

Universal Access National Partnership

ACA Qld Review



Australian Childcare Alliance
Queensland



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Introduction

An independent review (the Review) is being conducted into the national funding arrangements that support access for all children in Australia to 600 hours per year of quality early childhood education in the year before full-time formal schooling. The Review was commissioned by State, Territory and Australian Government Education Ministers as a key input into their consideration of future funding in this area. Nous Group is conducting the Review on behalf of all Australian Governments and will present its final report in the first half of 2020.

As the peak body in Queensland, Australian Childcare Alliance Queensland (ACA Qld) is a not for profit, member funded association representing over 850 early learning (centre based, long day care) services employing approximately 13,500 educators, who educate and care for around 180,000 children and over 245,000 parents in Queensland. We advocate for the interests of children, families and educators. We work on behalf of approved providers and operators to ensure that families across Queensland have access to quality and affordable early education. ACA Qld welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Review in the context of ensuring that all kindergarten/preschool children in Queensland continue to have access to high quality, affordable and sustainable early learning and therefore the best start in life.

Majella Fitzsimmons
President ACA Qld

Brent Stokes
General Manager ACA Qld

The Review

Universal Access National Partnership (UANP)

1. The degree to which the agreed objectives, outcomes and outputs of the UANP have been achieved since 2014?

UANP has been instrumental in supporting affordability for Queensland children in accessing 600 hours per year of quality early education (kindergarten), however the objectives and outcomes are by no means completed. Without the continuation of UANP Queensland families will be at minimum \$1240 pa (\$31 per week) to \$1753 pa (\$44 per week) out of pocket worse off. This potential outcome would erode benefits the Government achieved by the implementation of the Jobs for Families package / Child Care Subsidy, decreasing out of pocket expenses for a majority of families by approximately 8%. Families are passionate and vocal in their expectations that Government should support a minimum of one year of kindergarten/preschool for 4-year-old children through mixed model delivery including centre based (long day care) early learning services. The extended hours services provide flexibility meeting community needs and expectations and is the only way to ensure increased workforce participation. Utilising extensive, existing infrastructure is the most effective and efficient use of taxpayer funds.

2. The broader benefits that have been achieved for the community and economy as a result of UANP?

ACA Qld believe it is the right of children to have access to quality kindergarten/preschool while allowing families the choice of the quality early learning service type that best meets their work / family needs. The broader benefits achieved by the community and economy as a result of UANP have not yet been fully realised. Australia's universal cohort of children are only just entering their teenage years, therefore we haven't seen the full benefits in the assessments. Evidence¹ shows all children benefit from quality early learning, regardless of their background or family income. Children who do not attend kindergarten/preschool are 50% more likely to start school 'developmentally vulnerable', which means they're starting school behind their peers and children who start behind, tend to stay behind. Children who attend three or more years of quality early learning perform better in year four maths, science and reading. The benefits of early learning are still evident in higher levels of literacy and numeracy understanding in children at ages 11 and 16². Children who attend early learning are more likely to finish school, achieve higher paying jobs and therefore increased taxes, own their own home, less likely to be involved in crime and therefore not require incarceration and less likely to require support with emotional and behavioural issues.

¹ Academic Research: The benefits of early learning and a play-based environment – <http://beststartinlife.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/References-Best-Start-In-Life-Academic-research.pdf>

² Australian Early Development Census data 2012 - <https://www.aedc.gov.au/resources/detail/national-report-2012>

3. The efficiency, effectiveness and equity of current funding, measurement and performance arrangements?

Increasing national enrollment rates, from 12% in 2008 to now over 95%³ is recognition of the efficiency, effectiveness and optimum implementation of the current funding. Without this funding it would have been near impossible to recruit and retain quality 4-year university degree qualified early childhood teachers, purchase additional age specific resources and offer increased incursions and excursions for this age group. Although enrollment of 3-year-old children is in the early 60%, UANP of 4 year olds has had some positive impact on attendance of those children and we understand also for children the following year, attending formal schooling.

4. Future arrangements to maintain and improve the benefits already achieved and the benefit of pursuing any new objectives, outcomes or outputs?

ACA Qld believe UANP has been extremely effective, achieving increased enrollment rates of a minimum of 600 hours per year of quality early education for many children in Queensland / Australia. The efforts and investment however must continue, in order to achieve improved attendance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage. At the same time embedding the benefits for the children in the existing cohort. The undeniable benefits of early learning are in research and practice, however it must be continued to ensure all in the community are educated to understand and champion this effort.

In the absence of UANP kindergarten/preschool is unlikely to continue as it currently does, we will see a regression to the results achieved. Inevitably providers would be forced to pass on the cost associated with operating a kindergarten/preschool or worse, discontinue the program to remain viable. Universal Access / kindergarten/preschool funding (QKFS) and QKFS Plus used to offset fees and therefore reduce cost as a barrier must to be applied after Child Care Subsidy to avoid eroding the benefit to families by up to 85%. ACA Qld holds concerns about performance indicators adjusted to include attendance data, recognising the fact that preschool / kindergarten is not mandatory, for those children that preschool / kindergarten is their first experience with early learning, illness may be a contributing factor to lower attendance; however that prepares children for much higher attendance the following year in formal schooling (prep).

³ See Table 2 in the National Report - [National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education – 2016 and 2017](#)



Australian Childcare Alliance
Queensland

Email: gld@childcarealliance.org.au

Website: www.qld.childcarealliance.org.au

Phone: 07 3808 2366

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