

Two years are better than one

Kindergarten programs in Queensland

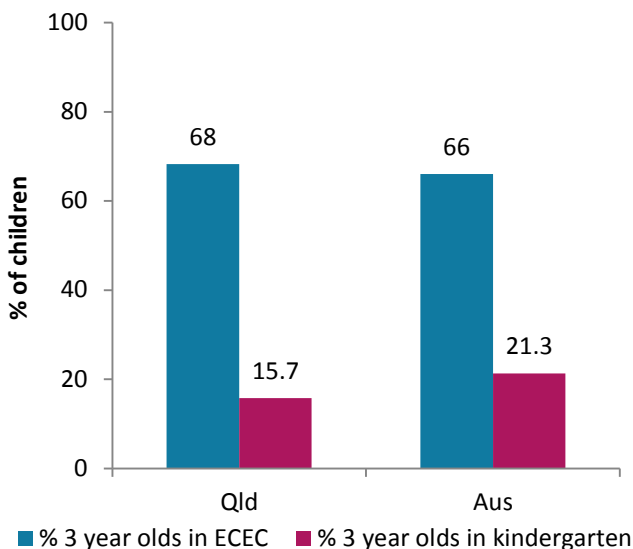
Queensland has been very successful in ramping up access to 4 year old kindergarten programs, but has limited access to kindergarten programs for 3 year old children - although two thirds are enrolled in early education and care (ECEC).

3 year olds enrolled in ECEC and kindergarten

Two thirds of 3 year olds in Queensland are attending ECEC, although only a small proportion of 3 year olds are enrolled in kindergarten programs.

- 68 per cent of 3 year olds are enrolled in ECEC (in long day care, sessional kindergarten and family day care)
- 16 per cent of 3 year olds are enrolled in kindergarten programs

Figure 1: Proportion of 3 year olds enrolled in all ECEC and kindergarten (Preschool Education, Australia 2015 and ROGS 2016)



Policy and funding for 3 year old kindergarten programs

Where spaces are available in the 4 year old kindergarten program, parents can access a kindergarten program for their 3 year old.

However, 3 year old children are not eligible for state government subsidies so the out-of-pocket cost is high.

Queensland has a few providers of fee-based dedicated 3 year old kindergarten programs. These services usually also offer the funded four year kindergarten program.

Progress towards Universal Access for 4 year olds

Queensland is performing above the national average for enrolment and attendance in year before school kindergarten programs.

This is a huge achievement, given Queensland had the lowest levels of access to kindergarten programs when Universal Access to kindergarten was introduced in 2008.

- 100 per cent of children are enrolled in kindergarten programs in the year before school
- 90 per cent are attending for 15 hours or more (noting data is collected in a reference week and is likely to under-estimate actual attendance across the year)

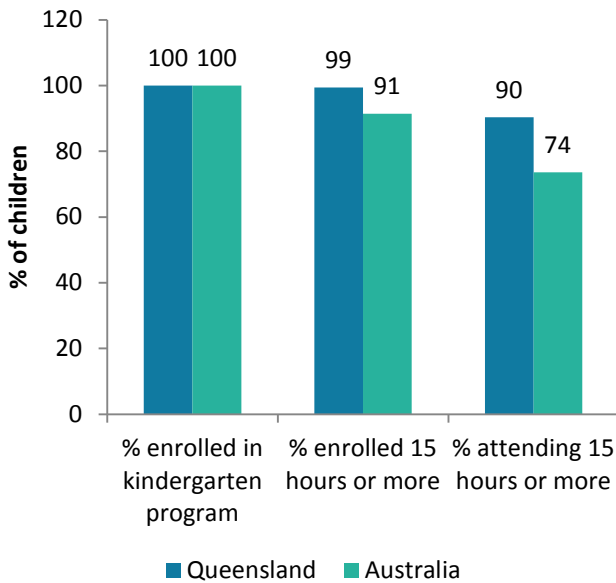
What is kindergarten?

Kindergarten is a play-based, learning-focused program.

In Australia, kindergarten programs are provided for children for 600 hours in the year before school (4-5 years) and are delivered by an Early Childhood Teacher.

There is no national kindergarten program for 3 year olds, but some children attend programs delivered by an Early Childhood Teacher.

Figure 2: Proportion of children enrolled in year before school preschool programs (Preschool Education, Australia 2015). Note: totals have been capped at 100%



Policy and funding for 4 year old kindergarten programs

The Queensland Kindergarten Funding Scheme provides funding per-child to approved preschool providers.

The funding contributes to the costs of implementing and operating a kindergarten program.

- Kindergarten services receive around \$2,700 per child per year.
- Long day care services receive around \$1,600 per eligible child per year (the lower rate is because families can access Child Care Benefit/Rebate to reduce their costs).
- Kindergarten services in low socio-economic communities receive a 45% loading if located in the bottom SEIFA quintile and 30% if in the second bottom quintile.
- Long Day Care services in low-socio-economic communities receive a 25% loading if located in the bottom SEIFA quintile.

- Services receive an additional 50 per cent loading if located in Very Remote and Remote communities.

Strategies to boost attendance of priority cohorts

Queensland's funding scheme also provides additional subsidies for priority groups, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families with a health care or concession card and multiple births, to ensure access is low or no cost.

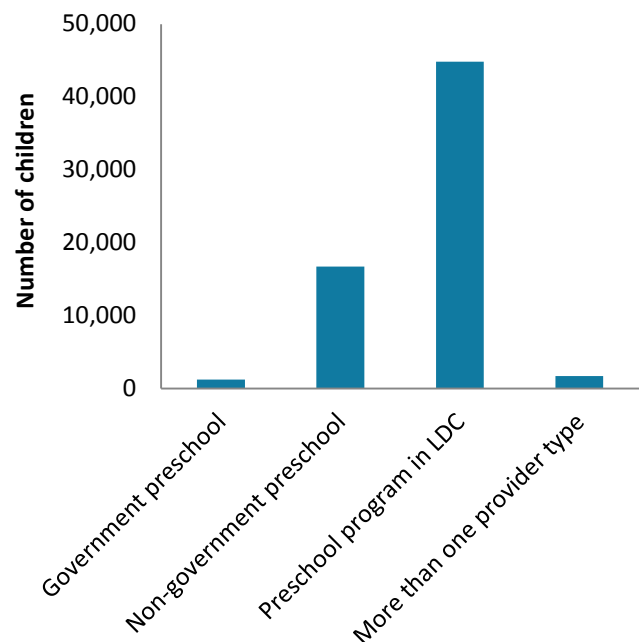
The Queensland Government invests in a range of local initiatives to integrate early education with the broader service system.

These initiatives include building the capacity of kindergarten providers to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and deliver inclusive early childhood education programmes.

Who provides kindergarten?

The majority of children in Queensland attend kindergarten through long day care settings, although there is also a substantial community preschool sector.

Figure 3: Number of children attending preschool per sector (Preschool Education, Australia 2015)

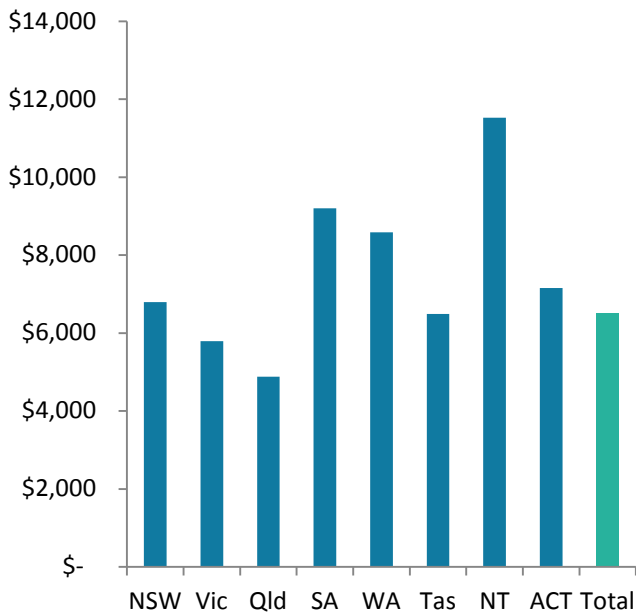


Universal Access funding

Total per-child expenditure in Queensland is substantially below the national average.

In Queensland, state government funding is below the national average and parents pay a higher proportion of the total cost of kindergarten programs than the national average.

Figure 4: Estimated per-child expenditure on preschool (combined Australian Government, state and territory government and parent contributions) 2012-13 (Productivity Commission 2015). Queensland figures may be an undercount due to issues with in the underlying data.



Nearly a quarter of Australian children arrive at school without the foundational skills they need to thrive. A child's risk of being developmentally vulnerable is closely correlated with their socio-economic status, meaning that before they have even started school, these children's chances are more influenced by where they were born than by their own innate abilities. These inequalities often increase as children progress through school.

Access to a high quality preschool program is one of the few proven strategies for lifting outcomes for all children, and evidence suggests that two years has more impact than one, especially for the children most likely to be developmentally vulnerable.

Mitchell Institute's new report, *Two Years are Better than One*, makes the case for preschool programs for 3 year olds.

The report is available at:

www.mitchellinstitute.org.au