021 to deliver an overall increase to preschool funding of 10%.

This injection of funding on a needs-basis for preschool communities is an important initiative, which recognises that the most vulnerable communities deserve additional funding and resources. As can be seen in Figure 1, children from low socioeconomic status backgrounds are less likely to attend preschool. This means those children who most need support start school further behind, creating a gap that may never be closed.

A man with dark hair, wearing a dark blue or black jacket over a purple polo shirt, stands in a playground. He has a small circular badge on his jacket. The background is a blurred playground with colorful equipment and trees.

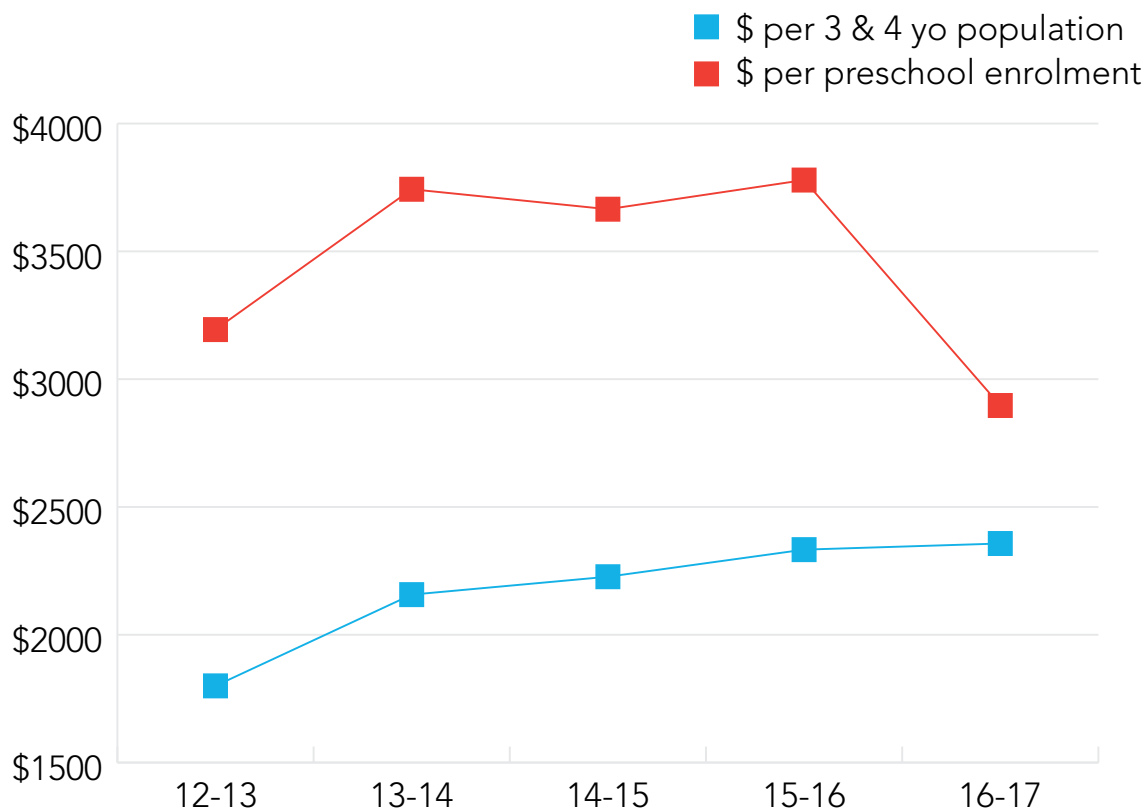
“FOR FAMILIES, IT MEANS
THEY DON’T KNOW WHAT’S
GOING TO HAPPEN TO THEIR
KIDS, AND THAT’S GOING
TO IMPACT ON PARENTS’
ABILITIES TO PLAN FOR
WORK.
BUT THE ONES WITH THE
MOST AT STAKE ARE, OF
COURSE, THE CHILDREN.”

AEU early childhood sector councillor
Ty Delle-Vergin. Photo : Larry Chew

Funding

Real funding for preschool in Victoria has been increasing in line with population growth, as can be seen in Figure 2 below. However, Figure 2 also shows how increasing population and participation rates affect funding for our preschools with per-student funding in Victoria falling from \$3,779 to \$2,897 between 2015 and 2016. Over this period, the participation rate of four-year-olds jumped from 78.7% to 83.4%, while the participation rate of three-year-olds jumped from 7% to 48%.⁴

Figure 2: Victorian real recurrent expenditure per preschool enrolment and per estimated three- and four-year-old population.⁵



4 SCRGSP (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision) 2018, Report on Government Services 2018, Table 3A.19 and Table 3A.7, Productivity Commission, Canberra, Viewed 26 July 2018, <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2018/child-care-education-and-training/early-childhood-education-and-care>

5 SCRGSP (2018)

OVER
50%

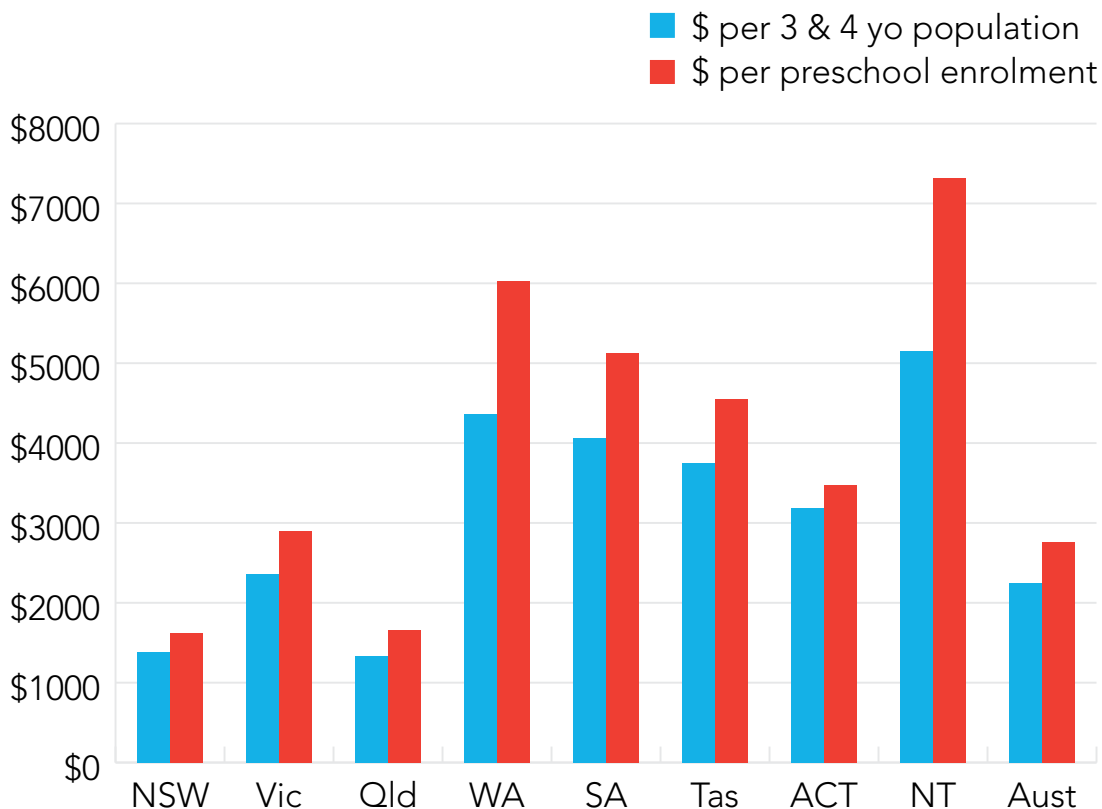
OF THREE-YEAR-OLDS
ARE MISSING OUT ON
PRESCHOOL BECAUSE OF
PROHIBITIVELY HIGH FEES.

Productivity Commission figures show that Victoria’s expenditure on preschool per student and age-group population is the third-lowest of any state, although larger than the national average due to the low expenditure rates of NSW and Queensland (Figure 3).⁶

It should be noted that meaningful interstate comparisons can be difficult due to different enrolment and subsidy policies between states. The collection of accurate preschool data is also hampered to a degree by the diversity of provider types and a lack of central coordination. An increased role for coordination by the Department of Education and Training would be beneficial for fairer and more efficient preschool delivery.

Figure 3: State real recurrent preschool expenditure by age-group population and enrolments.

Source: SCRGSP 2018



6 SCRGSP (2018)

Figure 4: Public expenditure on preschool educational institutions (2014, 2014-15 for Victoria)⁷ as a percentage of GDP (GSP, Victoria).⁸



7 OECD (2017), Education At a Glance, Table C2.3, <https://doi.org/10.1787/eag-2017-en>

8 Productivity Commission (2015), Report on Government Services, Table 3A.5 <http://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2016>

State preschool funding in Victoria – while not the lowest in the nation – is still extremely low in an international context (as shown in Figure 4).

Unfortunately, no Victorian government has reversed the cuts to preschools made under former premier Jeff Kennett in the early 1990s, when preschools were fully funded and the department played a greater role in staff management.⁹

The funding split between government and parents remains at 65% from government per capita funding and subsidies, and 35% from income generated by parent fees.

There is provision for families who hold a health care card to access preschool for free. However, vulnerable children in families with low incomes are often those least likely to attend preschool due to the prohibitive cost. As we know, those children are often the ones who would benefit the most.

There also remains very minimal funding for three-year-old preschool programs, limited to the most vulnerable children through *Early Start Kindergarten*. Access to either three-year-old or four-year-old preschool should not rely on parents capacity to pay.

Recommendations

- Resource a funding model for preschools that recognises and provides funding to cover the full cost of service delivery for all three- and four-year-old programs.
- In the interim, commit to increasing the Victorian government's contribution – staggered until it reaches 100% – to three- and four-year-old preschool provision, thereby reducing the cost barrier faced by families.

⁹ Garbutt, S (1995), VicHansard, p.1945, viewed on 27 July 2018, https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/volume-hansard/smaller/Hansard%2052%20LA%20V424%20May-Jun1995/VicHansard_19950531_19950601.pdf



Two years of preschool for every child

The AEU believes the state government, in partnership with the Commonwealth, should deliver two years of fully funded preschool education for every child. The benefits of two years of preschool education are now well understood in Australia and internationally.

The *Lifting our Game*¹⁰ report, commissioned by all state and territory governments and released earlier this year, identified that two years of preschool education should be a matter of policy and funding priority for governments.

Two years of preschool education sets children up for academic and cognitive success, as well as enhancing social and emotional development to ensure children arrive at school ready to thrive.

PISA data identifies that two years of early childhood education is the minimum duration needed to have a decent chance of reaching a good level of performance at age 15.¹¹ Preschool education also contributes to improved employment prospects, health

and wellbeing, and social outcomes such as reduced reliance on social services and less interaction with the justice system.¹² It's an investment with broad-reaching and long-lasting consequences.

While we have made significant gains in boosting access and participation rates for four-year-olds, Victoria is significantly behind when it comes to providing three-year-old preschool. Internationally, 68.6% of children in OECD countries participate in three-year-old preschool education¹³, compared to Victoria's 48.1%.¹⁴ We have recently seen the New South Wales and the ACT governments invest in three-year-old preschool education from 2019 in community-based services.

It's time for the Victorian government to make an investment in fully funded three-year-old preschool across service types, including stand-alone preschools and long-daycare centres.

Expanding the current provision of 15 hours for every four-year-old, and to deliver 15 hours for every three-year-old, would require a staged rollout with a focus on building the workforce and infrastructure to accommodate increased participation.

The sector also needs an ongoing commitment to funding for four-year-olds. The *National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access* with the Commonwealth expires at the end of 2019 and, yet again, the sector faces an uncertain future because of the federal government's refusal to commit long term. Families, children, staff and providers deserve greater certainty about preschool provision and funding.

Recommendations

- All four-year-olds be fully funded for a minimum of 15 hours of early childhood education.
- All three-year-olds be fully funded for a minimum of 15 hours of early childhood education.

10 Pascoe, S. and Brennan, D. (2018) *Lifting our Game, Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools Through Early Childhood Interventions*, viewed 27 July 2018 <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/research/LiftingOurGame.PDF>

11 Pascoe, S. and Brennan, D. (2018), p40

12 Pascoe, S. and Brennan, D. (2018), p47

13 Pascoe, S. and Brennan, D. (2018), P11

14 SCRGSP (2018), Table 3A.19

Children with additional needs

While the School Readiness funding provides a much-welcome investment in preschools, targeting children in need of additional support, we must ensure that no child is left to fall between the cracks. Early intervention resources and funding must be delivered to these children and families in a timely manner.

Under the current funding arrangements for Kindergarten Inclusion Support (KIS), children must reach the threshold criteria to access early intervention, including support at their mainstream preschool. The application process can be lengthy, with no guarantees that it will result in additional resourcing, and waiting lists for early intervention and access to an additional educator can be long.

In some cases, families will source support at their own expense. Preschool Field Officers are also under immense pressure to meet caseload demands, with an ever-increasing number of children and families needing identification and support.

The Preschool Field Officer (PSFO) program supports the access and participation of children with

additional needs in kindergarten. PSFOs support children in preschool programs by providing consultation, resources and advice to teachers and families. Demand for their services has soared due to the expansion of preschool programs, new accountability requirements and their role in filling the gaps created by early intervention waiting lists for speech therapists, occupational therapists, and so on.

Resources must be made available to facilitate access to professional development for PSFOs. The number of positions funded by the government must also be increased to meet demand.

Strict criteria means that children must display need in two developmental areas or more, meaning those children who simply need more time to grow and mature do not qualify for a second year of preschool education.

Teachers report that children who have not attended a three-year-old preschool program, or who are at the younger end of the age range, would benefit from a second year of preschool but do not qualify for funding.

While School Readiness funding will hopefully alleviate some of this pressure, the new system of funding will need to be monitored closely to ensure it is targeted at children appropriately to lift outcomes.

Unfortunately, the introduction of the NDIS has resulted in the driving down of salaries and conditions for PSFO and EI teachers. These highly skilled professionals are treated as generalist support or key workers, with little regard for their skills and expertise in not only working with children, but also with families and preschool staff. Salaries and conditions do not reflect their expertise, and the sector will face workforce shortages if attraction and retention is not addressed.

Recommendations

- Increase the funding for special needs through the Kindergarten Inclusion Support (KIS) program.
- Increase the number of Preschool Field Officers (PSFOs).

Meeting population growth and workforce demand

Victoria's population is growing by 3,000 people each week. By 2022, there will be 90,000 additional children entering the education system. Government will need to invest in the workforce and infrastructure to meet this increased demand.

The impact of increased demand for services – particularly in growth corridors and as a result of the increased provision of preschool programs in long-daycare settings (in addition to preschool settings) and to three-year-old Early Start programs – must be addressed.

Government must invest in additional staff (permanent and relief), improved support systems and upgraded facilities to meet this demand.

Attraction and retention of a highly qualified and skilled workforce will be central to implementing the objectives of the *Education State Early Childhood Reform Plan* and meeting the requirements of the *Education and Care*

Services National Law, requiring a second qualified teacher in all long-daycare centres with 60-plus enrolments by 2020.

The department's *Teacher Supply and Demand Report* forecasts the need for an extra 631 (net, FTE) teachers in funded preschools between 2016 and 2022 – a 3% year-on-year increase. The same report estimated the need for an extra 225 teachers (net, FTE) in funded long-daycare between 2016 and 2020.¹⁵

There is a mounting early childhood workforce supply crisis brought about through the national reform agenda, the greater demand for services, ever-increasing workload pressures and large numbers of staff on the verge of retirement. To address these supply issues, the government needs to ensure that there is an increase in qualified staff, salaries and conditions to make the sector as attractive as possible, and adequate resources for ongoing professional

development and training – particularly for new entrants into the profession.

Government currently does not have a comprehensive workplace plan for the early childhood sector, beyond an investment in teaching scholarships.

While we welcome the scholarship support for pre-service teachers to complete their teaching degrees, we must ensure that these graduates move on to well-paid, secure employment in the profession and see it as a viable and sustainable career.

Graduates continue to be enticed into primary teaching, where pay is superior and collegiate support and resourcing is often greater. Recent data from the *Victorian Institute of Teaching* reveals the difficulties new graduates face in connecting with a mentor and fulfilling the requirements to move from provisional to full status.

Some 27% of provisionally registered teachers identified

¹⁵ Department of Education and Training (DET), 2018, *Teacher Supply and Demand Report 2016*, viewed on 27 July 2018, <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/teachers/profdev/careers/TSD-Report2016.pdf>, pp. 31-32

68.6%

OF CHILDREN IN OECD
COUNTRIES PARTICIPATE
IN THREE-YEAR-OLD
PRESCHOOL EDUCATION,
COMPARED TO

48.1%

IN VICTORIA

that they were unable to source a mentor and 35% identified that they were employed in non-teaching roles and therefore unable to move to full registration.¹⁶ To date, 755 teachers have had to extend their provisional status and cannot progress to full registration.¹⁷

There is a real possibility that this could cause graduates to leave the early childhood workforce at a time when we need to grow the profession, and this issue will compound year on year.

Another disincentive for early childhood teachers and educators is the disparity in pay, both between the early childhood and school sectors, and within the sector itself. While pay gaps were successfully bridged for teachers in the benchmark industrial agreements, VECTEA and EEEA, these gaps will widen again as early childhood teachers and educators prepare to negotiate successor agreements in 2019.

Educators must also be an area of priority for government in the next round of bargaining, with their wages barely above or at award rates. They deserve recognition and reward for the critical role they play in helping to deliver educational programs, and the expertise they bring with Certificate III and diploma-level qualifications.

But it is not only wages that will attract and retain a profession.

Working conditions must also be addressed to reduce workload pressures; to provide funded professional development for all staff; to support staff with additional responsibilities such as educational leaders and nominated supervisors; and to provide time and support to facilitate mentoring relationships.

Governments must provide an appropriate level of funding to support the industrial outcomes achieved and to ensure we have a workforce to deliver the *Education State Early Childhood Reform Plan*.

Government must also remain committed to including early childhood teachers and educators in portable long service leave schemes, to motivate staff to remain in the sector and benefit from the portability of their entitlements.

Beyond industrial negotiations for the main enterprise agreements, government should also be looking at the per capita preschool funding it provides for programs in long-daycare settings to ensure all funding is spent on outcomes for children, including the employment conditions for the preschool staff. Teachers in long-daycare settings generally

receive 30% less pay and far inferior conditions to teachers in stand-alone preschools. With large growth predicted in the long-daycare sector – and high demand for teachers – professional pay and conditions facilitated through preschool per capita funding should be a priority of government.

Recommendations

- In partnership with the Commonwealth, support and resource the continuation of the National Quality Framework – in particular, the requirement for additional degree-qualified early childhood teachers in services with enrolments of more than 60 children by 2020.
- Fund delivery and access to professional development and support for early childhood teachers and co-educators within the hours of attendance, and provide better access to appropriate ICT hardware and software support and resources for early childhood staff.
- Implement a system of portable long service leave and sick leave for early childhood teachers and co-educators.
- Resource mentoring relationships.

16 Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT), June 2018, *Early Childhood Stakeholder Reference Group Moving from provisional to (full) registration*.

17 VIT, June 2018, *Early Childhood Stakeholder Reference Group Moving from provisional to (full) registration*.

Infrastructure

Victoria's population boom is currently outstripping other states.¹⁸ The ABS projects that there will be almost an extra 10,000 three- and four-year-old Victorians in 2023.¹⁹

There is an increased demand for infrastructure arising from population growth, universal access and the need to upgrade ageing facilities to provide modern, flexible learning environments for children and appropriate work spaces for staff.

Many services require urgent upgrades to provide facilities that accommodate the needs of the different staffing ratios, along with larger staffing teams, to respond to the delivery of universal access: office space that allows desk and storage space for staff teams, rather than single teachers; staff rooms; larger storage areas; and car parking facilities that can accommodate increased congestion as a result of reduced time between child attendance periods.

The 2018–19 Victorian State Budget allocated \$42.9 million for kindergarten infrastructure to build, upgrade and equip kindergartens to cater for this growth.

The Victorian state government also committed to record investment in school infrastructure in the 2018 state budget, including the creation of 28 new schools in growth areas.²⁰ Consideration should be given to including co-located preschool and early childhood development facilities within these new schools. The budget allocated \$9 million to co-locating early childhood development facilities at schools but more could be done.²¹ As we noted in our submission to the Education State Review process:

Unfortunately, many models of preschool provision used in Victoria currently lack a level of stability and integration with broader systems... There could be great efficiency and equity benefits in the DET playing a greater role in the coordination and provision of preschool in Victoria.

ICT is another area where investment has been lacking. Additional appropriate ICT resources and support are required to meet present needs in early childhood education.

The advent of new staffing structures (such as team teaching with staff on different rosters) and increased roles for educators in the planning and documentation process (arising from implementation of Universal Access, National Regulations and the National Quality Framework) have added complexity to the capacity of services to maintain required student records in an efficient manner.

Recommendations

- Additional funding to ensure sufficient facilities are available to cater for population growth and the increased numbers of children attending due to the provision of both three- and four-year-old preschool.
- Additional funding for ICT hardware.
- Continued capital works upgrades.
- Co-location of preschools within school campuses.

18 ABS (2018), Australian Demographic Statistics, Dec 2017, Cat. no. 3101.0, viewed 27 July 2018, <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/3101.0Main+Features1Dec%202017?OpenDocument>

19 ABS (2013), Population Projections, Australia, 2012 to 2101, Population projections, by age and sex, Victoria – Series B, cat. No. 3222.0, viewed 26 July 2018, [http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/3222.02012%20\(base\)%20to%202101?OpenDocument](http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/3222.02012%20(base)%20to%202101?OpenDocument)

20 DET (2018), State budget highlights 2018/19, viewed 26 July 2018, <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/educationstate/Pages/budget.aspx>

21 DET (2018)



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