



Review: Universal Access National Partnership

#BestStartInLife

ACA Submission to the Nour Group on behalf of the Australian and State & Territory Governments 2019





Contents

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Key consultation questions related to the Review's Terms of Reference	5
To what extent have the UANP policy objectives, outcomes and outputs been achieved?	5
What should UANP target and measure and how should data be collected and used?	6
Are the current UANP arrangements efficient and effective and how could the efficiency, effectiveness and equity of UANP funding to be improved?	7
How does the kindergarten/preschool system operate across the States and Territories and settings?.....	9
Based on your experiences, should changes be made to future national policy on kindergarten/preschool for children in the year before school, and why? What improvements would those changes make? What works well with the current UANP arrangements?.....	12



Introduction

This submission was put together in response to the Australian Government's call for submissions to the Nous Group, as part of their role in conducting an independent review of the Universal Access National Partnership (UANP) on behalf of the Australian and State and Territory Governments.

The Australian Childcare Alliance (ACA) appreciates that the UANP Review will inform governments' decisions about future kindergarten/preschool funding arrangements.

We are pleased that this funding initiative is under review with a view to ensuring that future funding is provided under a model and distribution system that is both practical and effective in its aim to maximise kindergarten/preschool participation, particularly for Indigenous children, children in regional and remote areas, as well as children experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage.

This submission represents the position of the ACA and includes separate submission papers from each ACA state body (Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia) in the Appendix. These submission papers from ACA's state bodies contain greater detail about how the Universal Access funding is applied to early learning services in each of the states we represent.

As the national peak body in the Australian Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector, the ACA represents more than 2,500 members and approximately 360,000 families throughout Australia. We work on behalf of long day care service owners and operators, predominantly private, to ensure families have an opportunity to access affordable, quality ECEC throughout Australia.

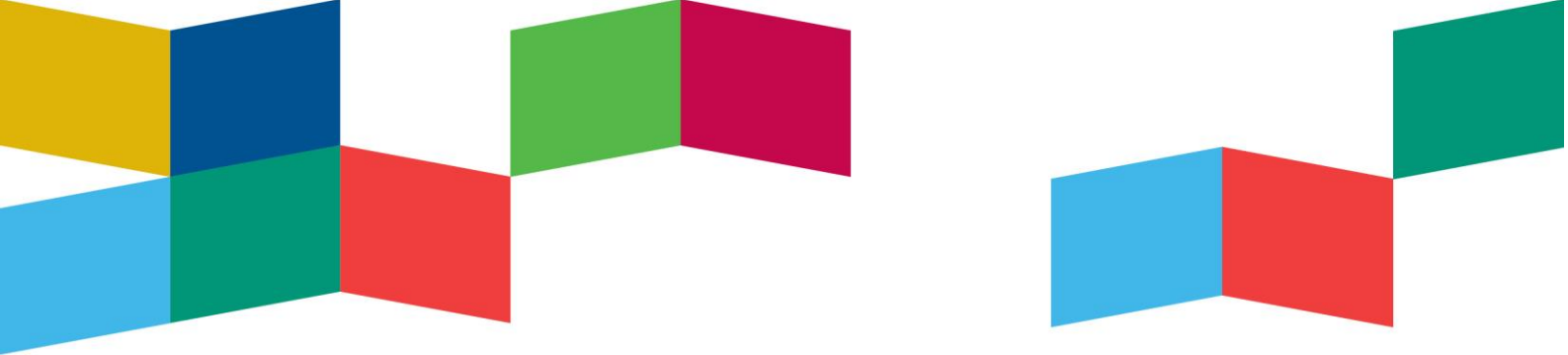
ACA has existed in various forms for more than 30 years. Our experience means that we understand the critical role a quality ECEC program plays in the life of families and the importance of a sustainable long day care sector in preparing children for the best start in life and learning.

ACA's national and state bodies work collaboratively with all sides and levels of government, regulatory bodies and other stakeholders to ensure that families are supported into the future with a sustainable, affordable and viable sector.

As a federated peak body, ACA aims to include the views and experiences of **all of its member states** which are all impacted differently by the current National Partnership Agreement (NPA) as it relates to **children, service providers** and the **choices of families**.

The introduction of the first National Partnership Agreement (NPA) on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education in 2009 was intended to provide access to quality /kindergarten/preschool programs for 600 hours per year in the year before formal schooling delivered by an Early Childhood Teacher (ECT), with a focus on the participation of Indigenous children and children from vulnerable and disadvantaged backgrounds.

Whilst the NPA has largely delivered positive outcomes via Australia's early childhood education system through improving enrolments in these programs in the year before school, **albeit with vastly different outcomes in the various jurisdictions**, it is not unfair to say that in some jurisdictions many centre-based



long day care service providers believe that the current arrangement is delivered **inequitably** and **not as was intended** when the funding model was originally established.

The challenge of evaluating the true impact through the lens of a collective national viewpoint is heightened by the vast difference in both the origins of kindergarten/preschool in the year before formal school in each state, as well as the significantly different delivery modes in each state.

It is also worth noting that research has shown that by investing in quality early childhood education, children have better education, health and employment throughout their lives¹. For every dollar invested now, Australia receives a minimum \$2 back over a child's life². It is also incredibly effective for the cohort of children which includes Indigenous, rural, remote and regional children and those suffering disadvantage and vulnerability.

Whilst a brilliant initiative, there is certainly room for improvement in the delivery of this highly valuable and impactful program, and this review provides a much appreciated opportunity to build on and enhance the benefits of the Universal Access National Partnership (UANP) in the context of ensuring that **every child in Australia** has access to a high quality kindergarten/preschool service in the year before school, and therefore is on the path to the **best start in life**.



Paul Mondo
President, Australian Childcare Alliance

¹ <https://www.thefrontproject.org.au/the-evidence>

Preschool – Two Years are Better Than One - <http://www.mitchellinstitute.org.au/reports/two-years-preschool/>

² A Smart Investment for a Smarter Australia: Economic analysis of universal early childhood education in the year before school in Australia, The Front Project June 2019 - https://www.thefrontproject.org.au/images/downloads/ECO_ANALYSIS_Full_Report.pdf

The Heckman Equation - <https://heckmanequation.org/resource/research-summary-lifecycle-benefits-influential-early-childhoodprogram/>

Key consultation questions

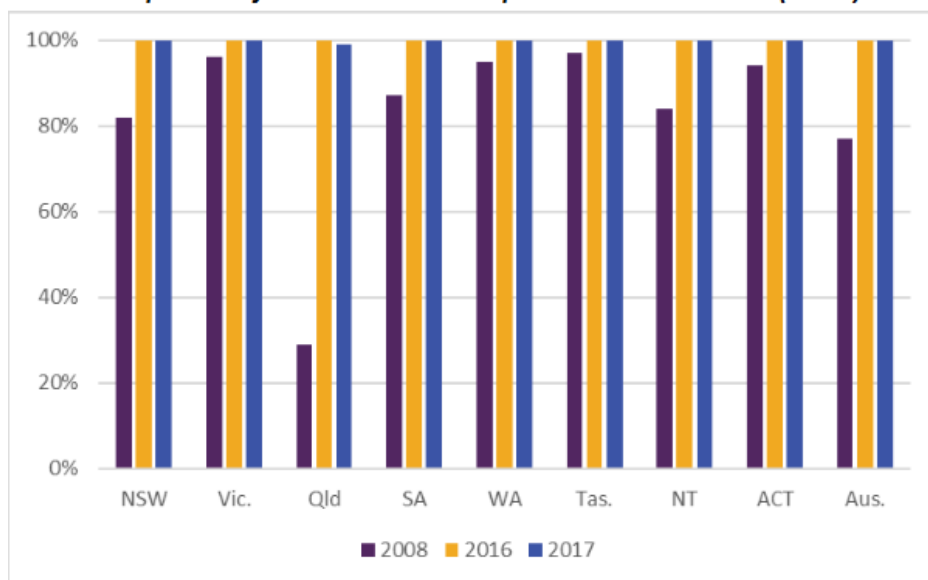
related to the Review's Terms of Reference

1. To what extent have the UANP policy objectives, outcomes and outputs been achieved?

In spite of the vast array of different delivery modes of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in the year before school, it is fair to say that the NPA on UA has improved accessibility and participation in a kindergarten/preschool program.

The following table illustrates the Increased percentages of children attending kindergarten/preschool across Australia's states and territories, clearly supporting the intentions of the policy surrounding the Universal Access National Partnership (UANP).

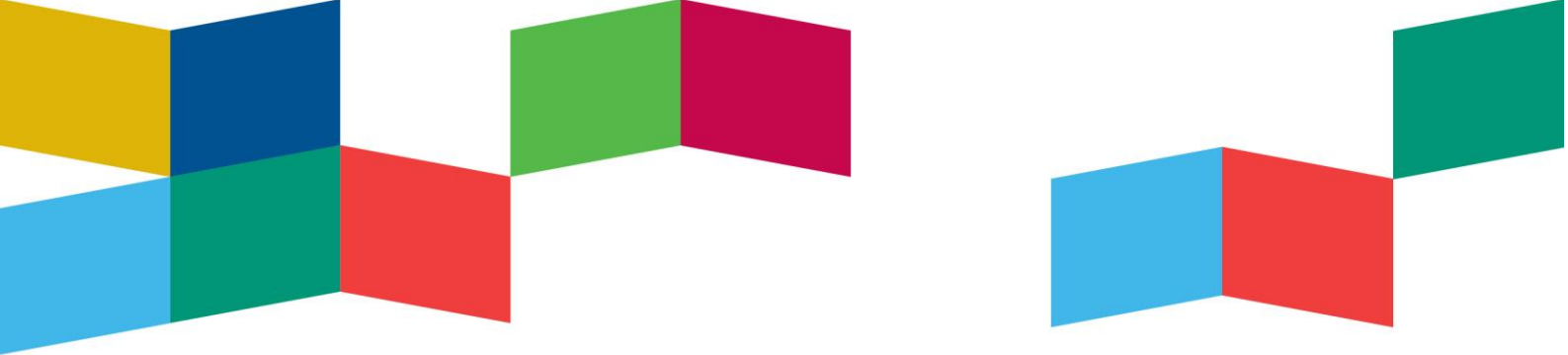
Chart 1: Proportion of children enrolled in preschool—all children (PI 2.1)



Source: 2008 data from Bilateral Agreements under the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education. 2016 and 2017 data from ABS Preschool Education, Australia (cat. no. 4240.0). Includes supplementary data from some jurisdictions.

Notes: Due to the inclusion of supplementary data for some jurisdictions and different counting rules used in 2008, 2016 and 2017, data is not directly comparable across years or across jurisdictions. Where proportions are calculated using two different sources of data, data comparability issues can result in estimates greater than 100 per cent. Where this occurs, results are capped to 100 per cent.

Beyond the significant improvement in enrolment numbers and the expansion of the program to 600 hours per year in all jurisdictions there is clear statistical evidence that the target of improving participation for



both Indigenous and vulnerable and disadvantaged children has met the policy objectives, outcomes and outputs.

Whilst it is clear that the original performance indicators are largely met, particular the significant increase of degree trained early childhood teachers delivering the programs, it is vital to consider that there is still work to be done in ensuring an adequate supply of degree trained teachers to allow for the future success and sustainability of kindergarten/preschool programs in the year before formal school.³

One of the Key Performance Indicators of the agreement are that **all** children are supported to participate in quality early childhood programs **regardless of setting**. There is a huge difference from state to state on how this output has been achieved with states such as Victoria and Queensland delivering on the true intent of this arrangement.

Other states have chosen their own path often at the expense of children and their families receiving these programs in settings not recognised effectively or appropriately in those states. Whilst WA and Tasmania choose to deliver these programs exclusively in schools, states like NSW choose to direct funding to state-funded kindergarten/preschools whilst relying on the long day care centres to deliver a large proportion of their kindergarten/preschool programs, distributing a paltry amount to offset these costs for service providers and families.

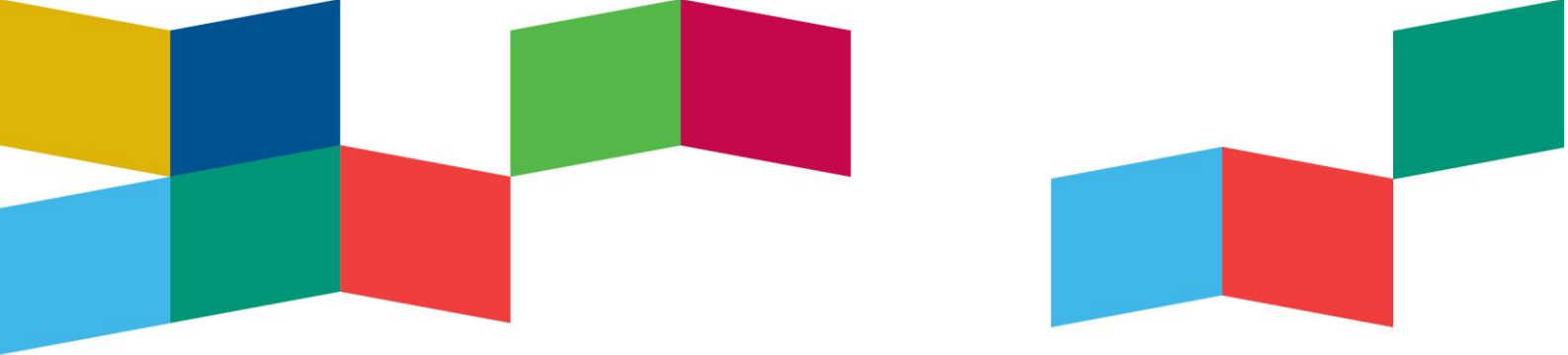
2. What should UANP target and measure and how should data be collected and used?

ACA believes that the current UANP agreement is largely delivering on most of its performance indicators and benchmarks in spite of glaring inequities that reduce parent flexibility in many states.

To ensure that kindergarten/preschool programs across the country are effectively delivering on the UANP's benchmarks and target focus, we believe that continuing to offer services that support improving participation and attendance for **all children**, particularly those from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) communities and those experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage is vital.

There has been an argument that although **enrolment numbers** reflect significant improvement, **actual attendance** by particular cohorts can vary greatly. Whilst it is of course important to encourage as many children as possible to attend kindergarten/preschool as often as possible, and data to support this is required, we believe that future funding for a significant proportion of the population who do attend regularly **should not be delayed**. Nor should the funding for some children be contingent upon attendance by children at other services in a non-compulsory setting.

³ Refer to Early Learning Workforce Strategy, page 12 of ACA Mid-year Budget Submission - <https://childcarealliance.org.au/documents/test-feb/125-aca-mid-year-budget-submission-30-09-2019/file>



It is also important to note that many service types delivering these programs **do not currently record actual attendance data** so it can be extremely difficult to substantiate the claims of low attendance in some circumstances.

If it is deemed necessary to provide data to validate these claims then it would not be unfair to consider alternative methods to track attendance beyond the current census arrangement. However as this has not been a part of previous performance measures within the agreements, it should not impact the provision of new and ongoing funding.

Furthermore, there is opportunity for further analysis on **where** the deemed low attendance rates are, and to assess how appropriate and flexible the existing arrangements are for the communities where the issue has been identified.

Future agreements could also consider the difference in attendance and participation for where a co-contribution is required as compared to those that are at no cost to families.

3. Are the current UANP arrangements efficient and effective and how could the efficiency, effectiveness and equity of UANP funding be improved?

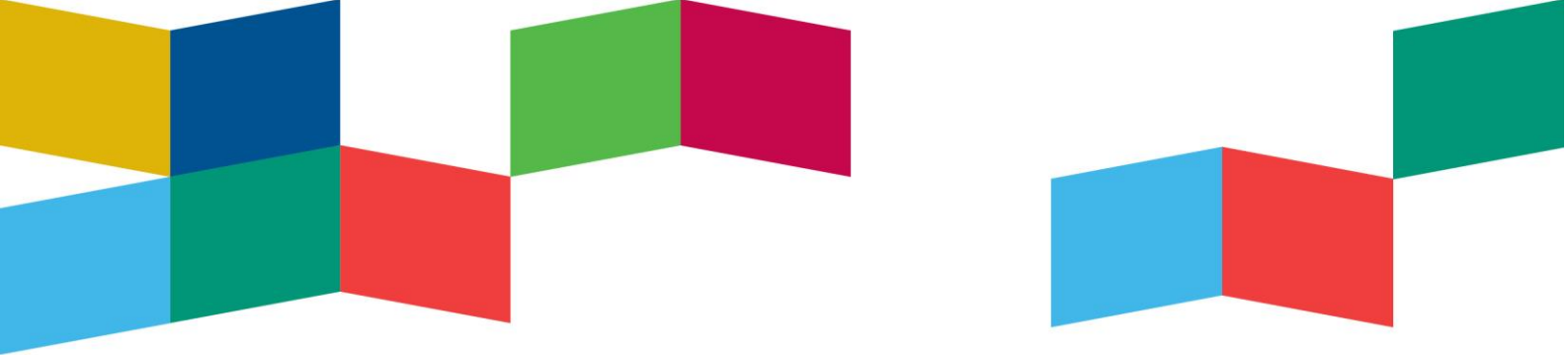
It is really important to consider the local context to determine the efficiency and effectiveness of the current funding arrangements which results in a significant disparity from one jurisdiction to the other when understanding the impact of the funding. These differences are not only **between states** but can also be **within** states particularly for children in regional, rural and remote communities.

Significantly it is our belief that funding arrangements have created **inequities** between states and for children and providers accordingly.

In Western Australia (WA), private early learning service operators do not receive Universal Access (UA) funding. The UA funding is exclusively provided to the independent public schools, independent private schools and the Catholic schools, which have in-house kindergarten programs, as per legislation set up by the WA Government.

Ultimately if the goal of this funding is to allow flexible arrangements which support delivery that is appropriately contextualised for local conditions, can we honestly accept that the existing arrangements deliver on this objective?

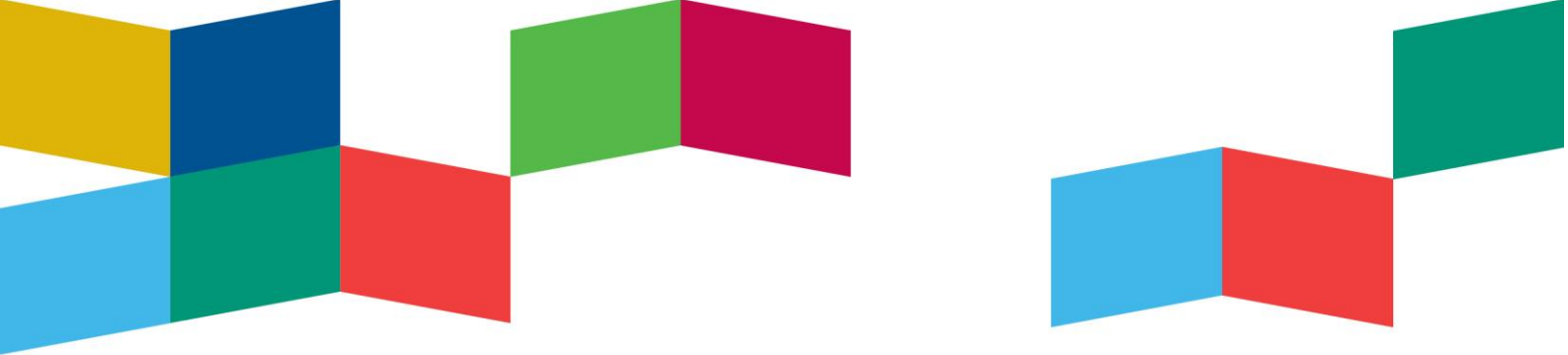
For example, does the school-based delivery in Western Australia provide a suitably flexible delivery mode for children in remote communities, and if so, is there attendance of sufficient duration to ensure the most



effective outcomes? Additionally, does this arrangement deliver a high quality, age and developmentally appropriate kindergarten/preschool experience for the children?

It is clear that the **most significant improvements** have been made in terms of increased participation of children enrolled in the year before school, in those states which have **embraced the objective of flexible delivery**, regardless of setting.





4. How does the kindergarten/preschool system operate across the States and Territories and settings?

While ACA is aware that this review does not set out to review the specific funding and delivery arrangements across the states and territories, it is a review of the national funding arrangements that support access by **all children in Australia** to 600 hours per year of quality early childhood education in the year before full-time school.

It is ACA's view that it is impossible to review these funding arrangements and their outcomes in each state, **without taking into account** the funding models and policies in place for each state.

ACA firmly believes that in some jurisdictions the current arrangement is delivered inequitably and therefore fails to deliver on the agreed objectives of the UANP.

It is worth noting that one of the key deliverables of the UANP is noted as “supporting **all children's** quality early childhood education participation, **regardless** of whether quality early childhood education programs are delivered **through schools (non-government and government), standalone kindergarten/preschools or long day care centres.**”

We believe that the UANP funding model needs to be changed, in order to ensure that it reaches all children across Australia regardless of service type, as intended. The current model has allowed each state/territory government to take a different approach to implementation since inception of the agreement, leading to **grossly inequitable outcomes** for children, families and service providers alike.

As previously discussed, in WA the UA funding only goes to schools with kindergarten/preschool /kindergartens on site. This arrangement excludes all other early learning services, including long day care.

Kindergarten/preschool systems across each state

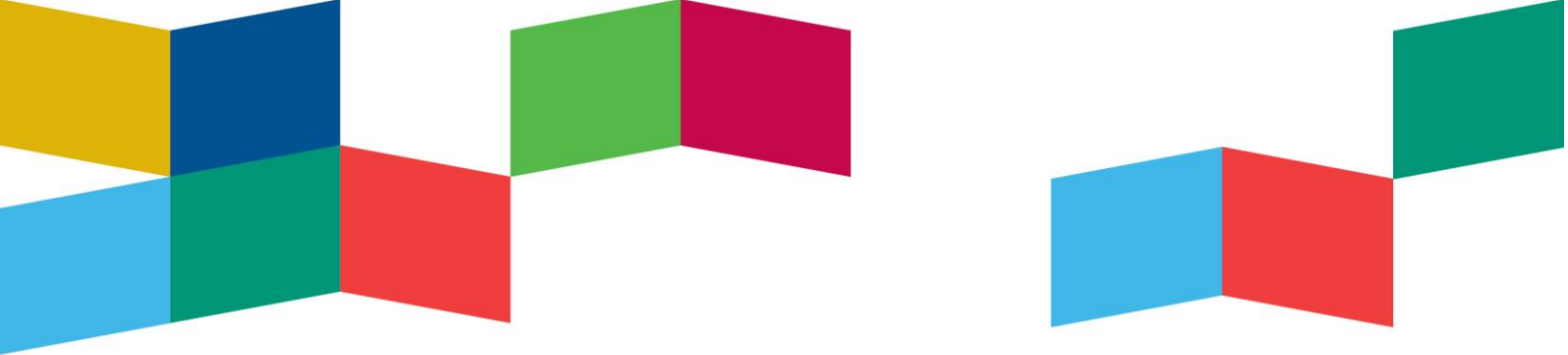
State	UN funding
TAS	Only goes to public, independent public, private and Catholic schools with Kindergarten services on site.
VIC	Provided to all service types.
SA	Provided to all service types.
WA	Only goes to public, independent public, private and Catholic schools with Kindergarten services on site. Part of the UA funding also goes to Kindilink, Community based Playgroups (on School sites) and only 8 Education & Care Networks. UA funding is not available for the Long Day Care sector in WA.
QLD	Provided to all service types.
NSW	Goes to both community kindergarten/preschool and centre-based long day care services. However centre-based long day care only receives limited less than 10% funding compared to government community kindergarten/preschool s funded early learning services despite a NSW Government report recommending that it be at least 33%.

Whilst ACA acknowledges the vast difference in both the origins of kindergarten/preschool in the year before formal school in each state, the benefits of high quality kindergarten/kindergarten/preschool programs are now well recognised and acknowledged locally and globally⁴.

There are currently over 10,000 early learning services delivering kindergarten/kindergarten/preschool programs across Australia, with over 60% (over 6,800 services) of these programs being delivered by long day care centres⁵.

⁴ Invest in Early Childhood Development: Reduce Deficits, Strengthen the Economy, Professor James J. Heckman, Henry Schultz Distinguished Service, Professor of Economics at the University of Chicago

⁵ Report on Government Services 2018, PART B, CHAPTER 3, Early childhood education and care, <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-governmentservices/2018/child-care-education-and-training/early-childhood-education-and-care>



Australia’s long day care sector offers the ideal balance of age/developmentally-appropriate early learning environments and appropriately trained educators to provide high quality early childhood education and care to Australia’s young children.

The infrastructure already exists - with 93% of long day care centres reporting vacancies⁶, there is ample capacity to support an increased number of children enrolling in kindergarten/kindergarten/preschool programs in the year before school.

ACA supports the right for all children to have access to quality kindergarten/kindergarten/preschool programs, while allowing parents with the choice of early learning service type that best suits their work/life needs as well as the significantly different delivery modes in each state.

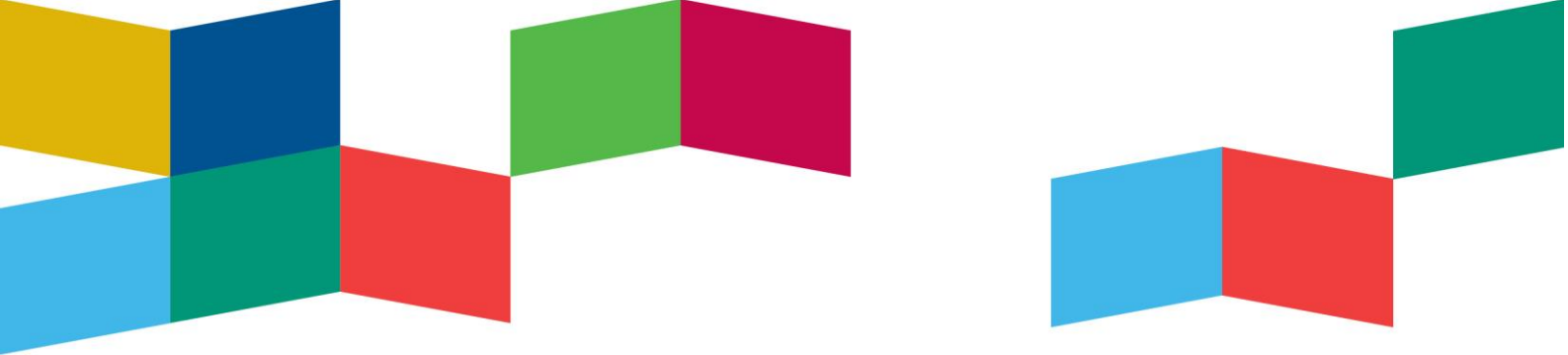
Minimum school starting age across each state/territory

<i>Cut-off dates mean a child must turn 5 by that date to start school in that year</i>			
State	Cut-off date	Name of first year	Minimum age of child when starting 31 Jan
TAS	1 January	Prep	5 years 1 month
VIC	30 April	Prep	4 years 9 months
ACT	30 April	Kindergarten	4 years 9 months
SA	1 May	Reception	4 years 9 months
WA	30 June	Pre-primary	4 years 7 months
QLD	30 June	Prep	4 years 7 months
NT	30 June	Transition	4 years 7 months
NSW	31 July	Kindergarten	4 years 6 months

Without a nationally consistent school starting age, it is extremely difficult (both in a practical and pedagogical sense) to:

- implement funding and programs for the two years before school given the enormous variances in age and development milestones that the programs and funding would apply to; and
- Measure learning outcomes against global data on educational achievement.

⁶ Federal Department of Education Early Childhood and Child Care in Summary Report 2018 - <https://www.education.gov.au/early-childhood-and-child-care-reports>



ACA would like to see Australia's Federal and State Governments agree to a nation-wide requirement that children must be at least 5 years of age by 1 January in their first year of formal schooling.

5. Based on your experiences, should changes be made to future national policy on kindergarten/preschool for children in the year before school, and why? What improvements would those changes make? What works well with the current UANP arrangements?

Whilst a brilliant initiative, there is certainly room for improvement and more work to be done in the delivery of the Universal Access National Partnership (UANP), to build on and enhance the benefits in the context of ensuring that every child in Australia has access to a high quality kindergarten/preschool service in the year before school, and therefore is on the path to the **best start in life**.

ACA applauds those state governments (ie. Victoria, Queensland and South Australia) which have supported the flexible delivery of high quality kindergarten/preschool programs across a range of service types that support parental choice. These states are clearly delivering the agreed outcomes of the UANP and no doubt those states are delivering on flexible, affordable kindergarten/preschool education in the year before school.

However as previously outlined, ACA believes that the agreed outcomes of the UANP are not being met in every state, due to the design of the funding model, which gives the state/territory governments discretion to limit the dissemination to only some early learning service types (for example, Western Australia) or significantly reduce the funding for children enrolled in kindergarten/preschool programs in NSW-based long day care compared to NSW-based community kindergarten/preschools.

This review of the UANP is the opportunity for the Australian Government to improve outcomes by adopting the recommendations below and overleaf.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We call on the government to:

- Introduce a new funding model that
 - is disseminated equitably, to ensure that **all children** have access to at least **15 hours per week** of a quality kindergarten/ preschool lead by tertiary qualified early childhood teachers, jurisdiction. This includes delivery in **long day care services**, allowing parents flexibility and choice of early learning service type that best suits their work/life needs.
 - offers **long term, sustainable** funding, so that families and service providers have certainty beyond year to year agreements



RECOMMENDATIONS CONTINUED

- Introduce a reporting system that provides more accurate enrolment and ongoing attendance data, to ensure that the most vulnerable are not only enrolled but are actually attending for 15 hours a week.
- Introduces a nationally consistent school starting age - children must be at least 5 years of age by 1 January in their first year of formal schooling regardless of jurisdiction.
- Allocate funding to a national early learning workforce strategy that aims to ensure high quality early learning outcomes via an adequate supply of quality early childhood educators and teachers for the sector.

This must include:

- Government policy that will deliver a consistent level of high quality vocational training courses with the required outcomes, to ensure that Australian young children receive the best quality early childhood education and care
- Addressing the desperate shortage of degree qualified Early Childhood Teachers (ECT's) in the wake of the 2020 change in NQF requirements regarding early childhood teachers and the potential for the universal kindergarten/preschool programs to be extended to a second year for 3 year olds. Government policy could reduce barriers for existing Diploma qualified educators who may wish to upskill to a teaching degree.
- Government funding for the professional development of early childhood educators and teachers. i.e. a program similar in concept to the LDCPDP with the same distribution model that allows early learning service providers to determine the most appropriate training needs for the staff in their own services.



Email:

president@australianchildcarealliance.org.au

Website: www.childcarealliance.org.au

Phone: 0411 587 170

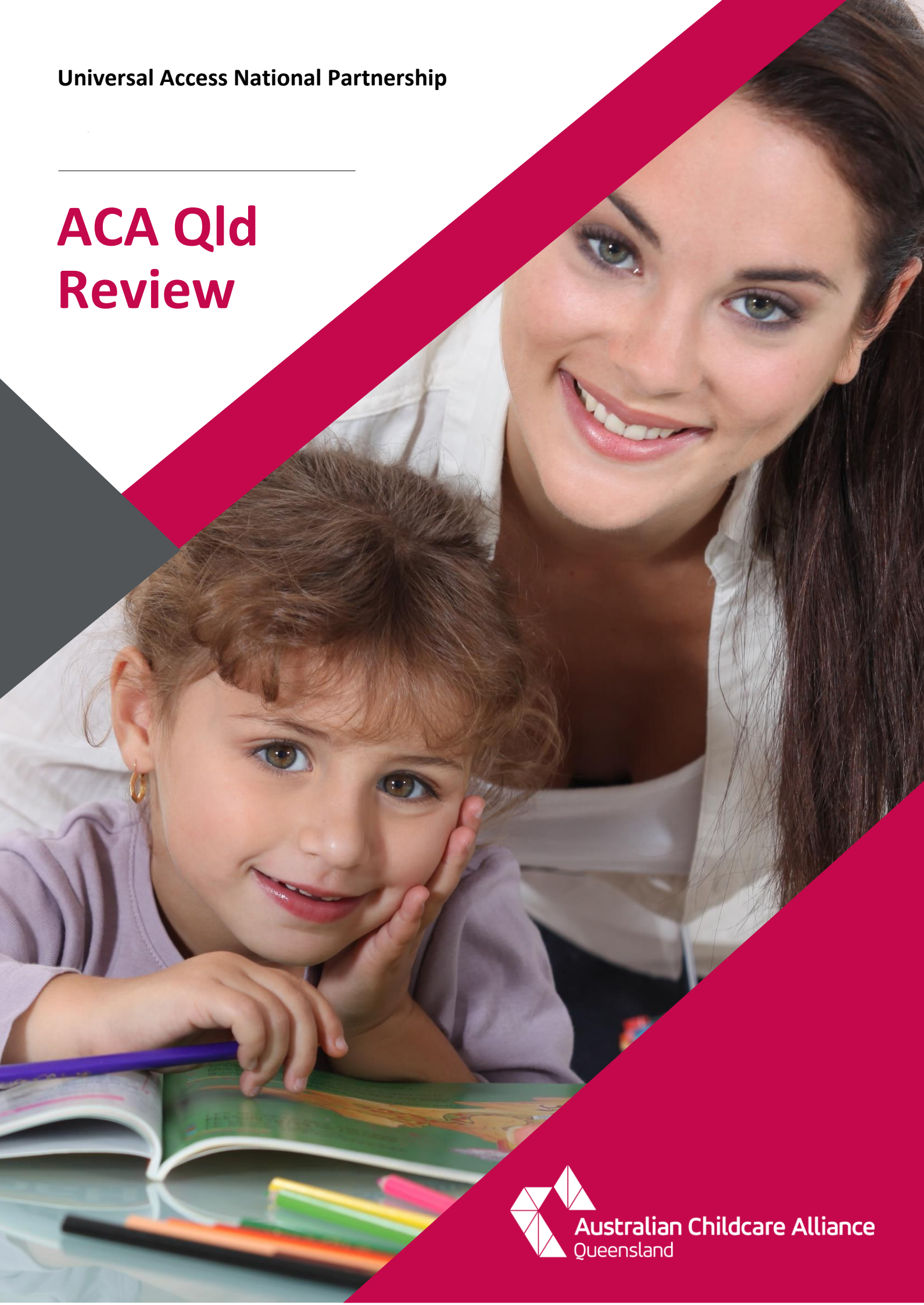
Facebook: www.facebook.com/childcarealliance

Twitter: www.twitter.com/ChildcareAus



Universal Access National Partnership

ACA Qld Review



Australian Childcare Alliance
Queensland



Contents

03 Introduction

04 The Review: Universal Access
National Partnership



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



Australian Childcare Alliance
Queensland

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.gld.childcarealliance.org.au

Phone: 07 3808 2366

 www.facebook.com/ACAQld

 [@ACAQld](https://twitter.com/ACAQld)

 [@Australian Childcare Alliance Queensland Inc](https://www.linkedin.com/company/Australian Childcare Alliance Queensland Inc)

 [@acaqlld](https://www.instagram.com/acaqlld)

Review: Universal Access National Partnership

ACA South Australia Submission to the Nous Group on behalf of the Australian and State & Territory Governments 2019

Universal Access in Childcare is essential for families who are committed to work and are limited in their ability to place their children in SA's numerous government kindergartens because of the kindergarten's shorter hours and ridged session times. Also, many families do not wish to disturb their children where they are settled in childcare to relocate them to a Government Kindergarten. In addition, many childcare centres run their universal access sessions every day so the pre-schoolers attending childcare get addition benefit and that also provides for children who are in for just a few days a week or who change days. Ensuring childcare centres participate in Universal Access funding is important to ensure flexible delivery to parents to enable them to have their children participate in the year before school.

Centres use the Universal Access funding to offset some of the additional cost of employing early childhood teachers and to purchase resources and the funding assists in keeping fees down for families by reducing these costs.

One of the major concerns is the shortage of Early Childhood Teachers willing to work in childcare to deliver the universal access program. Those that start in childcare are often using it as a temporary job until they can get a position at a school teaching junior primary. The only degree available is a 0-8 degree and much of the placement time during the degree is spent in schools rather than with 4-5 year old children in childcare. This tends to be a strong influence on their future job preference.

What is required is a 0-5 Early Childhood Degree with all of the training and placement time focused on the pre-school age groups, but so far the South Australian universities are unresponsive to this need. The Universities want to blame uncompetitive salaries and holidays in childcare but we find even when some of our childcare centres out of desperation go a long way to providing competitive pay and leave, retention of ECTs in childcare remains a problem. Therefore, we believe a 0-5 degree is the only way forward. This problem will be greatly exacerbated in 2020 with the requirement of a second ECT for larger centres and the mushrooming growth of new centres.

The only objective measures of the effectiveness of the UANP are those based as participation of children in the year before they attend school. This needs to be broken down into subgroups particularly for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Children and for Children who have come from a disadvantaged background. Education is the key to breaking the poverty cycle for these categories of disadvantaged children and their participation in pre-school sessions is a proven precursor to later success at school and in adult life. We believe the current measures track these well.

There is an argument that participation is not a measure of the quality of the Universal Access offered by the preschool but we already have the NQF and accreditation in place and critical measures of ratios and educator qualifications etc to look after this aspect.

A major concern is about the uncertainty that occurs every year as to whether funding will be renewed and it could get to November before parents and staff can be assured that the program will be available the following year. This causes staff retention and stress issues and the doubts impact on parents and their ability/interest in enrolling their children in the year before school.

The Government needs to build ongoing certainty around the Universal Access funding rather than an annual will we won't we approach.

There significant issues in providing universal access in remote areas, particularly for Aboriginal & Torrens Strait children. There are many difficulties in getting parents interested and onboard and providing teachers with 4 year degrees in remote areas and the lack of numbers to make the economics of operating a centre or preschool, viable.

More funding to reach out to families and influence them to commit to preschool may help, using an approach that is culturally appropriate together with the idea of accepting an alternative Diploma qualified teacher if a 4 year degree teacher is not available in that remote location. Scholarships could be offered to indigenous students to study for ECT degrees on the belief that they may be willing to return to remote areas to present the Universal Access program and overcome some of the cultural issues.

There is an important need to open the door wider for disadvantaged children to get access to Universal Access to break the cycle of disadvantage and the importance by waiving the activity test on an ongoing basis to provide access to the Universal Access program for at least 15 hours a week.

Further consideration of the need for a Universal Access program for the two years before school to add to the school readiness preparation for our pre-schoolers should be given, particularly in a childcare setting where so many of the needs of the young age group are already met and the majority of this age group are already in childcare.

Kerry Mahony
President ACA SA

Review: Universal Access National Partnership

ACA Victoria Submission to the Nous Group on behalf of the Australian and State & Territory Governments 2019

1. To what extent have the UANP policy objectives, outcomes and outputs been achieved?

Whilst Victoria has had a well established preschool system for decades prior to the first UANP, the significant step to increase the dosage to 600 hours would not have been possible without the funding provided by the Commonwealth. With the UANP one plank of the National Quality Agenda, Victoria's hybrid model of preschool education was able to modify its delivery modes, infrastructure and increase its workforce to deliver the 600 hour dosage.

Victoria's model of a subsidised rather than funded system has successfully supported the range of outcomes, outputs and performance indicators set out in the most recent UANP agreements.

It is important to note when trying to identify actual attendance information that Victorian community preschools do not collect actual attendance on a daily basis like centre-based long day care services through the CCSITS and any trends for attendance can only be identified during census week.

It is also important to note that it is difficult to silo UANP money considering the investment made by the State Government, Local Governments and private providers along the journey. It is clear that Victoria's hybrid approach to service delivery comes closest to meeting the National Early Learning Reform Principles in maintaining flexibility to deliver services in a way that adapts to those local circumstances, encourages innovation and supports choice for families.

Victoria is also the most successful at meeting the UANP performance indicator of 'Supporting all children's quality early childhood education participation, regardless of setting'.

It is clear that if this agreement expires without a renewed commitment, one of two things will eventuate:

1. Families will be forced to pay for the cost of maintaining the 600 hour dosage; OR
2. Service provision will reduce to 400 hours.

Considering that 600 hours is already deemed to be the **bare minimum** number of hours required to have an impact, a reduction to 400 hours is of course an unacceptable outcome.

3. What should UANP target and measure and how should data be collected and used?

It is entirely appropriate to consider how any new agreement for pre-school funding can better collect data to improve policy outcomes for Australia's children. Whilst the collection of attendance data has not been previously mandated under this agreement, ACA Victoria recommends introducing a mechanism that would allow for more detailed, accurate records to illustrate the utilisation of the 600 hours available for children. More accurate records and an ongoing monitoring process of hours used would provide greater transparency, with a view to ensuring that our most

vulnerable children, who we know benefit the most from early childhood education, are attending as often as possible.

It would also be extremely useful to know which locations are more likely to have children who attend for the least of the allocated 600 hours in order to target locally contextualised solutions to each location.

We must also be clear in our understanding that 100% attendance is **not currently happening** in the first year of formal schooling, and in this light, we need to ensure that our expectations are consistent with reality.

4. Are the current UANP arrangements efficient and effective and how could the efficiency, effectiveness and equity of UANP funding to be improved? Based on your experiences, should changes be made to future national policy on preschool for children in the year before school, and why? What improvements would those changes make? What works well with the current UANP arrangements?

In the context of Victoria, ACA Victoria believes that the current UANP arrangements are efficient and effective; they adhere to the current measures, objectives and outputs of the UANP.

Therefore we don't believe a great deal needs to change to ensure Victoria's children continue to benefit from access to 600 hours of preschool. However we believe **greater certainty** of funding to our sector is vitally important to allow families, service providers and our workforce to plan ahead with security.

The short-term nature of agreements means that teachers cannot be sure about their employment arrangements from year to year, and this is particularly counterproductive in regional and rural communities where attracting teachers can be an even more difficult proposition. Families are also finding it increasingly challenging to be sure about their preschool arrangements as they are enrolling for subsequent years by March of the previous year. The potential threat of one third of the dosage also impacts many families' considerations around their workforce participation or the type of preschool provider they choose.

The current Victorian arrangements are effective and work well and if removed would result in adverse impacts for children, families, service providers and the workforce. An enduring commitment is integral to maintaining the amazing progress made since the inception of the UANP in Victoria.

Review: Universal Access National Partnership

ACA Western Australia Submission to the Nour Group on behalf of the Australian and State & Territory Governments 2019

QUESTION 1:

To what extent have the UANP policy objectives, outcomes and outputs been achieved?

In WA this is hard for us as the Peak Body for Early Education & Care as the UA money is not used for Early Childhood Centres in WA.

QUESTION 2:

What should the UANP target and measure, and how should data be collected and used?

We believe that data on attendance v's enrolments is of extreme importance, data of enrolments doesn't give factual data of children attending. Collection of attendance, how many days, hours would give an accurate summary of how the UA funding is working.

A consistent school age across the country would also give more accurate data, as we have different starting ages across the country with WA having extremely young children attending the year before compulsory schooling, as young as 3 and a half years. We believe a minimum starting age of 4 for the year before compulsory schooling.

QUESTION 3:

Are the current UANP arrangements efficient and effective and how could the efficiency, effectiveness and equity of UANP funding be improved?

No, in WA parent choice is taken away as the Early Childhood sector do not receive any UA, we believe it should be more equitable across service types and funding should follow the child.

We also believe that all services that receive UA funding should come under the same National Quality Standards and undergo the same Assessment & Rating.

Vulnerable & Disadvantaged: All sector and agencies need to work together to assist these children and families access 15 hours EEC in the setting that is best suited to the child, for better outcomes,

Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander children & Families: Community/Parent/Carer involvement from each community is required to find the best setting/environment for these families and children.

QUESTION 4:

How does the preschool system operate across States and Territories and settings?

This is where we need consistency across the States & Territories. As it is so varied.

In WA Compulsory schooling is now Pre-school, no longer year 1, this means that kindergarten is the year before compulsory schooling meaning children as young as 3 and a half years of age attending a school. The consequence of this is that for some children are in up to three different settings each week, and not always the most age appropriate setting for them. i.e.: A child in Kindergarten may now attend an Outside School Hours Care service at 3 and a half, so they are placed there prior to school, attend school, attend after school care and attend an LDC on the days they do not attend Kindergarten. We do not see this as the best interests of the child.

Parents/carers have choice taken away from them, as they are made to feel that Kindergarten is compulsory and the only place your child can receive this is in a school setting, this disregards the rest of the sectors i.e. Long Day Care, Community Kindergartens.

- National Consistent School starting age (Must have turned 4 prior to starting the year before compulsory schooling)
- All services that offer a kindergarten program are eligible for UA Funding
- All services that receive UA funding must follow the National Quality Standards (NQS) as per ACECQA
- All services that receive UA funding must be Assessed & Rated as per the NQS

QUESTION 5:

Based on your experiences, should changes should be made to future national policy on preschool for children in the year before full-time school, and why? What improvements would these changes make? What works well with the current UANP arrangements?

- Equity across the sector
- National Consistent School age
- Data collection on attendance not just enrolment
- National Quality Standard and Assessment and Rating to be the same across all services that receive UA
- Communication to parents/carers on the importance of the early years and the different service types where they can access this
- Community consultation for what is the best service type for a community and child involvement



6 October 2019

UANP Review
Level 19, 567 Collins Street
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

E-mail: UANPReview@NousGroup.com.au

Dear Nous Group,

Re: Submission to the Review of the Universal Access National Partnership

The Australian Childcare Alliance (ACA) NSW is the state's peak body representing 1,600 privately-owned centre-based childcare services who employ about 25,000 individuals and serve up to 125,000 children and their families.

Around 348,000 children across Australia are eligible to receive funding under the National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education, attracting over \$1,237 per capita. This Agreement supports universal access to, and improved participation by, children in quality early childhood education with preschool programs in the year before school, with a focus on vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics show that in 2016, there were 288,369 children in the Year Before School Cohort of whom 92.4% were enrolled in preschool but only 70.8% attended for 600 hours.

Based on the Report on Government Services 2018, New South Wales has the lowest enrolment and attendance in 600 hours of preschool in the year before school in 2016. We understand this has not improved significantly enough in the years to 2018.

It is worth noting that in NSW, 64.4% (2016) of children in the year before school preschool enrolments are in long daycare, Yet the NSW Government spends \$456 per child in long daycare settings (now \$459 per child per year in 2019) compared to many other comparable states who spend up to \$3,695, and the national average for the same profile of child of \$1,724 per child per year.

Similarly, the NSW Government spends on average \$5,188 per child enrolled in dedicated preschools yet the national average spend is \$6,431 per child per year.

In order to achieve a more effective result of enrolments as well as fairer distribution of funding, ACA NSW has been consistently asking the NSW Government to:

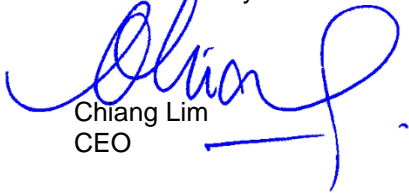
- publish its reports for 2016 and 2017 proving that the differences in funding by Commonwealth and NSW Governments compared to the rest of Australia demonstrating if such arrangements for NSW have produced the participation it originally agreed to through the National Partnership Agreement;
- significantly increase its funding for children in the year before school in long daycare to those in comparable states, especially Queensland, South Australia and Victoria; and
- have such funding in long daycare be directly for the use of reducing fees or offsetting the cost of degree-qualified teacher, regardless of settings.

To date, the NSW Government has not responded, and the Commonwealth Government has not been prepared to renegotiate with the NSW Government that funding would be withheld

entirely for children in long daycare services unless a more equitable arrangement and results are forthcoming.

Please feel free to contact us should you require any further information.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Chiang Lim', with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Chiang Lim
CEO

encl "Early Childhood Education and Care in NSW: A Better Direction" by ACA NSW (2018)