

Designing a preschool program

Two Years are Better Than One

A dedicated, universal preschool program for 3 year olds is the best way to make sure every child has access to a high quality early education in their local community.

The design of the preschool program must reflect what we know about the conditions and features that ensure the levels of quality needed to have a substantial and sustained impact on children's development and outcomes.

The evidence is very clear that unless minimum quality thresholds are met, the investment in preschool will not deliver strong returns.

The foundations of quality early education are: structural quality (dose, ratios, qualifications and group size) and process quality (curriculum and professional learning).

Australia's National Quality Framework (NQF) and Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) already provide strong foundations to work from.

Dose (hours per week)

Preschool is like antibiotics - children must receive the right dose and the full course for it to work. The number of hours of quality early education that children are exposed to (hours per week/weeks per year) is one of the most important keys for unlocking the potential impact of early education.

Research supports a minimum of 15 hours per week, although children experiencing significant disadvantage may benefit from closer to 30 hours.

Educator to child ratios

The NQF established a ratio of 1 educator to 10/11 (depending on state) children for children aged 3 to 5. Applying these ratio requirements to a 3-year-old

preschool program will ensure an adequate minimum standard.

Qualifications

The skills of educators in fostering rich interactions with children, and planning and delivering appropriate learning opportunities, is one of the primary drivers of high quality early education. Ideally, preschool programs will be delivered by a university-trained Early Childhood Teacher (ECT).

Group size

Currently, the average group size for 3 year old rooms is around 20-22 children (with an educator to child ratio of 1:10/11), and it is recommended that this be maintained.

Curriculum

A 3 year old preschool program must provide developmentally appropriate learning environment that is grounded in the EYLF, is play-based and inquiry-focused, and intentional about developing children's skills and capacities.




Professional learning

Preschool programs for 3 year olds would leverage the sector's skills and capacity. An investment in professional learning opportunities for educators and those in leadership roles will be necessary.

Delivering preschool

Preschool programs for 4 year olds are currently delivered in a mix of Long Day Care, stand-alone preschools and government and non-government schools. An additional year of preschool should work with, build on and strengthen the existing early education and care sector.

The aim should be a nationally consistent model, able to be delivered in different settings, in ways that meet the needs of children and families and with flexibility for states and territories to implement two years of preschool in ways that work for them.

	POTENTIAL DELIVERY APPROACH	ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION
STRUCTURAL QUALITY		
DOSAGE	 <p>Minimum dosage of 15 hours per week/600 hours per year for all 3 year olds</p>	<p>Implement 15 hours of universal preschool in specific locations and expand to more locations over time</p> <p>Test higher dosage (30 hours) for children with greater risk of developmental vulnerability</p>
RATIOS	 <p>Maintain existing NQS ratios of 1:10/11</p>	<p>Research the impact of mixed age groups as part of implementation</p>
QUALIFICATIONS	 <p>Delivered by an Early Childhood Teacher 3 year old preschool to be the priority for the additional Early Childhood Teacher required under the NQS from 2020</p>	<p>Delivered by current diploma-qualified staff, supported by an Early Childhood teacher, as an interim measure Work towards delivery by Early Childhood Teachers as resources/workforce capacity allows</p>
GROUP SIZE	 <p>Consistent with existing practice and infrastructure (20/22 children per group) Prioritise maintaining consistent peer groups and educator-child relationships</p>	<p>Research the impact of mixed age groups as part of implementation</p>
PROCESS QUALITY		
CURRICULUM	 <p>Consistent with the Early Years Learning Framework Additional guidance on the focus, structure and developmentally appropriate pedagogy for 3 year old preschool programs</p>	<p>Complement and align with existing state and territory curriculum models</p>
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING	 <p>Deliver training and professional learning for educators planning and delivering 3 year old preschool programs</p>	<p>Complement and align with existing state and territory professional learning initiatives</p>