



**PRESCHOOL DIRECTORS  
ASSOCIATION OF  
SOUTH AUSTRALIA**

**Preschool Directors Association of South Australia**

**Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Early  
Childhood Education and Care**

Prepared by Current PDA President, Kate Ryan and the 2023 PDA Committee  
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Preschool Directors Association  
Education Development Centre  
4 Milner Street, Hindmarsh, SA 5007

[president@pda.sa.edu.au](mailto:president@pda.sa.edu.au)

Dear Commissioners,

The Preschool Directors Association of South Australia (PDA) was pleased to be able to meet with you recently in Adelaide to provide information about the early childhood context in South Australia.

We have been actively participating with the Royal Commission into ECEC in South Australia and I am pleased to share with you our first submission to the Commissioner, as was suggested by you in our meeting. We will be submitting a second submission to the South Australian Royal Commission within the next week and would be glad to share that with you also once it is available.

As an organisation for, and of Preschool leaders in government preschools across South Australia our submission asks that proposed changes in ECEC consider the value families place in government preschools in SA for its high-quality preschool education programs and for its place within the Department of Education.

PDA is keen that preschool remain a special part of each child's educational journey and that it maintain its focus on educational programs that promote children's learning, development, and wellbeing. We firmly believe that government preschool services are a vital component of the ECEC system, ensuring equitable and accessible services for all children.

We acknowledge that the changing needs of families does mean that sessional preschool is difficult for some families to access and are keen for examination of the legislation and regulations relating to provision of 'wrap around care', to enable services to more easily adapt their provision of preschool and care more flexibly to meet the context of each local community and to support the early childhood workforce to work across services without tax penalties relating to multiple employers.

I look forward with interest to reading the recommendations of your inquiry.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you wish clarification or further information from PDA.

Yours sincerely

Kate Ryan  
President – Preschool Directors Association of South Australia

Preschool Directors Association  
Education Development Centre  
4 Milner Street, Hindmarsh, SA 5007

[president@pda.sa.edu.au](mailto:president@pda.sa.edu.au)

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## Introduction

The Preschool Directors Association of South Australia (PDA) is the peak body for early childhood education leaders in South Australia working within government sites. We have been supporting Preschool Directors for 25 years. PDA is a not for profit, membership-based association. PDA works collaboratively with other public education associations and with the Department for Education (DfE) directorates to advocate for government preschool leaders and to contribute to the development of DfE policy.

Our submission is reflective of contemporary research, much of which has already been provided to the Commission, and therefore we have chosen not to unnecessarily reiterate these references but have aimed to identify the practical steps the State government should consider, and implement, to ensure the successful introduction of a high-quality preschool provision for 3- and 4-year-old children.

In preparing this submission we have consulted with our members, other preschool staff and early childhood experts across the state, through online forums, face to face interviews, site visits, written feedback and through our ongoing engagement with preschool leaders. PDA has also connected with early childhood networks across Australia to understand how three-year-old preschool has been implemented around Australia and to explore benefits, issues, and concerns with their models of preschool.

We have consolidated feedback from our members in reference to the guiding questions provided by the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care.

PDA seeks clear, realistic timelines for implementation and transparency of government strategies to achieve universal preschool and ongoing consultation to support successful implementation.

## Executive Summary

PDA welcomes the opportunity to clarify the purpose of preschool in South Australia and we have been aspirational in our recommendations. We aim to articulate our position on quality preschool provision and the best possible delivery of universal 3- and 4-year-old preschool in South Australia. We understand that to achieve these aspirations we will need significant financial investment from the State government and believe that such an investment will provide high quality preschool provision, enable early intervention, support families with young children and contribute to the government's aim of achieving economic complexity to secure the future of our state.

As an association of, and for, government preschool leaders we are clear in our advocacy that capacity to deliver universal 3- and 4-year-old preschool must be built within the public preschool system where there are already strong foundations of preschool delivery, and the purpose of preschool education is clear.

We strongly submit that the qualifications and experience of preschool leaders is critical in optimising learning opportunities and in achieving the best outcomes for preschool children. This has been confirmed across multiple research studies, including the 'Effective Provision of Pre-School Education Project (EPPE)' (2004) findings which identified highly qualified leaders as a key contributor to quality in preschool programs.

Educational leadership requires teachers to act ethically and with purpose (Waniganayake et al, 2017), and it is our belief and experience which reinforces our recommendation that all preschool programs should be delivered by early childhood qualified and registered teachers and that leadership of services providing preschool programs should be by teachers with dedicated early childhood education (minimum four year) degrees. This will ensure that preschool programs are implemented in ways that align with contemporary early childhood education research, educational theories and approaches to curriculum and pedagogical practices.

PDA understands the importance of a holistic approach to children's education and development in the early years. To this end we are highly supportive of integrated models of three- and four-year-old preschool with attention provided to ensuring a strong and complementary workforce of health and allied health professionals. We maintain that leaders in integrated preschool settings should be early childhood degree qualified teachers to maintain a focus and purpose of supporting three- and four-year-olds to access the preschool curriculum.

It is clear that ensuring a strong and knowledgeable early childhood workforce is essential in ensuring South Australia is able to successfully extend preschool provision to three-year-olds. PDA notes that while there is a current shortage of suitably qualified early childhood teachers and educators, it would be counterproductive to achieving the aims of the

government to lower the qualifications of staff employed in preschools. However, PDA is supportive of transitional arrangements being put in place to provide funding, time, and support to upskill the current workforce to maintain the quality of preschool provision.

Initial teacher education provides strong foundations for teachers in curriculum, pedagogy and establishing ethical understandings required in education. Early childhood education initial teacher education programs in South Australia require intensive review to ensure content is relevant to contemporary 3- and 4-year-old preschool programs, to improve accessibility and support for students from under-represented groups and to ultimately increase the number of graduates. The current Early Childhood degrees have excessive focus on the primary school curriculum due to constraints of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). Graduates of South Australian early childhood degrees enjoy parity with their colleagues in primary education degrees and it is important that this is maintained to ensure a professional early childhood workforce for preschool programs.

Ongoing professional learning is a key contributor to broadening and deepening the knowledge and skills of teachers. It will be critical that professional learning opportunities are provided to current preschool teams on a range of topics, including the recently updated EYLF, assessment and reporting and child development. In addition, we believe that there is much South Australia can learn from international preschool programs of excellence, including the New Zealand approaches to inclusive practices and assessment of learning and the principles of the Reggio Emilia Approach, though the collective gaze should be lifted to all examples of leading-edge innovation in early childhood education to ensure that there is a consistent effort to provide world leading education to our children. Efforts should be made to offer funded research projects to preschool sites to explore the theories and approaches through supported action research within their preschool sites.

The South Australian government has invited international early childhood experts, over many years, to work with educators, review the early childhood provision in our State and to provide recommendations for improving the lives of young children. This includes reports from Pr. Fraser Mustard (2007) and Pr. Carla Rinaldi (2013). PDA considers these reports to still be relevant today and should be reviewed looking at outcomes achieved and for any recommendations not yet enacted.

In addition to highly qualified educators and leaders, properly resourced sites is of equal if not greater importance. Beginning to treat early childhood leaders as we do with primary and secondary school teachers in terms of administrative load and support will enable the delivery of better educational outcomes for all children in South Australian sites.

Government preschool programs in South Australia are delivered in various models. The Children's Centre model has the capacity to be expanded and improved to provide a holistic service for young children and to support parents in their parenting role. The introduction of three-year-old preschool could be an opportunity to explore which models

of preschools are best suited to particular communities through the development of pilot sites across metropolitan and country South Australia. It will be critical that pilot sites have an experienced preschool leader and that the leader is offered professional development in leading multidisciplinary teams. Essential to the success of new preschool programs will be initial and ongoing consultation with communities.

Three-and four-year old preschool in South Australia could provide children with an excellent early childhood experience that is attentive to their learning and wellbeing needs and one which will provide them with a strong foundation for educational achievement and overall wellbeing throughout their lifespan. High quality 3- and 4- year-old preschool can be a contributor to ensuring our state thrives, with well adjusted, constructive, and participating citizens if the indicators of quality preschool are realised in the development phase and in an ongoing manner.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "C. Ryan".

President  
Preschool Directors Association of South Australia Inc.

# Recommendations

## 1. Purpose and aims

- 1.1 The Department for Education (DfE) to be the lead provider of preschool education in South Australia.
- 1.2 DfE to have oversight of the quality of preschool provision and programs and provide system support for children, families, and the workforce to ensure delivery of high-quality preschool education.
- 1.3 Consideration is given to the role of preschool teachers and leaders and how the secondary aims of preschool can be supported through a multidisciplinary workforce.
- 1.4 Early childhood qualified Preschool leaders are appointed as the overall leader of any integrated preschool service provision to maintain a focus on education.

## 2. Defining key terms

- 2.1 The system of universal preschool acknowledges the difference in educational settings and ensures that, whilst preschool programs are separate and autonomous from primary and secondary education, they should have clear pathways of communication and continuity of learning for each child and family.
- 2.2 A developmentally appropriate, play and inquiry-based program is maintained with attention to the needs of both three- and four-year-old children.
- 2.3 Preschool should be separate and distinct from the wrap-around care that may be required to support workforce participation of families.

## 3. Quality and innovation

- 3.1 All preschools have an early childhood qualified preschool leader who has autonomy of decision making with respect to pedagogy, resource management and staffing decisions.
- 3.2 Opportunity for quality interactions and child and teacher wellbeing should be considered along with physical capacity of sites in determining group size in a preschool setting.
- 3.3 The preschool program should be delivered in environments purposely designed or adapted for 3- and 4-year-olds.
- 3.4 Local community consultation, population data and early childhood expertise informs which models of preschool delivery best suit particular communities and where new preschools should be provided.



- 3.5 Early intervention is supported in all preschools with capacity increased to deliver timely learning support and to sustain connections with special education specialists and allied health professionals.

#### 4. Workforce

- 4.1 Preschool leaders are provided with a base load model for regulated minimum leadership and administration time. This should be a minimum of 0.5FTE and should increase on a sliding scale to 1.0FTE, based on complexity criteria.
- 4.2 Postgraduate studies in early childhood education and leadership are made available to leaders and educators wanting to build on their knowledge and to strengthen the profession.
- 4.3 A review of preschool teacher and leader workload pressures is prioritised, in consultation with current preschool staff and those who have chosen to exit the profession, to develop strategies to address the wellbeing of the current preschool workforce and to attract and retain preschool staff.
- 4.4 DfE develops further opportunities and strategies to support and encourage the retention and attraction of preschool leaders by offering more flexibility and part time roles for leaders.
- 4.5 Conduct a review of initial teacher education programs delivered in SA to ensure adequate content of curriculum, pedagogy, and practical experience relevant to children of preschool age (3-5 years old).
- 4.6 Universities ensure early childhood education degrees maintain parity, rigour, and level of professionalism with those of primary and secondary teacher qualifications.
- 4.7 Preschool educational programs learn from and engage with centres of educational excellence such as Reggio Emilia's Municipal Infant-Toddler Centres and Preschools - Reggio Emilia, Italy, Pen Green Centre for Children, and their Families - Corby, Northamptonshire, UK, and the Te Whāriki, Early Childhood Education Curriculum – New Zealand.
- 4.8 Country and remote tertiary study options in early childhood education are available, with consideration to mentoring arrangements, safe and affordable housing, and economic support for students.
- 4.9 A funded program to upskill educators with a Diploma in Children's Services to an early childhood teaching degree (in line with the SA Teacher registration board requirements) is implemented in a timely manner to support the inclusion of three-year-olds in preschools.
- 4.10 Increase and make visible differentiated initial teacher education (ITE) programs to encourage underrepresented groups of people in the early childhood workforce to participate in early childhood teacher training.

- 4.11 Preschool leaders are funded and resourced as part of their core work to provide mentoring for parents, secondary students and others expressing a desire to enter the early childhood profession.
- 4.12 The Department for Education should identify strategies to be an employer of choice for teachers and promote these benefits to the public and graduates.

## **5. Delivery and administration**

- 5.1 Preschool teams always consist of a minimum of 3 staff on site to support child safety, WHS, and uninterrupted periods of learning for children.
- 5.2 Undertake an assessment of the outcome of earlier government studies, publications, and reports into early childhood provision in South Australia to determine what recommendations have been implemented and what their impact has been, and where recommendations have not been implemented why this has not occurred.
- 5.3 A review of the recent (2022/2023) 'Mid-Year to Preschool/school intake' project will be examined and shared with relevant stakeholders to identify if this impacts or influences the process, policy and timelines needed to enact 3-year-old preschool across the state.
- 5.4 Well-resourced government pilot sites are developed to explore benefits of models of preschool delivery across a range of socio-economic, country, and metropolitan areas. Data collected from these pilots is used to inform policies, and timelines for universal implementation.
- 5.5 A comprehensive audit into the internal and external building infrastructure of government preschools is conducted and a plan for improvement of sites is developed to ensure that government preschools are contemporary and provide an environment that promotes learning for all children, considers the physical care needs of younger children and children with disabilities and the creation of safe workplaces for staff.
- 5.6 An audit of government preschools is undertaken to determine where there is physical capacity to increase enrolments.
- 5.7 DfE creates and implements a range of professional development opportunities for educators and Local Education Teams (LET) across the state to support the implementation of 3-year-old preschool.
- 5.8 DfE increases the number of early childhood teachers within corporate and curriculum divisions, including within LETS, to ensure policy development and support for preschool teams reflects early childhood education contemporary research and pedagogy.
- 5.9 Attraction and retention of support staff, such as special educators and allied health staff in our metropolitan and regional education offices is considered to provide consistent advice for leaders and educators.

- 5.10 The number of DfE Children’s Centres with wrap-around services for children and families are increased across the state, and where possible are co-located with primary schools while retaining early childhood leadership at Band A level within the site.
- 5.11 Fees for preschool for the year should be set as it is in public schools for the materials and services charge.
- 5.12 The school card scheme is expanded to government preschools to support the participation of all children in preschool programs.

# Discussion

## Purpose and aims.

### **What should every 3-year-old child in South Australia be entitled to in terms of early learning?**

At present in South Australia, the Government commitment is to provide all South Australian children aged from three years old with access to two years (8 terms) of quality preschool education prior to their entry into primary school. Preschool education is not compulsory, and at present is only offered to four-year olds and specified cohorts of three-year olds for reduced hours.

PDA supports the concept of children being entitled to a preschool education commencing at age 3. This early learning should include:

- a) sites with age-appropriate facilities and resources.
- b) sufficient staff to enable successful learning for all children.
- c) pre-screening (CYH 3-year-old health check) of children prior to entry into preschool to identify opportunities for early intervention.
- d) tailored educational support for children with additional needs.
- e) community and family connection and support to assist in developing an educational support structure for children and their families.
- f) respect and acknowledgement of cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity; and
- g) a skilled and professional workforce that is encouraged to extend and develop its knowledge and learning from best practice not only in South Australia but worldwide.

The Department for Education should be the lead provider of preschool education in South Australia to ensure equity of access and to maintain preschool education as part of the broader public school system. Government preschool services should be promoted and advertised as ethical, effective, and high-quality preschool education.

The Department for Education should have oversight of the quality of preschool provision and programs and provide system support for children, families, and the workforce to ensure delivery of high-quality preschool education. The learning and development of children, including their social and emotional needs, should be prioritised above the convenience of working parents where accommodating that convenience would be detrimental to learning and development.

The research on how many hours of preschool makes a positive difference to children does not provide a consistent view. PDA members offered a range of views on how many hours of preschool should be offered for all children. Members noted that the current provision of 15 hours for four-year-olds is difficult to manage operationally for staff and for families. Consideration of how many hours, and how those hours are delivered across a week should be viewed considering child wellbeing, system capacity and industrial conditions to ensure models are implementable in ways that work for children and educators. It would also be useful to examine how other education support programs that may be currently offered, such as playgroups can continue. PDA believes the hours per week of preschool available to 3- and 4-year-old children should be consulted on further, including options for extended hours of preschool for children in disadvantaged families and communities.

### **What should be the central aim of 3-year-old preschool? What are important but secondary aims?**

The primary purpose of 3-year-old preschool should be to enact the right of every child to a developmentally appropriate, play and inquiry-based curriculum that provides equitable access to quality, evidence-based, early learning education in a dedicated setting. Situating education as the focus of preschool will enable South Australia to achieve the change the state wants to see for individuals, communities, and our state, now and into the future, that is, economic complexity, safer communities, participating constructive citizens.

Secondary and complementary aims include:

- Child and family support
- Parenting skills
- Parent connected to a positive & supportive community
- Parenting advice
- Connection to health, allied health and special education services
- Connection to other government services that support families such as NDIS, DCP, and Centrelink
- Support workforce participation of parents

Consideration must be given to the role of preschool teachers and leaders and how these secondary aims can be supported through a multidisciplinary workforce.

Early childhood qualified preschool leaders should remain the overall leader of any integrated service provision to maintain a focus on education and should be provided with professional development on leadership of multidisciplinary teams.

PDA members have expressed concern that, due to current capacity and staffing constraints, the implementation of 3-year-old preschool may preference long day care settings over Government preschool, something which we believe would have a

deleterious impact on the learning outcomes of children. Data reports on assessment and rating outcomes from the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA, November 2022) has consistently shown that in general, government preschools with dedicated early childhood teacher leadership, achieve higher ratings when measured against the NQS than other in-scope services. This is most likely due to a combination of factors in government preschools not always found in long day care service, including:

- a) leaders and teachers with a higher early childhood degree.
- b) higher levels of skill and knowledge in understanding how to develop a focussed educational play and inquiry-based program.
- c) an understanding of the importance of executive function skills and attending to each child's overall wellbeing as these factors impact a child's capacity to engage and progress in their learning.
- d) skills in articulating and designing their practice and regular scheduled reflection and evaluation of learning programs.
- e) connection to the public education system and a supportive range of system provision.
- f) regular professional development that connects with current research

## **Recommendations - Purpose and aims**

- 1.1. The Department for Education (DfE) to be the lead provider of preschool education in South Australia.
- 1.2. DfE to have oversight of the quality of preschool provision and programs and provide system support for children, families, and the workforce to ensure delivery of high-quality preschool education.
- 1.3. Consideration is given to the role of preschool teachers and leaders and how the secondary aims of preschool can be supported through a multidisciplinary workforce.
- 1.4. Early childhood qualified Preschool leaders are appointed as the overall leader of any integrated preschool service provision to maintain a focus on education.

## **Defining key terms**

**What does universal preschool look like to you / your organisation? Does a universal program mean the same program design and service is offered to everyone? How would you define universal?**

PDA supports equitable educational opportunities as opposed to 'equal' educational opportunities. Not every child in the community has the same needs, and therefore the principle of universal preschool should provide a base level of access to preschool for all children and additional targeted and appropriate support to children with additional needs,

be they physical, developmental, cultural or socioeconomic, to ensure that the learning outcomes for all children are to the greatest extent possible.

This could include the provision of additional support workers in preschool settings, the increase in early developmental screening for children before they enter preschool, and the coming together of allied health and educational professionals to create tailored plans for children as needed.

AEDC data should be actively monitored and reviewed to determine where support needs are likely to arise, however the system should equally be flexible enough to respond to identified needs as they are encountered throughout a given year.

The system of universal preschool should acknowledge the difference in educational settings and should ensure that whilst preschool programs are separate and autonomous from primary and secondary education, they should have clear pathways of communication and continuity of learning for each child and family.

Targeted provision of 3-year-old preschool should be offered in areas of unmet demand and in disadvantaged areas, but not at the expense of all children having access to a quality preschool program in the year before they attend school.

Central to universality of outcomes for children and families will be the strength and ability of the teaching team at each site. As above, early childhood educators should be incentivised to further their own educational practice, and efforts should be made to attract and retain experienced educators with respect to both pay and conditions as well as opportunities for further development.

Contextual information should be considered and used when making decisions about the models that will be delivered in different communities across the state. Decisions about models of preschool delivery should also consider how industrial conditions of teachers, leaders and support staff could influence implementation of expanded preschool programs.

### **(How) should 3-year-old preschool differ to 4-year-old preschool?**

Including a three-year-old preschool program will require attention to a wider range of developmental differences in preschools and some adaptations will be necessary to provide the appropriate curriculum and pedagogical practice required across the developmental span.

A developmentally appropriate, play and inquiry-based program should be maintained with attention to the needs of both three and four-year-old children. Preschool should be separate and distinct from the wrap-around care that may otherwise be required at the beginning and ends of days and in school holidays, as opposed to attempting to run a

preschool program that commences early and finishes late to accommodate working families.

The integration of three- and four-year-olds in the same site and session of education will require significant planning and consideration in some sites so that the positives of such integration, such as peer to peer learning is emphasised, without the educational needs of either cohort being sacrificed for the good of the other. The learning resources and environment may be the same, however, there would likely be more need for closer supervision, increased support for emotional regulation and more differentiation of curriculum plans for the three to five year age range. Additional ECW support should be provided for 3-year-olds to assist with emotional regulation and physical care needs.

**(How) should 3-year-old preschool differ to ECEC currently provided to 3-year-olds (e.g. in centre-based day care and family day care?)**

PDA believes it is important to view ECEC that is not a designated preschool program as being intrinsically different to preschool. ECEC can deliver significant educational and development benefits to children but should not be seen as a replacement for a dedicated preschool program that is specific in its educational goals and works towards these goals in an intentional manner to ensure equity in educational opportunity.

PDA recognises and endorses the DfE's 2022 'Preschool Position Statement: All young children thriving and learning, quality preschools'. This document outlines the essential elements of quality government preschool programs that support and enable all young children to thrive and learn at preschool.

The 8 key themes are:

- Children: Children in South Australia have the right to high-quality educational preschool programs that support their learning and development in their local government preschool.
- Families and community: Children grow and learn in the context of their family and community.
- Learning and development: Children's learning is dynamic and holistic, with each child learning in their own way and at their own pace.
- Support and inclusion: Timely and effective support ensures children have the assistance they need to fully engage in preschool.
- Outcomes: Every child at preschool makes progress towards learning and development outcomes
- Leadership: Strong educational leaders guide high-quality evidence-based practice and plan for continuous improvement.
- Teachers and educators: Knowledgeable, skilled, and supported teachers and educators ensure each child progresses in their learning and development.
- Quality: Preschools demonstrate high-quality practice at all times in the best interest of children's outcomes



Stability of a group across the year to promote relationships and continuity of learning will be important and is a feature of government preschools that differs from many long day care centres, where children attend different days and sessions according to their parent's workforce participation. The stability of the group in government preschools builds strong learning groups amongst the children and teachers and provides an opportunity for families to develop relationships with educators to ensure that they are supported in their role as parents and to promote positive attitudes and strategies to work in partnership with education institutions throughout their child's time in the education system.

## **Recommendations - Defining key terms**

- 2.1. The system of universal preschool acknowledges the difference in educational settings and ensures that, whilst preschool programs are separate and autonomous from primary and secondary education, they should have clear pathways of communication and continuity of learning for each child and family.
- 2.2. A developmentally appropriate, play and inquiry-based program is maintained with attention to the needs of both three- and four-year-old children.
- 2.3. Preschool should be separate and distinct from the wrap-around care that may be required to support workforce participation of families.

## **Quality and innovation**

**What does high-quality 3-year-old early learning look like? What are the markers of optimal program delivery?**

A high-quality 3-year-old early learning program involves:

- a) a fully qualified and experienced early childhood leader managing a team of tertiary (4 year minimum) early childhood degree qualified registered teachers and appropriately qualified ECWs.
- b) early childhood qualified; registered teachers are employed to meet the NQF ratio of educators to children.
- c) a play and inquiry-based program appropriate to the cultural and social context of the setting.
- d) connection to community and families.
- e) implementation of global best practice, evidence-based teaching methods and structures.
- f) well equipped, and appropriately designed, or adapted facilities.

All preschools must have an early childhood qualified preschool leader who has autonomy of decision making with respect to pedagogy, resource management and staffing decisions. Preschool leaders have the same level of decision-making powers as principals in public primary and secondary schools. They should be given sufficient administrative support

and time to enable them to develop best practice amongst their team to ensure quality learning experience for all children.

Group size can influence the quality of interactions and the ability to scaffold the learning for each child. Therefore, consideration of group size should not only be determined by physical capacity of the site and staff to child ratios but also in relation to child and teacher wellbeing and the teaching and learning opportunities available to them.

The preschool program should be delivered in environments purposely designed or adapted for 3- and 4-year-olds to enable provision of appropriate learning environments, materials, and experiences. Independence, interdependence, agency, and developmentally appropriate learning should be supported by both the environment and the approach of teaching teams.

All preschool programs will have open-ended natural environments for outdoor learning and these spaces should be adequately fenced to support children's agency, autonomy, and safety at preschool.

### **What does high-quality look like in terms of time spent in preschool?**

Whilst a minimum of 2 days of preschool per child, per week should be considered essential to promote the establishment and development of peer to peer and child to teacher relationships, sheer quantity of hours should not be considered a measure of quality. The amount of time should be made appropriate to the needs of children, and the quality of their educational experience should take preference over sheer volumes of time.

Delivery of the preschool program should maintain the annual calendar of terms in line with the primary and secondary schooling sectors to ensure continuity of learning for children and families.

### **(How) does quality differ for different cohorts of children?**

PDA's view is that the level of quality for each child across the State should be equitable. Whilst this doesn't mean that identical service provision should be provided to every child, a form of education that meets a child's individual needs should be available regardless of their socio-economic, social or developmental circumstance.

To ensure this occurs, local community consultation, population data and early childhood expertise should inform which models of preschool delivery best suit particular communities and where new preschools should be provided. Individual, cohort, or community needs may influence decisions to provide more hours of access, higher teacher/child ratios, individualised programs and extended time (after 2 years) at preschool.

Early intervention should be supported in all preschools with capacity increased to deliver learning support and to sustain connections with special education specialists and allied health professionals.

### **Where is innovation happening in programming and service delivery? What does that look like?**

There are many models operating throughout the state which show innovation in program and service delivery as outlined below.

#### **Children's Centres**

Children's centres have dedicated early childhood leadership. They bring together care, education, health, community development activities and family services for families and their young children. Integrated early childhood services offer a combination of 2 or more services.

Services offered at children's centres vary from centre to centre and may include childcare, playgroup, preschool, early education and learning, early development, health services and family support services. Children's centres help parents and children get the support they need, when they need it, within their own community. Each centre may offer a slightly different mix of services depending on the needs of the community. Early childhood services work closely together to provide the best support for children's development and families. Families can also be connected with other families and groups in the community with similar interests.

Some children's centres are co-located on school sites creating an education and family support hub for the community.

#### **Stand-alone preschools**

These preschools have dedicated early childhood leadership. They are located across the state in local communities enabling families access to preschool near their home and build strong connections with local schools and community organisations.

#### **Co-located with schools**

In some instances, co-located preschools operate as a stand-alone preschool with dedicated early childhood leadership. Collaboration with the school enables the provision of extended services, such as OSHC, to preschool children and families. In other co-located sites known as school-based preschools, the school principal has leadership of the preschool.

As mentioned above, PDA asserts that to ensure delivery of a high-quality preschool program, all preschools should have early childhood qualified leaders who have autonomy of decision making in relation to curriculum, resource management and staffing.

#### **Other Integrated models of service delivery**

Some preschools across the state operate alongside or in collaboration with outside organisations and/or with other government services. These innovative ways of working make for flexibility for families and ensure high levels of continuity for children attending these services. Care should be taken to ensure these preschools maintain a connection to the DfE networks and system supports.

### **Campbelltown Preschool Case Study**

*Has operated as a stand-alone preschool for 12 years. This government preschool operates in the same building as a community managed long day care. Although both services are independently managed, funded, and staffed, they have worked to build mutually beneficial agreements. Leaders from each centre and parent representatives from each of these entities sit on each other's Governing Council/Management committee. Structure of long day care fees and hours has been considered to ensure that families who need 'wrap around' care (before and after preschool care) can access that service as needed and is a drawcard for both centres when families are enrolling. In previous years continuity for children has been encouraged by each of the centres offering staff contracts/hours of work in their respective services on different days. Not only does this provide continuity in attachment for children, but it also provides opportunities for increased staff employment.*

*Other committees have also been created that are made up of representatives from each centre, such as the Sustainability Committee. In previous years representatives from each centre have worked on common projects with Campbelltown City Council which have encouraged further family engagement with the local community and have contributed to common community goals to battle Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) results where children were developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains within the community (Child Friendlies Cities Project, OPAL).*

### **Recommendations - Quality and innovation**

- 3.1. All preschools have an early childhood qualified preschool leader who has autonomy of decision making with respect to pedagogy, resource management and staffing decisions.
- 3.2. Opportunity for quality interactions and child and teacher wellbeing should be considered along with physical capacity of sites in determining group size in a preschool setting.
- 3.3. The preschool program should be delivered in environments purposely designed or adapted for 3- and 4-year-olds.
- 3.4. Local community consultation, population data and early childhood expertise informs which models of preschool delivery best suit particular communities and where new preschools should be provided.

- 3.5. Early intervention is supported in all preschools with capacity increased to deliver timely learning support and to sustain connections with special education specialists and allied health professionals.

## **Workforce**

### **What are the most important competencies for workers delivering 3-year-old preschool?**

Early childhood teaching is a profession that is complex, diverse, and dynamic and requires teachers and leaders to act in ways that are ethical, equitable and responsive to individual, community, state, national and global contexts. Early childhood teaching and leadership requires teachers to have skills and knowledge across a broad range of content. Teachers and leaders need to be able to adapt content to individuals and groups of children through adaptations of environment, resources, and pedagogy. Arthur et al (2018) ascribe the following components as contributing to quality early childhood teaching:

- engagement in reflective practice, critical action, and change
- understanding the importance of cultural contexts in children's learning
- respecting diversity and focussing on equity and social justice
- building effective partnerships with families, children, and communities
- enhancing relationships and collaborative learning environments
- focusing on dispositions and processes of learning
- proving meaningful curriculum that connects to children's social worlds and extends learning
- engaging in intentional teaching, drawing on a repertoire of pedagogies
- documenting children's learning in ways that acknowledge children's strengths, make children's thinking visible to children, staff and families.

PDA would suggest that higher levels of expertise in these competencies contributes greatly to quality early childhood education.

We also highlight other essential competencies and expand further on some of the above themes to include the following competencies for those delivering three- and four-year-old preschool:

- capacity to differentiate curriculum and pedagogy for individuals and cohorts of children
- capacity to be creative and solve problems
- effective communication skills, both orally and written
- being proactive in building a positive work culture and working as part of a collaborative, multidisciplinary team

- strong understanding of literacy and numeracy development and how to implement, track, review literacy and numeracy within the program alongside other aspects of the EYLF
- sound understanding of the National Quality Framework, the AITSL teacher standards and Early Years Learning Framework and apply this knowledge effectively in work with children
- trauma informed practice approaches

### **What are the highest value interventions to improve workforce supply in South Australia?**

PDA purports that two of the highest value interventions to improve workforce supply are:

- to increase the leadership salary levels available to preschool leaders in acknowledgement of the variance in complexity of sites, and to better reflect preschool leader workload and work value.
- to ensure that preschool leaders are provided with a base load model for regulated minimum leadership and administration time. This should be a minimum of 0.5FTE and should increase on a sliding scale to 1.0FTE, based on complexity criteria (number of children enrolled, programs offered and model of delivery, cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity, incidence of additional needs and other complexities of preschool cohort.

This will allow leaders to:

- a) undertake the day-to-day operations of administering the preschool;
- b) allow sufficient time to build relationships with and support families in their education and parenting journey;
- c) most importantly, to foster excellence, inspire and develop preschool teams to implement high-quality teaching and learning programs that achieve learning and development outcomes for all children.

To achieve these goals, appropriate post graduate studies in early childhood education and leadership should be made available to leaders and educators wanting to build on their knowledge and strengthen the profession.

A review of preschool teacher and leader workload pressures needs to occur, in consultation with current preschool staff and those who have chosen to exit the profession, to address the wellbeing of the current preschool workforce and to attract and retain preschool staff.

Given the nature of the job and the retiring workforce, PDA believes DfE should develop further opportunities and strategies to support and encourage the retention and attraction of preschool leaders by offering more flexible/or part time roles. This change will promote

retention of current leaders, support the development of new and aspiring leaders and build capacity within the workforce, while also valuing the return to the workforce of those professionals with young children.

### **What else should South Australia do in addition to workforce supply initiatives already underway?**

PDA recommends a review of initial teacher education programs (ITE) delivered in SA. This review should be conducted to ensure adequate content of curriculum, pedagogy and practical experience relevant to children of preschool age (3-5 years old). The outcomes of this review should ensure early childhood education degrees maintain parity, rigour, and level of professionalism with those of primary and secondary teacher qualifications. In addition, educational programs, inclusive of ITE and ongoing professional learning should learn from centres of educational excellence such as:

#### *Reggio Emilia's Municipal Infant-Toddler Centres and Preschools - Reggio Emilia, Italy*

The Reggio Emilia Approach is an educational philosophy based on the image of a child with strong potential for development and a subject with rights, who learns through the hundred languages belonging to all human beings and grows in relations with others. The approach is underpinned by several principles to guide educational practice:

- the hundred languages
- participation
- listening
- learning as a process of individual and group construction
- educational documentation
- progettazione (inquiry)
- organisation
- environment, spaces and relations
- professional development
- assessment

#### *Pen Green Centre for Children and their Families - Corby, Northamptonshire, UK*

The Pen Green Centre offers education and care for children, information and support services for parents through home visiting, group work, health interventions, adult education and training as well as the professional development, training and dissemination of good practice through the Research, Development and Training Base, and the Teaching School.

#### *Te Whāriki, Early Childhood Education Curriculum - New Zealand*

The New Zealand early childhood education curriculum is play-based and emphasises relationships with children, family and communities. School readiness includes an emphasis on learning resilience and risk taking. New Zealand early educators use narratives,

(learning stories) as described by Margaret Carr and Wendy Lee (2012) to assess the progress of each child.

To alleviate the pressures in finding high-quality workforce in rural and remote areas, we suggest that country and remote tertiary study options in early childhood education are available, with consideration to mentoring arrangements, safe and affordable housing, and economic support for students.

We recommend that a funded program to upskill those educators with a Diploma in Children's Services who are wanting to move to an early childhood teaching degree (in line with the SA Teacher registration board requirements) is implemented in a timely manner to support the inclusion of three-year-olds in preschools.

Furthermore, an increase of and additional visibility of differentiated ITE programs should be prioritised to encourage underrepresented groups of people, such as Aboriginal, gender diverse, culturally diverse and socially and economically disadvantaged people to participate in early childhood teacher training.

### **Are there innovative approaches to building workforce supply that the Commission should consider?**

As mentioned above, encouraging, and creating vocational study pathways for rural and remote communities would build capacity in local communities. Furthermore, pathways could be created for parents and secondary students to enter the early childhood education profession, if desired, with preschool leaders being funded and resourced to provide mentoring for these parents as part of their core work.

The Department for Education should identify strategies to be an employer of choice for teachers. This would involve identifying current and future benefits of working within the public system and developing promotional resources that highlight these benefits to attract new teachers to the preschool sector.

### **Recommendations - Workforce**

- 4.1. Preschool leaders are provided with a base load model for regulated minimum leadership and administration time. This should be a minimum of 0.5FTE and should increase on a sliding scale to 1.0FTE, based on complexity criteria.
- 4.2. Postgraduate studies in early childhood education and leadership are made available to leaders and educators wanting to build on their knowledge and to strengthen the profession.



- 4.3. A review of preschool teacher and leader workload pressures is prioritised, in consultation with current preschool staff and those who have chosen to exit the profession, to develop strategies to address the wellbeing of the current preschool workforce and to attract and retain preschool staff.
- 4.4. DfE develops further opportunities and strategies to support and encourage the retention and attraction of preschool leaders by offering more flexibility and part time roles for leaders.
- 4.5. Conduct a review of initial teacher education programs delivered in SA to ensure adequate content of curriculum, pedagogy and practical experience relevant to children of preschool age (3-5 years old).
- 4.6. Universities ensure early childhood education degrees maintain parity, rigour, and level of professionalism with those of primary and secondary teacher qualifications.
- 4.7. Preschool educational programs learn from and engage with centres of educational excellence such as Reggio Emilia's Municipal Infant-Toddler Centres and Preschools - Reggio Emilia, Italy, Pen Green Centre for Children and their Families - Corby, Northamptonshire, UK, and the Te Whāriki, Early Childhood Education Curriculum - New Zealand.
- 4.8. Country and remote tertiary study options in early childhood education are available, with consideration to mentoring arrangements, safe and affordable housing, and economic support for students.
- 4.9. A funded program to upskill educators with a Diploma in Children's Services to an early childhood teaching degree (in line with the SA Teacher registration board requirements) is implemented in a timely manner to support the inclusion of three-year-olds in preschools.
- 4.10. Increase and make visible differentiated initial teacher education (ITE) programs to encourage underrepresented groups of people in the early childhood workforce to participate in early childhood teacher training.
- 4.11. Preschool leaders are funded and resourced as part of their core work to provide mentoring for parents, secondary students and others expressing a desire to enter the early childhood profession.
- 4.12. The Department for Education should identify strategies to be an employer of choice for teachers and promote these benefits to the public and graduates.

## **Delivery and administration**

**What is needed to support 3-year-old preschool? (What would you/your organisation need to do to be able to deliver 3-year-old preschool?)**

PDA proposes that preschool teams always consist of a minimum of 3 staff on site to support child safety, WHS, and uninterrupted periods of learning for children. Currently some 'standalone' preschools, school-based preschools and rural sites operate with their warranted staffing of 2 educators (1:0 Director, 1:0 Teacher) on site at one time. This arrangement does not allow for free flowing inside/outside play and often means the learning and safety needs of children are put at risk when one educator is required to answer the phone, manage a facility issue, help children with physical care or emotional regulation. Given the higher needs of 3 year old children for physical care, supervision and emotional support, having an additional support educator (ECW) to increase the staff to child ratio will alleviate this pressure and promote safety for all children and staff.

There have been a significant number of important reviews into aspects of early childhood education in South Australia in recent years. PDA recommends that the commission undertake an assessment of the outcome of earlier government studies, publications, and reports into early childhood provision in South Australia to determine what recommendations have been implemented and what their impact has been, and where recommendations have not been implemented why this has not occurred.

Relevant reports include 'The Virtual Village: Raising a Child in the New Millennium' (2005), 'Re-imagining Childhood: The inspiration of Reggio Emilia education principles in South Australia' (2013) and 'Investing in the Early Years: Closing the gap between what we know and what we do' (2005).

PDA suggests the learnings from the recent (2022/2023) 'Mid-Year to Preschool/school intake' project be examined and shared with relevant associations and organisations to identify if this impacts or influences the process, policy and timelines needed to enact 3-year old preschool across the state.

We recommend well-resourced government pilot sites should be developed to explore benefits of models of preschool delivery across a range of socio-economic, country, and metropolitan areas. Data collected from these pilots could then be used to inform the above process, policies, and timelines.

A comprehensive audit into the internal and external building infrastructure of government preschools is also needed. A plan for improvement of sites should be developed to ensure that government preschools are contemporary and provide an environment that promotes learning for all children, considers the physical care needs of younger children and children with disabilities and the creation of safe workplaces for staff. At the same time this audit should review government preschools to determine where there is physical capacity to increase enrolments.

Furthermore, the Department for Education should develop a range of professional development opportunities for educators and LET across the state to support the implementation of 3-year-old preschool.

**What are the strengths of the current SA government administrative arrangements for delivering 4-year-old preschool programs (e.g. funding arrangements, parent fees, choice of providers)? What are areas for improvement?**

*Areas of strength:*

Government preschools:

- operate on principles of equity and excellence and welcome all children and families.
- have a 'Preschool position statement' (DfE, 2022) that articulates the premises of quality government preschool. The model encourages "high-quality educational preschool programs underpinned by excellence in teaching and learning in every preschool in our system".
- are recognised and valued as a part of the public education system by teachers and parents.
- are established in communities and accepted as critical to local community profiles.
- provide some wrap around services for families. DfE Children's Centres are a positive example of wrap-around services for children, inclusive of services such as CAFHS, Parent Development Programs, access to specialists (e.g.: Speech Pathologist, OT, Prenatal care). In some of our children's centres, there is before and after preschool and/or long day care providing for working and studying parent support.
- have systems to support the inclusion of all children through funding, advice, and access to allied health professionals;
- have system wide and local orientation to preschool and transition to school processes.
- have funding models that provide for EC registered teachers and leaders to meet NQF ratios with support for individual children through ECW's.
- offer pay parity for preschool teachers and leaders with teachers and leaders in public schools.
- have leadership support and receive guidance and oversight of education programs and practice through LETs and Central Office teams.
- have an established peer support system through partnership with local schools and preschools.
- provide preschool teams with high quality professional development.
- provide system wide curriculum development and guidance.
- have an effective improvement process that encompasses and extends upon the NQS through the Preschool Quality Improvement Plan, (PQIP). This is a system supported by the head office team and the LET.

- have systems and support in place to manage enrolments, finance, compliance with NQS, HR and WHS legislative requirements.

### **Areas for Improvement:**

PDA believes the Department for Education should increase the number of early childhood teachers within corporate and curriculum divisions, including within local education teams, to ensure policy development and support for preschool teams reflects early childhood education contemporary research and pedagogy.

There are inconsistent support services across the state for services such as Speech Pathology, OT and behaviour development advice. Attraction and retention of support staff in our metropolitan and regional education offices would support consistent advice for leaders and educators, in turn supporting children and families within a space where they feel safe and familiar.

PDA suggests that the number of DfE Children's Centres with wrap-around services for children and families are increased across the State in line with recommendations of the Fraser Mustard, Thinker in Residence Report, *'Investing in the Early Years: Closing the gap between what we know and what we do'* (2007).

PDA recommends a timeline is established to upgrade facilities to increase capacity and improve learning environments to contemporary standards

### **Who should be primarily responsible for paying for 3-year-old preschool? Who should share that responsibility?**

To reduce barriers to enrolment and attendance at preschool a long-term aim should be that preschool is offered fee free to all families. However, we understand that some families have the capacity to contribute financially and therefore, it could be acceptable that fees for preschool for the year should be set as it is in public schools for the materials and services charge. Introducing the school card scheme to government preschools to support the participation of children from economically disadvantaged homes would be a benefit.

### **Recommendations - Delivery and administration**

- 5.1. Preschool teams always consist of a minimum of 3 staff onsite to support child safety, WHS, and uninterrupted periods of learning for children.
- 5.2. Undertake an assessment of the outcome of earlier government studies, publications, and reports into early childhood provision in South Australia to determine what recommendations have been implemented and what their impact has been, and where recommendations have not been implemented why this has not occurred.

- 5.3. A review of the recent (2022/2023) 'Mid-Year to Preschool/school intake' project will be examined and shared with relevant stakeholders to identify if this impacts or influences the process, policy and timelines needed to enact 3-year-old preschool across the state.
- 5.4. Well-resourced government pilot sites are developed to explore benefits of models of preschool delivery across a range of socio-economic, country, and metropolitan areas. Data collected from these pilots is used to inform policies, and timelines for universal implementation.
- 5.5. A comprehensive audit into the internal and external building infrastructure of government preschools is conducted and a plan for improvement of sites is developed to ensure that government preschools are contemporary and provide an environment that promotes learning for all children, considers the physical care needs of younger children and children with disabilities and the creation of safe workplaces for staff.
- 5.6. An audit of government preschools is undertaken to determine where there is physical capacity to increase enrolments.
- 5.7. DfE creates and implements a range of professional development opportunities for educators and Local Education Teams (LET) across the state to support the implementation of 3-year-old preschool.
- 5.8. DfE increases the number of early childhood teachers within corporate and curriculum divisions, including within local education teams, to ensure policy development and support for preschool teams reflects early childhood education contemporary research and pedagogy.
- 5.9. Attraction and retention of support staff, such as special educators and allied health staff in our metropolitan and regional education offices is considered to provide consistent advice for leaders and educators.
- 5.10. The number of DfE Children's Centres with wrap-around services for children and families are increased across the state, and where possible are co-located with primary schools while retaining early childhood leadership at Band A level within the site.
- 5.11. Fees for preschool for the year should be set as it is in public schools for the materials and services charge.
- 5.12. The school card scheme is expanded to government preschools to support the participation of all children in preschool programs.

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Waniganayake, M, Cheeseman, S, Fenech, M & Shepherd, W 2017 *Leadership: Contexts and complexities in Early Childhood Education (2nd Ed)*, Oxford University Press, Australia.

## Web Links

Reggio Emilia's Municipal Infant-Toddler Centres and Preschools - Reggio Emilia, Italy  
<https://www.reggiochildren.it/en/reggio-emilia-approach/>

Pen Green Centre for Children and their Families - Corby, Northamptonshire, UK

<https://www.pengreen.org/>

Te Whāriki, Early Childhood Education Curriculum - New Zealand

<https://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Early-Childhood/ELS-Te-Whariki-Early-Childhood-Curriculum-ENG-Web.pdf>

<https://tewhariki.tki.org.nz/en/key-documents/te-whariki-2017/underpinning-theories-and-approaches/>