



French-Australian Preschool

Ecole Maternelle Franco-Australienne

French-Australian Preschool—Submission

About the French-Australian Preschool

The French-Australian Preschool's vision is to prepare children for life long learning by providing a high quality bilingual (English-French) educational environment that enables children to be successful learners.

Its mission is to provide a progressive immersion program into the French language that addresses each child's holistic development (physical, social, emotional and cognitive) and fosters individuality, confidence and creativity in a stimulating, fun and safe preschool environment.

The Preschool is a not-for-profit association managed by a Board consisting of parents, staff and community representatives. It is entirely self-funded and does not receive any subsidy from the Commonwealth, the Australian Capital Territory, or the French governments. It has been successfully operating in Canberra for over 40 years.

The French-Australian Preschool is *homologuée* which means it is officially recognised by the French Ministry of Education as being responsible for implementing the French curriculum for learning. In 2013, the Preschool became an official partner of Agence pour l'Enseignement Français à l'Etranger AEFÉ. As a result, it is part of a large network of French schools overseas and benefits from pedagogical and other support.

The Preschool is also accredited as an Australian long day care centre. As such, it adheres to the vision and principles of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) for Australia.

The Preschool's teachers have been educated in the French university system to the level of an Australian Master's degree and are qualified to teach children aged 2 to 12. They hold a Professeur des Ecoles degree.

Most children enter the Preschool when they are 3, and stay for two years. The Preschool only offers full-time places to support the acquisition of French language.



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Many of the children who attend the Preschool go on to the bi-national Telopea Park School in Canberra. Telopea Park School, Lycée Franco-Australien, was established as a binational French-Australian school in 1983 by an agreement between the Governments of France and Australia. Unlike the Preschool, the Telopea Park School is administered as part of the Australian Capital Territory Government school system.

Response to Draft Report—Childcare and Early Childhood Learning

1. Draft Recommendation 12.2

The Preschool welcomes the proposal to replace the Child Care Rebate and Child Care Benefit with the Early Care and Learning Subsidy (ECLS) and to pay it directly to services. This would simplify processes and avoid circumstances where families receive the benefit directly and do not pay the service.

2. Draft Recommendation 7.5

The Preschool strongly welcomes draft recommendation 7.5 that services should be provided with greater flexibility to meet staffing requirements and that ACECQA should:

- remove the requirement that persons with early childhood teacher qualifications must have practical experience for children aged birth to twenty four months.
- explore ways to make the requirements for approving international qualifications simpler and less prescriptive in order to reduce obstacles to attracting appropriately qualified educators from overseas.

This recommendation should also be extended to remove any requirement that persons with teaching qualifications for a specific age group (including qualifications acquired internationally) be required to attain additional qualifications for another age group if they are not required to teach or care for children in that age group.

The Preschool is unique in the Australian education system as it delivers a comprehensive preschool program that complies with both French and Australian education requirements and is also an Australian long day care centre for children over 3. While the Preschool strongly endorses measures to ensure quality early childhood learning, it has found the very stringent and specific nature of the various regulations and requirements of authorities administering childhood



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education—particularly in relation to staffing qualifications—to be inflexible and not well-adapted to suit less typical models of education or long day care.

For example, there is very little (if any) flexibility in the regulations to enable French-education qualified teachers to teach in an Australian preschool without having to obtain further diploma-level qualifications in Australia. Training for teachers in France qualifies them to teach children from ages 2-12. Even though the French-Australian Preschool does not accommodate children aged birth to 2, the regulations require our French qualified teachers to undertake additional training in relation to children in that age bracket. This is particularly problematic for the Preschool when it seeks to recruit French-education qualified teachers on a temporary basis to backfill periods of long-leave for staff (maternity leave absences, for instance). We understand that this situation is not unique to teachers trained in France but also applies to teachers trained in many other countries.

We would like to add that, to comply with the current regulations, we have been working closely with Karen Curtis from ACECQA, on a request for a conditional approval for our teachers.

We have also been working with Sue Fox, the Qualifications Assessment Manager from ACECQA in regards to the recognition of our French teachers. She has been very helpful in assisting each of our teachers individually. She has recommended that they follow a (0-2 university unit) however, it has been impossible to find a university offering the course recommended. Indeed, universities are restructuring and won't be ready to offer courses till next year at the earliest or cannot offer 1 or 2 single units individually. So our teachers are finding themselves in a situation where the solution to the recognition of their degrees exists but is not currently available.

This raises a question: Why are universities not ready to cope with the demands of students / educators when it has been clear for the past two years that ACECQA would impose higher qualifications for everyone working in early childhood education?

To enable diversity in education and to allow high quality and successful organisations such as the French-Australian Preschool to thrive in Australia, it is fundamental that the Australian framework for early childhood education be sufficiently flexible to enable internationally qualified educators to be easily engaged.

This is particularly important considering that the main ethos of the Preschool is bilingual education and the improvement of language education, including in preschools, is a key objective of the Commonwealth Government.



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3. Draft Recommendation 12.10

The Preschool welcomes draft recommendation 12.10 that the Government should provide per child payments to long day care services where they do not receive such funding from the states and territories.

In relation to Information Request 5.1, the Preschool notes that all its children (from age 3 onwards) attend preschool full-time from 9.00am to 3.15pm Monday to Friday during school term. This is modelled on the French education system where children typically attend preschool for two years full time before commencing the equivalent of Australian kindergarten. Fulltime attendance also supports achievement of language education outcomes.

4. Draft Recommendation 7.6

The Preschool welcomes the removal of the 'excellent' rating, as recommended in draft recommendation 7.6, but considers that the 'Exceeding National Quality Standard' is also unnecessary. The following three levels would be sufficient:

Meeting National Quality Standard
Working Towards National Quality Standard
Significant Improvement Required.

We query the value of an 'excellent' or 'exceeding' rating when the rating is dependent on the subjectivity of the assessor. If all services that pass regulations were rated 'meeting', it would be up to families to visit services and decide for themselves what approach / philosophy suits them and their children.

5. Draft Recommendation 7.7

The Preschool welcomes the draft recommendation that Governments, ACECQA and regulatory authorities, as applicable, should provide more detailed and targeted guidance to providers on requirements associated with Quality Improvement Plans, educational programming, establishing compliant policies and procedures and applying for waivers.

We consider that it would relieve the administrative burden on services if, to the extent possible, authorities could produce 'ready to use' policies that could be picked up and used by services or adapted with minimal effort.



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As far as assessment is concerned, for maximum accuracy, we would like ACECQA and our local regulatory authority to send specialists for each area assessed (for example, someone from the education sector for the educational program).

I would like to thank you for the giving us the opportunity for this submission. I remain available if you need further information.

Véronique Danjou
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