



ACT
Government

Education

Set up for Success: An Early Childhood Strategy for the ACT



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We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the ACT, the Ngunnawal people. We acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region.



ACT
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Set up for Success: An Early Childhood Strategy for the ACT



Foreword by Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development, Yvette Berry, MLA

Being a parent is an exciting journey. Every day it seems our children learn something new and when they do, their enthusiasm is priceless.

This learning doesn't just kick in at school. From the moment a child is born, they begin to learn. Each stage builds on the last, enabling a child to learn for life. Our job as parents and as a community is to nurture that learning so that every child is set up to succeed.

Unfortunately, not every child has the same advantages when it comes to early life learning. Childhood development is influenced by a range of factors, from cognitive and developmental differences, to the quality of interactions with other people.

High quality early childhood education plays a critical role in supporting children to learn. For children experiencing vulnerabilities or disadvantage, this education plays an even more significant role in turning the curve on inequality. That's why the ACT Government is so passionate about this Early

Childhood Strategy. It is a strategy to ensure all children in our community are set up for success with the early learning and development they need.

Underpinning this strategy is the ACT Government's commitment to giving every child a fair start to life by improving access to high quality early childhood education that is affordable and works in partnership with community and health services, to meet the unique needs of each child.

No child should miss out on quality early childhood education because it is not affordable. Acting on this issue requires our whole community to change the way we think about early childhood education. Because everybody benefits when we maximise the opportunity of successive generations, early childhood education and care needs to be delivered in a way that is available to all children.

Through the strategy the ACT Government commits to work towards 15 hours per week, 600 hours per year, of free universal early childhood education for three-year-old children. This is an exciting and important investment that will help create a fairer early childhood education and care system in the ACT.

Early childhood educators are critical to delivering quality early childhood education and care. Gone are the days when early childhood education and care was considered a child-minding service. Not unlike teachers in schools, early childhood educators work in partnership with parents, schools and a range of community and health services to nurture each child's learning and development.

The ACT Government values the important role of early childhood educators, as professionals and significant influencers on the learning and development outcomes of children. This strategy will build on the professionalism of this sector through a range of workforce development initiatives that will raise the profile of early childhood educators and ensure they are supported in their roles.

This strategy also recognises that each child has their own story. Their contexts and experiences shape their story and impact on how their life will unfold in future years. To thrive, children need consistency and connection. Creating a collaborative community around the child will ensure their story moves with them and the supports they need early are already in place as they enter school.

This really is an exciting time for our community as the next generation of leaders are in their early years of learning. This is the opportunity to make a real impact on their lives through high quality and accessible early childhood education and care that is flexible, nurturing, collaborative and targeted to individual needs. This strategy provides a clear and evidence-based roadmap to get us there.

Yvette Berry
Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development



WHY IS EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING IMPORTANT?

The *Lifting our Game*¹ report consolidates the evidence that shows children’s development and education benefit from access and participation in a structured, quality, early childhood education experience.

There is increasingly strong evidence that demonstrates the positive impact of early years learning on outcomes later in life. While early childhood experiences do not entirely dictate future trajectories, they do create the foundations for all future learning, health and wellbeing.

Children can succeed in life through multiple pathways. However, when considering large numbers of children, there is a clear correlation between access to quality early childhood education and later educational and other life outcomes.

Children who access play-based learning guided by qualified educators have more highly developed dispositions for learning and experience other benefits including increased cognitive capabilities. This can be linked to improved achievement at school, which in turn affects school completion rates and levels of educational attainment. Educational attainment is in turn a strong predictor of success over a lifetime.

High quality early childhood education can have substantial and sustained impacts on a whole range of skills that are important for children’s futures, including improved social and emotional skills, and a head start in developing literacy and numeracy skills.

Social and emotional skills have a significant and lasting impact on children and affect outcomes over their lifetime, contributing to achievement at school and at work, to positive relationships and social cohesion, and to mental health and wellbeing. The development of measures of student wellbeing around Australia reflects the increasing recognition of the importance of these social and emotional skills to the lives of children and young people as they become adults and enter the workforce.

¹ Pascoe, S. and Brennan, D (2017) *Lifting Our Game: Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools Through Early Childhood Interventions*

About this strategy

Set up for Success: An Early Childhood Strategy for the ACT outlines the plan for early childhood education and care in the ACT for the next decade.

It is based on overwhelming international and national evidence on the importance of quality early childhood education for the life opportunities of all children, particularly those experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage.

Set up for Success acknowledges the fundamental importance of viewing children’s lives as characterised by belonging, being and becoming as articulated in *Belonging, Being and Becoming -The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*. The Framework outlines that experiencing *belonging* – knowing where and with whom you belong – is integral to human existence. Children belong first to a family, a cultural group, a neighbourhood and a wider community. *Belonging* acknowledges children’s interdependence with others and the basis of relationships in defining identities. In early childhood, and throughout life, relationships are crucial to a sense of *belonging*. *Belonging* is central to *being* and *becoming* in that it shapes who children are and who they can become.

Childhood is a time to be, to seek and make meaning of the world. *Being* recognises the significance of the here and now in children’s lives. It is about the present and them knowing themselves, building and maintaining relationships with others, engaging with life’s joys and complexities, and meeting challenges in everyday life. The early childhood years are not solely preparation for the future but also about the present. Children’s identities, knowledge, understandings, capacities, skills and relationships change during childhood. They are shaped by many different events and circumstances. *Becoming* reflects this

process of rapid and significant change that occurs in the early years as young children learn and grow. It emphasises learning to participate fully and actively in society.²

Set up for Success also reflects and confirms what the ACT Government heard through a range of conversations with the ACT community and the early childhood education and care sector.

The strategy is based on four foundations for implementation:

- > A fair start for every child
- > Valuing educators, values children
- > Every child has a story
- > Working together for children

These foundations align with the foundations and principles of the ACT Government’s *Future of Education Strategy*:

Foundations			
Students at the centre	Empowered learning professionals	Strong communities for learning	Systems supporting learning
Principles			
Equity – student achievement sets aside economic, social and cultural barriers	Student agency – students make decisions about their learning and how their learning environments operate	Access – supports for learning and wellbeing are available and provided to all students	Inclusion – diversity is embraced, all students are accommodated and a universal sense of belonging fostered

Set up for Success will build on and guide the delivery of high-quality early childhood education and care, and support workforce participation for families, particularly for women. The strategy recognises that participation in high quality early childhood education and care is part of the fabric of a cohesive, productive society.

The goal of this strategy, in line with the *Future of Education Strategy*, is to achieve an education system that sets all children up for success and the opportunity for a fair and decent life.

² *BELONGING, BEING & BECOMING The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (2010)*

A fair start for every child

Set up for Success is founded in the ACT Government's commitment to ensuring that every child has a fair start to life.

Evidence shows that the period from birth through to eight years of age, especially the years from birth to three, sets the foundation for every child's social, physical, emotional and cognitive development. Parents, families, and carers are a child's first and most important teachers. The ACT Government's commitment to equity for children and young people begins at birth. It means supporting parents to develop their skills and access help when they need it.

Not every parent, family and carer can give the same experiences to children. People's lives are complex. Providing every child with a fair start means that there must be improved access to quality early learning and development opportunities targeted to the individual needs of each child.

Every child needs, and is entitled to, a fair start in life through access to learning and development that meets their individual needs. Some children receive this through their home environment and family relationships. Other children, due to a range of personal and circumstantial factors, are not so fortunate.

Up to 10 per cent of all ACT children between the ages of one and four are both experiencing disadvantage and have been missing out on quality early childhood education opportunities. A child's brain develops rapidly in the early years, with around 85 to 90 per cent of brain development occurring in the first five years of life. Children who do not participate in quality early learning often enter school behind on their learning and development. Furthermore, children who start behind tend to stay behind.

Cost is a key barrier to children in the ACT equitably accessing early learning programs because, as the Report on Government Services shows, on average ACT services are the most expensive in Australia. Through the strategy the government is creating the means for children to access early childhood education, who would otherwise be excluded. The strategy aims to enable the sector to increase affordable access to early childhood education.

The variability in quality of services further compounds inequitable access to early learning. The E4Kids Study (Australia) shows there is a link between the quality of adult-child interactions and outcomes for children.

Children who participate in quality early learning programs are more likely to make a successful transition to school, stay longer in school, continue to further education, and fully participate in employment and community life as adults. The OECD Starting Strong study found two years of early childhood education is the minimum needed for a child to have a good chance of reaching a good level of performance at age 15. Internationally, two years of early childhood education is fast becoming the norm.

The Effective Provision of Preschool and Secondary Education Study (UK) and the Perry Preschool Studies (US) found substantial lifelong benefits for children who participate in quality early learning programs. These include learning how to learn, the ability to self-regulate, and improved wellbeing and academic achievement. Significantly, children experience the benefits of early childhood education regardless of their family, social or economic context but the benefits are greatest for children who experience disadvantage.



Valuing educators, values children

Young children learn and develop through interactions with people. Early childhood educators bring special knowledge and skills to their interactions with children, supporting them to deepen and extend their thinking, problem-solving skills and language as well as to build close and respectful relationships. Valuing children and investing in their learning and development requires that the government and community value and invest in educators.

There is a perception that workers in the education and care sector have a passive role with children. This outdated perception does not reflect the critical role they play in the education and development of children. This perception diminishes the role of educators. In the same way that teachers' practice and interactions with students make a significant contribution to student learning outcomes, early childhood educators also make a significant contribution to the education and development of children.

Children who participate in quality early childhood education enter school with a head start on their learning and development. This requires valued, skilled educators who are equipped with the training and resources needed to most effectively facilitate learning and development. The evidence shows that quality interactions between adults and children drives children's development. The quality of an educator's knowledge and skill to interact with children makes a positive difference to children's development.

There is significant competition in the ACT early childhood sector for skilled workers. Many services find it difficult to attract and retain qualified staff, due to the shortage of qualified staff, particularly early childhood teachers. Worker shortages may also contribute to higher overall costs because of the need to engage casual staff and the expenses associated with high staff turnover.

The high prices families pay for education and care in the ACT do not translate into wages and conditions for educators that reflect the value of their work. In fact, the most expensive services generally pay the lowest wages. As the evidence shows that quality early childhood education and care makes a significant developmental impact, everyone has an interest in ensuring that services in the ACT prioritise child outcomes over profits.

On a national level the ACT has advocated raising the profile of the education and care workforce, valuing the work of educators, and supporting increased professional recognition. Locally, *Set up for Success* is a plan for government, providers and the community to support the education and care workforce through enhancing skills and qualifications, and recognising the direct, positive educational and developmental impact the workforce has on children's early lives.



Every child has a story

Every child begins life with a unique set of circumstances and background factors that shape their experience. Early learning and development begins in this context, with each child's early childhood and educational journey shaped by it.

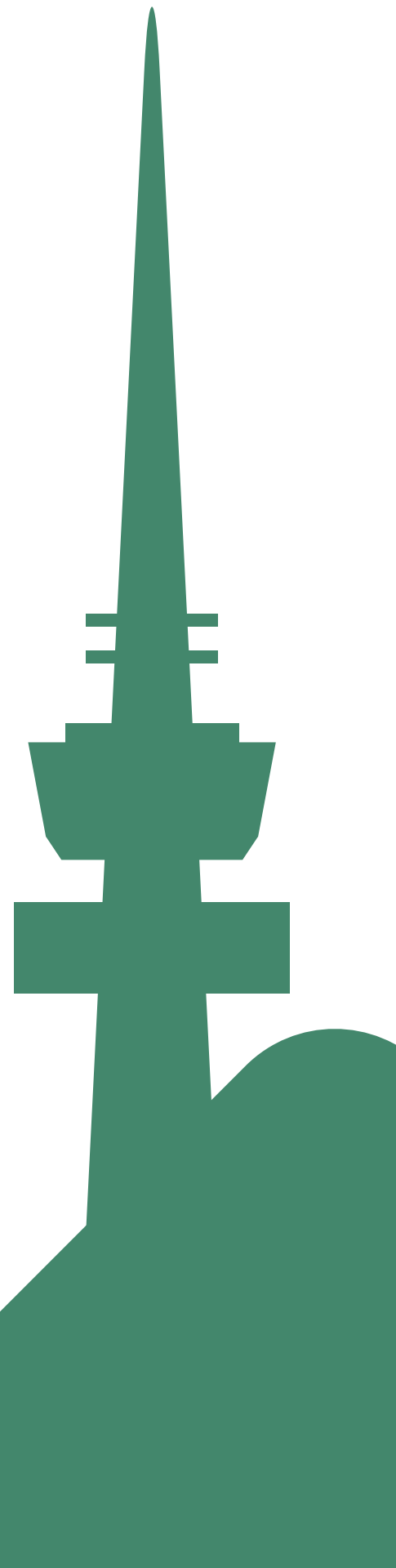
What happens for a child in early childhood impacts their experiences in school and later life. Individualised support is a key factor in quality early childhood education, just as it is in school education. Acknowledging and meeting the needs of each individual child must begin in early childhood education. While important for all children, it is particularly important for children experiencing developmental vulnerability.

Early childhood education and care should value diversity through inclusive practice and cultural integrity in all settings, including for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and culturally and linguistically diverse children.

Partnerships and positive relationships between children, their parents and carers, education and care services, and the wider community provide a strong foundation for nurturing each child's learning and development journey. A child's confidence in managing change, as well as their sense of belonging and connectedness within the community, is improved when they are recognised as an individual.

What is learnt about a child in their early childhood can also help schools to be prepared for the children and communities they serve. Collaborative relationships between early childhood settings and schools are a vital prerequisite to sharing the knowledge of a child's story. Providing opportunities for parents, educators and teachers to share information about a child's learning and development journey, and to involve the child in sharing their strengths, interests and challenges is important.

These collaborative relationships are a key part of effective transition strategies for children as they move between settings and grow from year to year. Continuity between settings, including continuity of best practice pedagogical approaches and coordination between early education providers, schools and families is created when everyone around a child is working together.



Working together for children

The ACT Government's focus in delivering early childhood services must be on securing the best possible future for each child. This can only be achieved when service providers within government and the community sector are working together. The aim of the strategy is to maximise the benefit that children and their families gain from early childhood services.

Best practice in delivering quality early childhood education is founded on quality partnerships between preschools, centre-based early childhood services, health and community services. Fostering collaboration amongst parents, educators and support professionals, based on mutual trust and respect, is a cornerstone of high-quality programs for children. Children grow, learn and thrive when families and educators work together in partnership. When the services around children and their families are working together in partnership a 'no wrong door' philosophy should result. In other words, all practitioners involved know how to connect children and families with schools, services such as those provided through Child and Family Centres, or additional ACT Government supports through Canberra Health Services or the Community Services Directorate.

Achieving early childhood services that work together for children and their families requires consideration of the geographic location of services. It also requires better physical and systematic integration of services. When services work together in this way, government and community investment is used more effectively because service delivery gaps and overlaps are reduced or eliminated. Importantly, children and families experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage have the most to gain from improved access and coordinated support to early childhood services.

In parts of the ACT where access is restricted, perhaps because of affordability or distance, there is also a need to consider how a government funded preschool service could better provide a full day of education and care, for example, through a changed service model or better integration of services. While education and care services are generally located evenly throughout most of the ACT, there are some parts of the Territory where the only early childhood service accessible by families is the government preschool.

The government and community direct substantial financial investment towards early childhood services to set children up for success. There is a collective responsibility that the money directed to these services is used effectively with a clear focus on increasing child learning and development outcomes and maximising the benefit to children.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

In the ACT, government and non-government providers deliver a variety of early childhood education and care services. These services are approved under the National Quality Framework or licensed under the *Children and Young People Act 2008*:

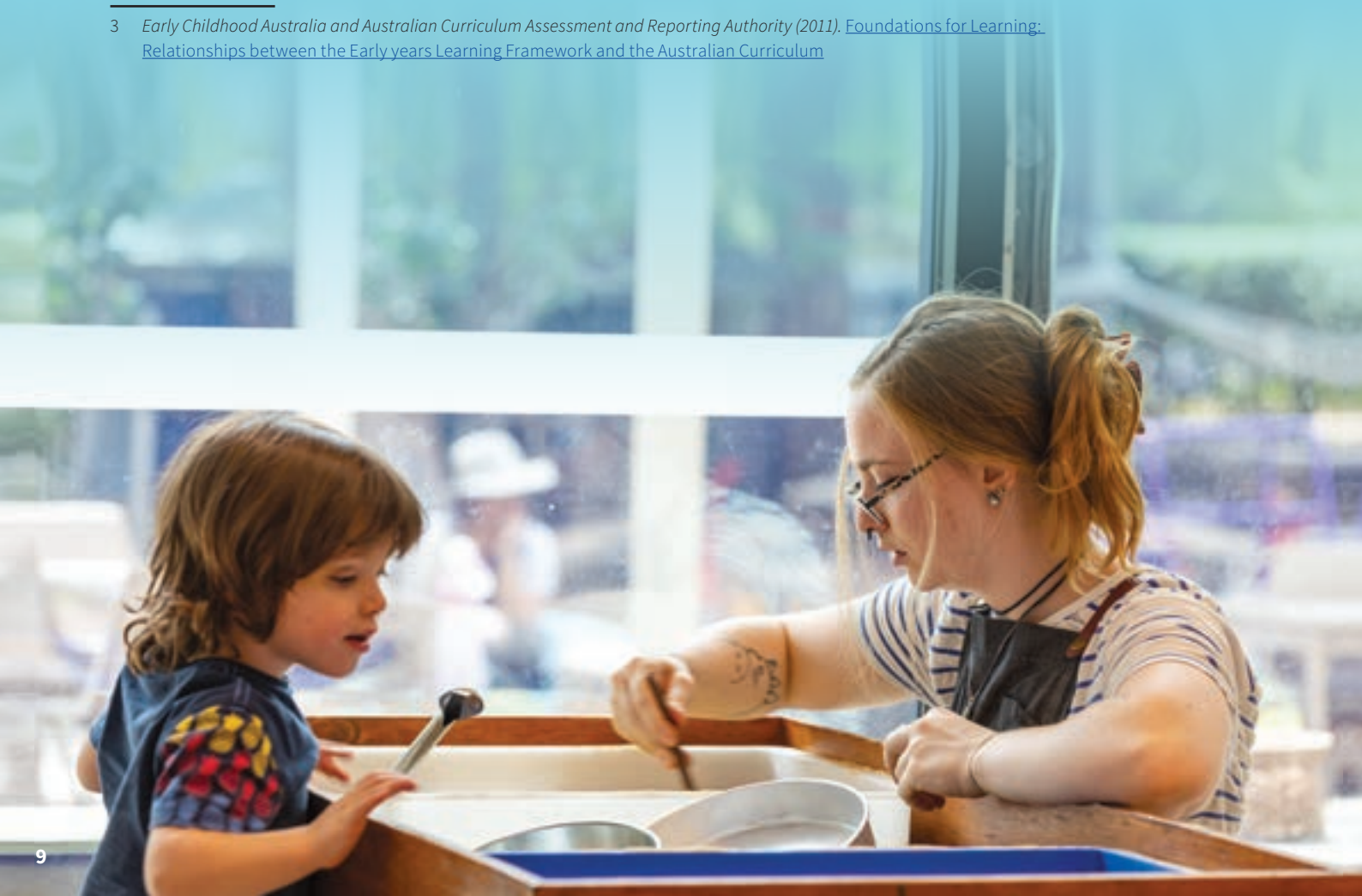
- > preschool for four-year-old children delivered by the ACT Government;
- > preschool and other early childhood services delivered by non-government schools; and
- > preschool and other early childhood services delivered by long day care and other services.

Community organisations deliver a range of other important services, such as playgroups, and education and care services provide a full day of care and learning which supports the needs of children and families.

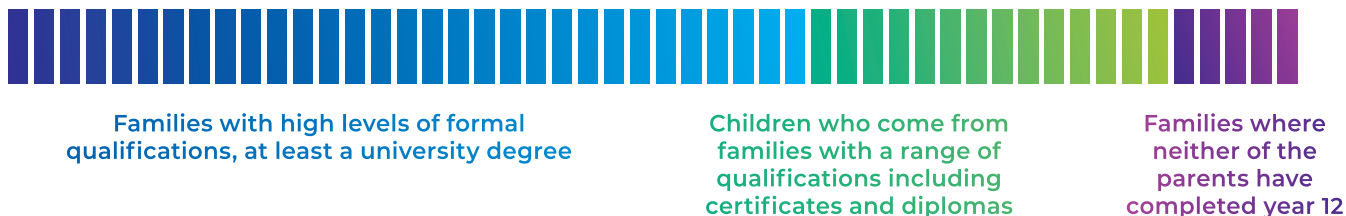
Both nationally and in the ACT, there has been a historical division between early childhood education settings and formalised schooling. Recent reforms are starting to break down these silos in recognition of the fact that learning begins from birth.³

By way of example, consider a representative group of four year old preschool children in a primary school in the ACT, any primary school, regardless of sector. This hypothetical primary school will have 100 preschool children in it. All aged around four years old.

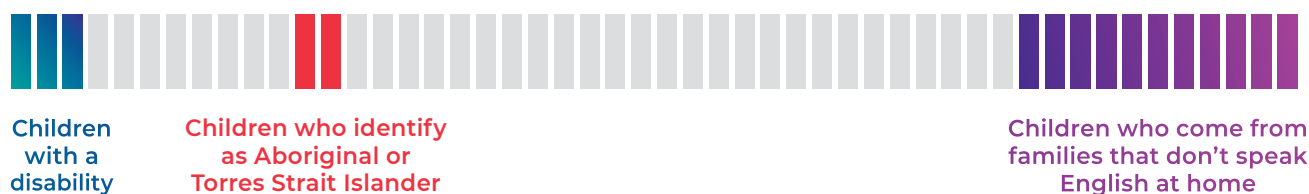
³ *Early Childhood Australia and Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (2011). [Foundations for Learning: Relationships between the Early years Learning Framework and the Australian Curriculum](#)*



Of these 100 children, approximately 63 will come from families with high levels of formal qualifications, at least a university degree. This high level of family education, nearly twice as high as the national average, reflects the unique nature of the ACT and its advantages. Twenty-nine children will come from families with a range of qualifications including certificates and diplomas and the remaining nine of these children will come from families where neither parent has completed year 12.



Among the 100 preschool students, 51 will be boys and 49 will be girls. Four will have a disability significant enough to require an adjustment of some sort. Three children will identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and 22 children will come from families that don't speak English at home.



Some of these children will be primed for school, others will not take to school as quickly, and the rest of the children will be somewhere in between. Thirteen children will show two or more developmental vulnerabilities – above the national average – in the following domains:

- a. physical health and wellbeing
- b. social competence
- c. emotional maturity
- d. language
- e. communication skills and general knowledge.



Of these thirteen children showing developmental vulnerabilities in two or more domains, nine will be boys.

As four-year-olds, nearly all these 100 children will have received the universal 15 hours per week, 600 hours per year free preschool program for all four year old children, with very few children not accessing this opportunity.

In the years up to four, however, these children's experiences have been very variable. Sixty of the children have benefited from early childhood education and care services offered within the ACT as three-year-olds or younger. Thirty-one of these children who commenced preschool as four-year-olds have not attended an early childhood education and care service. In many cases, these children will have remained at home in a supportive environment with their families.



Children who have benefited from early childhood education and care services offered within the ACT as three-year olds or younger

Children who commenced preschool as four-year-olds having had no structured early childhood education experience, but in many cases, these children will have remained at home in a supportive environment with their families

Children who commenced preschool as four-year-olds having had no structured early childhood education experience and who come from families where the highest level of education achieved by their parents is Year 11 or less

Nine of these children will have come from families where the highest level of education achieved by their parents will be year 11 or less.

Overall, approximately 500 to 600 of the most vulnerable three-year-old children in the ACT miss out on the benefits of early childhood education and care services each year.

Where do we want to be?

The ACT Government knows how important lifelong learning is to the wellbeing of all people and wants the learning future of all children to be as rich and rewarding as possible. The strength of the ACT community stems from valuing every child. The ACT Government wants all children to have the best possible start in life and to have the fairest possible opportunities to learn.

A central policy initiative described in this strategy is the transition to universal access to preschool for three-year-old children. That initiative will have a great impact on families, setting their children up for success in their lives. But universal access to preschool for three-year-olds is not the only important idea laid out in this document.

Through this strategy, the ACT Government also envisages that in the future early childhood education and care will be considered a force for social good, by policy and law makers, by the sector, and by the community. When early childhood education is seen as a social good, rather than an economic tool or business opportunity, children's outcomes will be at the centre. Increased workforce participation is another positive outcome of quality, accessible early childhood education and care. Increased workforce participation can also be a driver of equity and social good.

The ACT Government is working towards a future where all children have access to high quality early childhood education. Where services meet and exceed standards, put children's outcomes over profits, and are designed to include children experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage. Where the workforce is valued for their transformative contributions to children's lives and supported in their professionalism. Where children and families are supported on their learning journeys, including in transitions from one stage into another. And where the whole community understands and prioritises the importance of early years learning and development.

Implementing the strategy

In line with the *Future of Education Strategy*, the strategy will be delivered in three phases:

- > First phase – years one to two
- > Second phase – years three to five
- > Third phase – years five to ten.

As the strategy is implemented, initiatives in the second and third phases will be refined.

First phase – years one to two

A fair start for every child

Targeted access to preschool for three-year-old children for 2020/2021

Ensure access to 15 hours per week of quality education and care for up to 500 three-year-olds, prioritising children and families most in need, in services in partnership with public schools.

Provide 100 places in the Koori Preschool program for three-year-olds from 2020

Provide 15 hours per week of Koori Preschool for 100 three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Scope universal access to early childhood education for three-year-old children

Undertake preparatory work such as modelling, regulatory design and infrastructure enhancement to enable phased delivery of universal access to preschool for three-year-olds, within the constraints of the available budget and sector capacity. Plan for the inclusion of parenting programs as part of the partnership to deliver universal access to preschool for three-year-olds.

Provide long-term access to ECEC services for the Children's Services Program

Collaborate with the Community Services Directorate and the ECEC sector to provide children accessing the Children's Services Program long-term access to an education and care service until they start school.

Partner with Play Groups, Playschools and Nature Play Groups

Develop a framework for partnering with Play Groups, Playschools and Nature Play Groups to increase access to these services for families experiencing vulnerability and/or disadvantage. Consider initiatives such as the Village for Every Child project. Develop district-wide partnerships between government schools, Play Groups and Playschools, to improve connections with families across the community.

Expand the existing Koori Preschool program for four-year-olds to 15 hours per week from 2020

Expand the service from 12 hours to 15 hours per week.

Recognise early childhood education in ACT law

Amend the *Education Act 2004* to recognise that early childhood education and care has a central role in the realisation of the rights of the child and therefore must be universally available on an equity basis.

Valuing educators, values children

Develop educator professional standards

In consultation with unions and the ECEC sector, develop educator professional standards, initially for voluntary adoption. Work with Education Council to establish a new national workforce strategy to attract, develop, support and retain a high-quality workforce, initially for voluntary adoption by providers.

Provide training to educators to support children affected by trauma

Support education and care services to access training in trauma and early identification of families experiencing domestic violence.

First phase – years one to two

Share expertise of early childhood teachers across schools and services	Provide opportunities for early childhood qualified teachers in both government and non-government settings to collaborate and develop joint educational programs for children aged 3-5 years, through communities of practice.
Reform the Early Childhood Degree Scholarships Program	Reform the Early Childhood Degree Scholarships Program to increase take-up and completion rates.
Develop a cross-sector workforce strategy	Develop a cross-sector workforce strategy in close collaboration with the ECEC sector and industrial bodies that will improve consistency, increase knowledge and skills of the workforce, and foster collaboration.
Increase coaching and mentoring opportunities	Increase coaching and mentoring opportunities for the ECEC workforce across all types of services.
National Quality Framework training	Establish a training program to assist educators to understand and uphold the National Quality Framework.

Every child has a story

Develop and implement an ACT-wide approach to effective transitions between services for children, including schools	Develop a cross-sector approach to effective transitions for children based on strong collaborative relationships, best practice and a formal process for sharing information about children's learning and development across ECEC settings and schools.
Out of School Hours Care (OSHC) trial for preschool children in 2020	Meeting the ACT Government's election commitment to conduct a trial of OSHC for four-year-old preschool children at four ACT public schools, delivered in the preschool environment.
Expansion of Prep for Pre program	Expand the Prep for Pre program to engage families to be active partners in their children's learning prior to them starting preschool.
Enhance delivery of the Early Years Learning Framework focused on respectful relationships and gender diversity	Establish a training program to assist educators to use the Early Years Learning Framework as a tool to focus on respectful relationships and gender diversity.
Increase support for parents as first teachers	Increase the provision of CC Cares @ Canberra College to support new parents who are completing secondary education. Develop an early childhood educational component of the midwifery program with Canberra Health Services for expecting parents that can be included within the ACT's Personal Health Record 'Blue Book'.

Working together for children

Recognise and leverage the value of OSHC licence agreements and government lease arrangements with ECEC providers.	Work in partnership with the sector to leverage the value of OSHC and government lease arrangements to deliver on strategic elements of the strategy.
Co-design a process with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community for the evolution of Koori Preschool	Consistent with the commitment to self-determination in the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-2028, engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Canberra and Wreck Bay to co-design the evolution of Koori Preschool that meets the community's needs now and into the future, particularly about cultural safety and integrity.

First phase – years one to two

Continue the partnership with the Community Services Directorate to co-fund Early Years Engagement Officers who connect families with Koori Preschools, schools and Child and Family Centres

Continue to provide Early Years Engagement Officers to effectively connect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families between Koori Preschools, schools and Child and Family Centres, allowing this approach to evolve in line with the co-design process reflecting community needs.

Explore how a government funded preschool service could provide a full day of education and care for children

Explore how a government funded preschool service could better provide a full day of education and care, for example through a changed service model or better integration of services, for parts of the ACT where access may be restricted because of affordability or distance.

Develop a structured capacity planning framework for ECEC

Develop a structured capacity planning and land allocation approach to better manage long term development of ECEC service provision to ensure under and over supply does not undermine service viability or quality.

Second phase – years three to five

A fair start for every child

Evaluate the targeted delivery of preschool for three-year-olds

Complete an initial evaluation of the targeted delivery of preschool for three-year-olds.

Begin expanding delivery of preschool for three-year-olds towards universal access

Transition the delivery of 15 hours of free preschool for three-year-olds from targeted access towards universal access, within the constraints of the available budget and sector capacity

Explore the introduction of formative assessments to assist with identifying the needs of individual and groups of children

Explore the introduction of evidence-based formative assessments, particularly in areas such as oral language development and resilience, to assist with early identification of the needs of each child and support individualised learning and well-being.

Explore flexible options for access to extended hours early childhood education and care

Explore flexible options for access to extended hours ECEC to improve access for families particularly those working non-standard hours, out of term options, and/or out of hours care.

Investigate mobile preschool and 'Families as First Teachers' models that could apply in the ACT

In partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and consistent with the self-determination approach central to the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019–2028, investigate:
Mobile/outreach preschool models
'Families as First Teachers' models.

Investigate meals for children

Explore providing meals at low cost or no cost to children in ECEC services, and expanding meal provision to children in OSHC, focusing on families experiencing vulnerability and/or disadvantage.

Valuing educators, values children

Establish a sector-wide workforce development program in inclusive educational practices

Establish workforce development practices to build capability in more accessible and culturally inclusive educational practices across all ECEC settings.

Investigate amending the ACT teacher professional regulatory framework to include qualified early childhood teachers

Collaborate with the ACT Teacher Quality Institute to investigate amending the legislation regulating the teaching profession to include qualified early childhood teachers, based on the educator professional standards developed in phase one.

Second phase – years three to five

Establish a professional learning and resource portal for educators	Establish a shared professional and resource portal for early childhood education best practice to increase educator professional learning.
Every child has a story	
Expand transition process across a wider range of children’s services	Through cross-Government collaboration, expand coherent and supported transition processes across all services interacting with children in the ACT to increase shared knowledge of children and families.
Investigate enrolment from birth	In line with the <i>Future of Education Strategy</i> , scope an approach to enrolling children in learning and development from birth to ensure that service providers work together to set children on a strong path from their first moments of life.
Examine the alignment between funding and child-needs	As part of scoping the phased delivery of universal three-year-old early childhood education, examine whether diversity in child needs and service differentiation requires differential funding allocation.
Increase capacity for differentiated practice in early childhood education and care	Expand and build upon sector and workforce capability to deliver early childhood education and development that is founded in identifying a child’s individual learning and development needs and targeting intervention to that child, having regard to a child’s background and personal characteristics.
Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and kinship carers	Develop with CIT Yurauna and the Community Services Directorate a culturally appropriate parenting program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and kinship carers.
Working together for children	
Develop a whole of government measurement framework for early childhood development	Through cross-Government collaboration, develop a measurement framework for early childhood development 0-8, likely to be overseen by the Human Services Cluster (Community Services, Education, Health and Justice and Community Safety Directorates).
Work towards incrementally expanding the early childhood education and care offer in ACT public preschools	With the intent of increasing options for early childhood education to meet the needs of families with diverse working responsibilities (including shift workers), work towards expanding service provision beyond school hours within ACT public preschool environments.
Improve connections between Maternal and Child Health (MACH), the Child Development Service, Child and Family Centres and ECEC services	Improve connections between MACH, the Child Development Service, Child and Family Centres and ECEC services to share knowledge of children and families, and evaluate these connections using the whole of government measurement framework for early childhood development.
Amend the <i>Education Act 2004</i> statutory framework to incorporate early childhood	Through cross-Government collaboration, explore amendments to the <i>Education Act 2004</i> for a more seamless statutory framework for education that includes a connection to the ECEC sector.
Finalise structured capacity planning framework for ECEC	Finalise a structured capacity planning and land allocation approach to better manage long term development of ECEC service provision, including capacity planning and land allocation developed in phase 1.

Third phase – years five to ten

A fair start for every child

Continue the roll-out of universal preschool for three-year-olds

Continue to monitor the expansion of preschool for three-year-olds, including monitoring service quality and the experiences of families.

Enhance multi-agency support services for very young children

Working across Government, particularly with the Community Services and Health Directorates, identify the needs of families with very young children and identify opportunities to maximise the available support.

Develop flexible options for accessing extended hours to early childhood education

Research flexible delivery options such as the Helsinki play park model in Finland and explore how environments such as these could be adapted and considered for the ACT context.

Investigate providing learning and planning support for less formal environments

Investigate providing early learning and planning support for 'less formal' ECEC environments such as Playgroups and Playschools by strengthening relationships with relevant services.

Valuing educators, values children

Explore options for professionalising and increasing the pay and conditions for the ECEC workforce

Explore methods for professionalising the pay and conditions for the ECEC workforce to value, attract and retain quality education and care professionals.

Explore establishing 'Educational Leader' career pathways

Collaborate with the ECEC sector and higher educational institutions to establish 'Educational Leader' career pathways to improve workforce capability and retention rates across the sector.

Every child has a story

Explore embedding Prep for Pre and other related programs

Explore embedding the Prep for Pre and other related programs in a whole-of-sector approach to improve equitable access to early childhood education and care for children.

Explore increasing paid parental leave in the ACT public service

Using the ACT public service to lead by example, influence improved parental leave provisions for parents in the ACT, with the aim of improving childhood outcomes, increasing workforce participation and contributing to gender pay equality.

Working together for children

Explore enhancing multi-agency support services for very young children

Through cross-government and sector collaboration explore enhancing multi-agency support services through a model built on strong partnerships and relationships, to ensure children and families are supported through their learning, health, safety and wellbeing, when they need it.

Investigate system-wide policy and resource allocation through child-oriented outcomes

Through cross-Government collaboration, build on the measurement framework developed in phase 2 to establish a framework that links investment in services to measured outcomes for children between birth and eight years of age, likely to be overseen by the Human Services Cluster (Community Services, Education, Health and Justice and Community Safety Directorates).

Implement structured capacity planning framework for ECEC

Implement the structured approach to capacity planning and land allocation for ECEC services developed in phase 1 and finalised in phase 2.



Measuring the success of the strategy

The results of the strategy will be felt by every child who benefits from better access to learning opportunities, and from the care of the professional and dedicated educators who will guide children through their learning.

In the first phase of implementation, evaluation and accountability frameworks will be developed to provide robust measurement of the results. Evaluation and accountability frameworks will focus on understanding the extent to which improved access to early childhood education in the two years prior to formal school has resulted in more equitable education outcomes in the ACT, a key strategic indicator.

Measurement of improved educational outcomes for children who commence three-year-old preschool from 2020 onwards will take some time. Children are assessed in kindergarten using the Performance Indicators in Primary Schools tool to complement school-based data in the areas of literacy and numeracy. This one on one assessment allows the educator to identify the child's strengths and areas for further development. Once children are in the school setting, teachers assess progress through formative and summative assessment across the year.

Measuring the impact of the strategy means paying close attention to:

- > Collaboration between services, and between services and schools, that support the transition of children between settings;
- > Improved service delivery for families, who have a more seamless experience accessing and connecting with early childhood education services;
- > Increased professionalisation of the education and care workforce; and
- > Improved partnerships between the ACT Government and the non-government education and care sector to strategically deliver integrated services.

Glossary

Blue Book is a Personal Child Health Record used to record a child's health, illnesses, injuries, growth and development.

CC Cares @ Canberra College is a program for pregnant and parenting students from the ACT and surrounding districts providing flexible delivery of learning and content, towards the receipt of an ACT Senior Secondary Certificate and certified competency-based training.

Centre Based Service is an education and care service other than a family day care service.

ECEC is an early childhood education and care service which are centre-based services under the *Education and Care Services National Law 2010* that provide education and care services.

Educators are qualified staff who work directly with children to meet their developmental and educational needs. It includes staff who are tertiary qualified teachers.

Families as First Teachers is an early learning and family support program for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families delivered by the Northern Territory government.

Future of Education can be found at: <https://www.education.act.gov.au/our-priorities/future-of-education>.

Government preschool is the current preschool program for four-year olds delivered at ACT Government schools.

Helsinki play park is a model of support for families with babies as a continuation of maternity and child health clinic family coaching.

Koori Preschool is an ACT Government preschool program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in a culturally safe environment that promotes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and perspectives.

National Law is the *Education and Care Services National Law 2010*.

Nature Play is a community program for children that provides for structured outdoor play.

Out of School Hours Care (OSHC) are centre-based services under the *Education and Care Services National Law 2010* that provide education and care services for school age children on school days, before school starts and after school finishes.

Preschool program is an age-appropriate educational program delivered by appropriately qualified staff as determined by the National Law using an approved learning framework, such as the Early Years Learning Framework.

Play Groups are play-based programs for young children and parents organised by the ACT Playgroups Association.

Playschools are services licensed under the *Children and Young People Act 2008* that provide education and care services to young children.

Prep for Pre is a program to support parents and children with particular needs to prepare for preschool.

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ACT Early Childhood Advisory Council membership 2017–2020:

- > Minister Yvette Berry MLA
- > Ms Cathy Hudson (Chair)
- > Ms Natalie Howson (Deputy Chair) 2017–2019
- > Ms Katy Haire (Deputy Chair) 2020–
- > Mr Darren Black, Mr Simon Bennett,
Ms Bernadette Carbin, Ms Alice Castrission
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