

ACCS POLICY PLATFORM FOR THE 2019 FEDERAL ELECTION

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As the peak body advocating nationally for the right of Australia's children to access quality, not for profit, community children's services, ACCS calls on the major parties contesting the federal election to respond to our headline issues.

We will inform our members nationwide of the responses of the major parties to these proposals to guide their voting in the 2019 federal election.

Prue Warrilow, National Convenor Ph: 0408 020 904

HEADLINE ISSUES

- 1. The National Partnership for the National Quality Framework is extended and adequately funded beyond 2020**
- 2. Building a skilled and professional early and middle childhood workforce – pay equity for educators; subsidised fees for upskilling to diploma and degree early childhood qualifications; stronger controls for early childhood courses and quality assurance of providers**
- 3. Children and families experiencing vulnerability have two days per week of subsidised access - all children, including those of non-working parents, are eligible for subsidised early childhood education and care for at least 2 days per week – from a minimum of 18 hours up to 24 hours per week reflecting the operating hours of the service**

ACCS also advocates for:

- All government policy to recognise that learning starts at birth, particularly noting the first 1,000 days from conception to 2 years of age as the most important period of child development
- Universal Access to early childhood education and care is to be extended to all 3 year old children in Australia and funding to be consolidated for 15 hours per week for 4 year olds, in all settings (long day care, family day care, preschool/kindergarten)
- No children and their families in detention in Australia or off-shore
- Implementation of Priority of Access criteria to ensure access for families experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage
- Continuation of the full implementation of National Quality Framework to 2020
- Reintroduction of planning controls for new early childhood education and care services

ACCS is a partner in the Early Learning Everyone Benefits campaign. Our election issues reflect our commitment to the goals of this campaign. These are:

- To have all Australian children benefit from participating in early learning, particularly children experiencing vulnerability who will gain the most
- To have political parties commit to policies that will support 100 per cent of 4 year olds and 90 per cent of 3 year olds to attend early learning for at least two days per week, and for younger children to be able to attend as needed by their families
- To change the national conversation on the value of early learning that supporting attendance in early learning today will increase the future prosperity for all of us¹

EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THE ACCSPOLICY PLATFORM

ACCS has recently completed the [Trends In Community Children's Services Survey](#) of community children's services across Australia. This survey provides key evidence in support of the policy issues we put forward in the lead up to the next federal election.

Investing in quality early childhood education and care benefits not only the children attending these services, but also their families and communities in which they live. In addition our nation benefits from wider social capital gains such as enhanced life course trajectories and health outcomes; and from economic gains in the short, medium and longer term.

It just makes good sense to invest in quality early childhood education and care.

¹ <http://www.everyonebenefits.org.au/about>

EVIDENCE FOR THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF OUR POLICIES

1. The National Partnership for the National Quality Framework is extended beyond 2020

The National Quality Framework is delivering continuous improvement in the quality of early childhood education and care throughout Australia. Current funding for Regulatory Authorities allows only 15% of early childhood education and care services to be assessed annually; this suggests that services will be assessed only every 6.5 years.

ACCS calls for future National Partnership Agreements to ensure adequate funding for assessments so that all services can be assessed as follows:

- those previously assessed as Exceeding National Quality Standard (National Quality Standard) – at least every 3 years
- those assessed as Meeting National Quality Standard – at least every 2 years
- those assessed as Working Towards National Quality Standard – at least annually

Evidence

ACCS conducts regular surveys of community children's education and care services across Australia – the Trends In Community Children's Services Survey. The [latest survey](#) shows that the National Quality Framework is doing what it was designed to do - lift the quality of early childhood education and care for Australia's children with:

- 52% of respondents rated as Exceeding National Quality Standard and 37% rated as Meeting National Quality Standard
- not for profit community services operating with higher than prescribed ratios of educators to children and attracting and retaining skilled educators with higher than prescribed qualifications, at better than minimum wages and conditions

“Respondents reported positively on their most recent assessment and ratings process and ‘the impact on quality improvement at [their] service’ (73%), followed by ‘the timely reporting on outcome of assessment’ (69%), and ‘the clarity of the process to you and your staff’ (64%).”²

The National Quality Standard assessment and rating system is driving quality improvement.

Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority's [National Quality Framework Snapshot Q3 2018](#) shows that most services who have had a second and subsequent assessment and rating visits have improved their overall quality. Of the 5,608 services that have been reassessed 54% either improved their quality rating in the second and subsequent assessments or retained the Exceeding National Quality Standard rating. In the same period, only 17.5% of services received a lower quality rating in their second and subsequent assessment. The following table shows the previous and reassessed ratings and the proportion of services that have changed ratings or retained the same rating.

² ACCS(2018), *Trends in Community Children's Services 2017*, p. 49.

Table: Reassessments by overall quality rating

		Reassessed rating				
Previous rating	Overall rating	SIR*	Working towards	Meeting	Exceeding	Improvement rate
	SIR*	24%	65%	12%	0%	76%
	Working towards	1%	34%	48%	18%	66%
	Meeting	0%	21%	55%	23%	23%
	Exceeding	0%	13%	35%	52%	-

* Significant Improvement Required

Source: Australian Children's Education Care Quality Authority (2018), *National Quality Framework Snapshot Q3 2018*, p. 9.

The National Quality Framework is improving quality delivery in early childhood education and care services which flows on to improved education and life course outcomes for the children attending these services. While it is still too early to quantify these improved outcomes for children there is related indicative evidence that child outcomes are being enhanced. The Mitchell Institute has summarised these initial pieces of evidence.

- “Australian Early Childhood Development Census research snapshots show that children who attend preschool are less likely to be developmentally vulnerable children from disadvantaged backgrounds had a less than 30 per cent chance of being developmentally vulnerable if they attended preschool, compared to a 40 per cent chance if they did not (Australian Government, 2014).
- “The advantage of early education is maintained throughout schooling with the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children confirming that children who attend preschool score higher on Year 3 National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy tests, even after controlling for their personal circumstances.” (Warren and Haisken-DeNew, 2013)
- “In 2012, Australian children with a year of pre-primary education scored 27 points more in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) than children who did not attend preschool. This represents an additional six months of learning (OECD, 2015).”³

³ O'Connell M, Fox S, Hinz B and Cole H (2016). 'Quality Early Education for All: Fostering, entrepreneurial, resilient and capable leaders', Mitchell Institute policy paper No. 01/2016. Mitchell Institute, Melbourne. Available from: www.mitchellinstitute.org.au, p. 7.

2. Building a skilled and professional early and middle childhood workforce

ACCS endorses the [Lifting Our Game Report](#) and asks that the recommendations related to workforce be adopted. This report, commissioned by education senior officials from all States and Territories makes the following important recommendations about early childhood education and care workforce development.

- “Australian governments agree to a new national early childhood education and care workforce strategy to support the recruitment, retention, sustainability and enhanced professionalisation of the workforce, thereby improving service quality and children’s outcomes.
- The strategy should consider, at a minimum, opportunities to improve:
 - service leadership capability
 - pre-service training quality and content
 - ongoing professional development of the workforce
 - responsiveness of pre-service training and ongoing professional development providers to the sector
 - consistency and applicability of workforce registration and professional standards
 - workforce attraction, stability and retention, including medium and long-term career paths
 - the impact of remuneration and conditions on workforce stability and retention, and quality of practice
 - workforce diversity, including Indigenous communities
 - the status of the profession
 - responses to localised issues, including in regional and remote areas
 - engagement with parents”⁴

ACCS advocates for Government to support a skilled and professional workforce by developing a COAG endorsed National Workforce Strategy jointly implemented by the Australian and State/Territory Governments. This Strategy should include the following.

- Pay equity for educators in early and middle childhood services
- Renewed targeted support for early and middle childhood qualifications such as subsidised fees for upskilling to diploma and degree early childhood qualifications
- Recognition of early childhood education and care teaching experience in an early education setting for Teacher Accreditation/Registration
- Stronger controls for early and middle childhood courses and quality assurance of providers including tighter monitoring through Australian Skills Quality Authority
- Funding for training and professional development

⁴ Pascoe S, Brennan D (2017) *Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools through Early Childhood Interventions*, pgs. 65-66.

Evidence

A recent Mitchell Institute report notes research that demonstrated that children who participated in a preschool program delivered by a degree qualified early childhood teacher performed better in Year 3 National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy testing for reading, numeracy and spelling than children who did not attend preschool, even when controlling for personal circumstances⁵.

Skilled and qualified teachers and educators are one of the key contributors to quality early childhood education and care.⁶ A 2017 report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development identifies that in early childhood education and care services “teachers and pedagogical staff are the most important factors that influence child well-being, development and learning”⁷. Similarly, a recent report from the Mitchell Institute notes that “effective teachers and educators who can skilfully combine explicit teaching of skills and concepts with sensitive and warm interactions, is at the core of quality early education”⁸.

There is an emerging and critical shortage of early childhood teachers which is impacting the early childhood education and care sector and is being felt most acutely by providers of long day care. Commencements in early childhood teaching courses have fallen nationally by 15.4% in five years, and some jurisdictions this is even more marked; for example, in NSW commencements in all teaching courses fell 19% in the same period⁹. The demand for early childhood teachers is expected to grow rapidly with population growth of children attending early childhood education and care services, expansion of centres and extension of preschool to three-year-olds.

In the period 2015 to 2020 the number of child carers with Vocational Education and Training qualifications required to meet demand will grow by 39,000¹⁰.

The Department of Employment (C'with) predicts that the education and training industry will be one of four industry groups providing more than half of the employment growth over the next five-year period to May 2022. Part of this growth will comprise degree qualified early childhood teachers. The Department estimates that in May 2017 there were 47,000 Early Childhood (Pre-primary School) Teachers with bachelor degrees or higher. In 2022 this number is expected to be 59,400; a 26% growth in the total number of early childhood teachers¹¹.

Work is needed to improve the quality of vocational and higher education early childhood education and care courses to ensure that they meet the needs of the sector. Subsidies are needed to ensure cost is not a barrier to enrolment in Certificate III and Diploma courses, and similarly, scholarships should be provided to assist educators wanting to upgrade to Bachelor teaching qualifications.

The early childhood education and care sector, and most notably long day care, faces challenges in attracting and retaining qualified teachers and educators. Stability of the early childhood education and care workforce is vital to establishing the close, ongoing relationships

⁵ O'Connell M, Fox S, Hinz B and Cole H (2016). 'Quality Early Education for All: Fostering, entrepreneurial, resilient and capable leaders', Mitchell Institute policy paper No. 01/2016. Mitchell Institute, Melbourne. Available from: www.mitchellinstitute.org.au, p. 8.

⁶ Goodfellow, J. (2007) 'Childcare provision: Whose responsibility? Who pays?' *Kids Count: Better early childhood education and care in Australia*, p. 248 and Productivity Commission (2014) *Childcare and Early Childhood Learning and Inquiry Report*, Volume 2, p.310. ; Pascoe S, Brennan D (2017) *Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools through Early Childhood Interventions*.

⁷ OECD (2017), *Starting Strong 2017: Key OECD Indicators on Early Childhood Education and Care*, OECD Publishing, Paris. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264276116-en>, p. 101.

⁸ Torii K, Fox S & Cloney D (2017). Quality is key in Early Childhood Education in Australia. Mitchell Institute Policy Paper No. 01/2017. Mitchell Institute, Melbourne. Available from: www.mitchellinstitute.org.au, p. iii.

⁹ Dept of Education Higher Education Statistics Special Courses

¹⁰ SkillsIQ (2017), *Children's Education and Care Industry Reference Committee Industry Skills Forecast*, p. 21

¹¹ <http://lmip.gov.au/default.aspx?LMIP/EmploymentProjections>, accessed 13 December 2017

between teachers and educators, and children which are crucial to children's social and emotional learning¹². Strategies to support workforce stability include:

- access to affordable professional development
- recognition of early childhood education and care teaching experience in an early education setting for Teacher Accreditation/Registration
- access to supporting vocational and higher education training through fee reductions or subsidies
- subsidies to cover back filling of staff positions to enable working students to attend exams, residential courses and study time

¹² Whitebook, M., D. Phillips and C. Howes (2014), *Worthy Work, STILL Unliveable Wages: The Early Childhood Workforce 25 Years after the National Child Care Staffing Study*. Centre for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley, p. 6.

3. Children and families experiencing vulnerability have 2 days per week of subsidised access - all children, including those of non-working parents, are eligible for subsidised early childhood education and care for at least 2 days per week – from a minimum of 18 hours up to 24 hours per week reflecting the operating hours of the service

Evidence

The Child Care Subsidy Work Activity Test is broad and should enable many families who may not be in regular paid work to use hours of related upskilling or unpaid activities such as volunteering to be eligible.

ACCS is deeply concerned about those families who, for many reasons, such as family and domestic violence, substance abuse or mental health issues, intergenerational unemployment or low/no levels of literacy, are not able to meet the work activity test; and may not be eligible for Additional Child Care Subsidy. These families are often those experiencing the greatest vulnerability and disadvantage; and it is the children of these families who have the most to gain from early childhood education and care attendance – not only from immediate child protection factors and enhancement of wider child well-being, but also medium term gains in relation to school readiness and longer term gains in relation to life course satisfaction and health – “we are starting to appreciate how risks can escalate over time; with early adverse experiences and outcomes increasing the risk for later adverse experiences and outcomes”¹³.

The greatest brain development occurs in the first five years of life, with 80% of brain development occurring in the period from birth to 3 years. If a child commences school developmentally vulnerable it is challenging for these children to catch up to their peers who are not developmentally vulnerable¹⁴.

“.... a poor start to life in the first 1000 days may be the start of a cascade of events that reinforce earlier neurological and biological adaptations. What is undisputed is that reversing early adverse adaptations or inheritances gets progressively harder after the first 1000 days. While it is never too late to make changes, the first and best opportunity we have to build strong foundations for optimal development is during the first 1000 days.”¹⁵

Access to quality early childhood education and care is a strong mitigating factor against disadvantage, particularly for children who are not exposed to rich home learning environments. “All children benefit from access to high-quality early education, especially in the year before school, but children from disadvantaged backgrounds benefit more (Heckman, 2008; Harrison et al 2012)”¹⁶.

The Australian Early Developmental Census is a nationwide survey of children in their first year of full-time school which is conducted every three years; 2015 was the third wave of the survey. Teachers of children in their first year of school complete a survey on each child over five domains. These domains are:

¹³ Moore, T.G., Arefadib, N., Deery, A., Keyes, M. & West, S. (2017). *The First Thousand Days: An Evidence Paper – Summary*. Parkville, Victoria: Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Children’s Research Institute, p. 1.

¹⁴ Centre on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2016), *From Best Practice to Breakthrough Impacts: A Science-based Approach a More Promising Future for Young Children and Families*. Australian Early Development Census (undated), *Brain development in children*, p. 1.

¹⁵ Moore, T.G., Arefadib, N., Deery, A., Keyes, M. & West, S. (2017). *The First Thousand Days: An Evidence Paper – Summary*. Parkville, Victoria: Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Children’s Research Institute, p. 3.

¹⁶ O’Connell M, Fox S, Hinz B and Cole H (2016). ‘Quality Early Education for All: Fostering, entrepreneurial, resilient and capable leaders’, Mitchell Institute policy paper No. 01/2016. Mitchell Institute, Melbourne. Available from: www.mitchellinstitute.org.au, p. 6.

- physical health and well-being
- social competence
- emotional maturity
- language and cognitive skills and
- communication skills and general knowledge

These domains are key predictors of effective learning and academic success, and of overall health and well-being in later years.

In 2015 one in five children commenced formal school developmentally vulnerable in one of more domains and one in ten children commenced school identified as vulnerable in two or more domains¹⁷.

The Trends in Community Children's Services Survey research shows that not for profit community children's services are working closely with the wider community and have noticed an increase in the number of children attending services who are in vulnerable circumstances.

Not for profit community children's services are concerned that children who will most benefit from early childhood education and care will have reduced access to early childhood education and care as a result of the reduction in eligible subsidised hours for children of families who do not meet the Child Care Subsidy Activity Test. The survey showed that not for profit community children's services believe that access to early childhood education and care can be supported through the provision of fee relief and financial support.

¹⁷ <https://www.aedc.gov.au/early-childhood/findings-from-the-aedc>, accessed 29 November 2018

Return on investment

There are significant returns across a range of domains including gross domestic product both short and long term, social capital, health, justice, individual and family well-being, and future workforce preparedness from investing in quality early childhood education and care services delivered by skilled and qualified early childhood teachers and educators.

Considerable research on the economic benefits of early childhood education and care is international and shows benefit cost ratios varying from 2.62 to 17.07 for every dollar spent, with some of these benefits still impacting 20 years after the early childhood education and care participation¹⁸.

Australian modelling by PwC in 2014 showed that the Australian economy benefits significantly when children participate in quality early learning. The GDP impacts are:

- benefits for children receiving a quality education and care program are \$10.3 billion cumulative to 2050
- benefits of increased participation of vulnerable children whose parents are in the lowest income bracket are \$13.3 billion cumulative to 2050
- benefits of increased female workforce participation are \$6 billion cumulative to 2050

When PwC attributed the benefits and costs, modelling low and high productivity increases, the net fiscal benefit for the three impacts combined was estimated to be a saving to government of between \$1.6 billion and \$1.9 billion in net present value terms¹⁹.

The economic benefits of early childhood education and care participation cannot be viewed as a short term cost; there are medium and long term gains to be had when children attend quality early childhood education and care.

Pascoe and Brennan (2017) summarised these benefits including economic and social and emotional outcomes that accrue from this participation. These benefits are to the individual who participated, as well as to their broader community and to governments. The following table shows these accruals.

¹⁸ Pascoe S, Brennan D (2017) *Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools through Early Childhood Interventions*, p. 41.

¹⁹ PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC). (2014). *Putting a value on early childhood education and care in Australia*. Australia: PwC, pgs. 4-5.

Table: Economic effects of quality early childhood education

OUTCOME	Timing of effect	Who accrues the benefit?		
		Participants	Governments	Society
Reduced child abuse and neglect	Childhood	+	+	
Improved school readiness	Adulthood	(+)	(+)	
Higher achievement tests	Adulthood	(+)	(+)	
Reduced special education use	School years		+	
Reduced grade retention	School years		+	
Increased high school graduation	Adulthood	(+)	+	
Increased higher education attainment	Adulthood	-	-	
Higher earnings and taxes paid	Adulthood	+	+	
Reduced crime	Adolescence to adulthood		+	+
Reduced welfare use	Adolescence to adulthood	-	+	
Improved health and health behaviours	Adolescence to adulthood	+	+	+

Note: + denotes a favourable effect; – denotes an unfavourable effect. Parentheses indicate monetisable effect is indirect, i.e. through linkages to later outcomes.

Source: Phillips, D, et al. (2017), *Puzzling it out: The current state of scientific knowledge on pre-kindergarten effects – A consensus statement*. Washington DC: Brookings Institution. Retrieved from: <https://www.brookings.edu/research/puzzling-it-out-the-current-state-of-scientific-knowledge-on-pre-kindergarten-effects/> in Pascoe S, Brennan D (2017) *Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools through Early Childhood Interventions*, p. 43.

Investing in quality early childhood education and care benefits not only the children attending these services, but also their families and communities in which they live. In addition our nation benefits from wider social capital gains such as enhanced life course trajectories and health outcomes; and from economic gains in the short, medium and longer term.

It just makes good sense to invest in quality early childhood education and care.