Universal early learning

Distilling the evidence and checking the claims

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Mitchell Institute – focus on policy & impact

THE PROBLEM

22% not prepared for school
28% don’t have foundational literacy & numeracy skills
26% don’t attain Year 12 or equivalent by 19
26% 24 year olds not full time learning or earning

WHAT WE’RE DOING

Delivering policy solutions for quality early education
Developing great teachers and transforming schools
Designing a better and fairer vocational and higher education model

IMPACT

All kids ready for learning
Curious, creative & resilient learners
Entrepreneurial and skilled workers
What do we mean by 3 year old preschool?
- a second year of preschool/kinder
- usually provided in the year children turn 4
- children with early birth dates (eg. January-April) may commence in the year they turn 3
# The early learning policy context

## Jobs for families (Child Care Subsidy)
- Commonwealth funding to support families for children to attend ECEC services

## Nationally aligned quality and learning frameworks
- National Partnership Agreement on the National Quality Agenda for ECEC Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF); National Quality Framework (NQF), National Quality Standards (NQS), Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA)

## Universal Access to Preschool
- National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education (current extension funds until end of 2019)
  - 600 hours of access for all children in the year before school

## Compulsory schooling
- In all Australian states and territories, compulsory schooling starts in the year children turn 5 (or 6 if their birthday is after cut off date)
- All children have a right to school education
Current provision in Australia

- All children are entitled to 600 hours of access to preschool programs in the year before school
  
  *National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education (current extension funds until end of 2019)*

Child care subsidy (CCS):
from 1 July 2018
- Subsidy level linked to family income
- Hourly fees capped by service type
- Activity test to determine number of hours of CCS
- Child care safety net
Policies and programs – state & territory
2016 Mitchell Institute reports:

- **Quality early education for all**, Megan O’Connell, Stacey Fox, Bronwyn Hinz & Hannah Cole – key policy recommendations to improve outcomes for all young children.

- **Two years are better than one** by Stacey Fox & Myra Geddes – making the case for 2 years of universal preschool.

Ongoing calls for policy reform:

- Early Learning Everyone Benefits – campaign coordinated by ECA.

- **Lifting our Game**, 2018 Call from the states and territories to look at ECEC as a key space to promote excellence in Australian education.
## Benefits of early learning

### What are the benefits?

- **Academic:** reading, vocabulary, mathematics, attitude to school, performance at school
- **Social and emotional development, executive function**
- **Long-term benefits:** adult educational attainment, employment, service use
- **Workforce participation**
- **Economic:** cost-benefit analyses
Benefits of early learning

- Physical health and wellbeing
- Social competence
- Emotional maturity
- Language and cognitive skills
- Communication skills and general knowledge

Goldfeld et al, 2016
Why two years?

Longer duration, greater benefits

Improved academic outcomes: receptive vocabulary, reading, mathematics

Improved executive function: working memory, mindset shifting

Improved school adjustment

» Shah et al. (2017).
Two years are better than one

Going beyond average impacts

We need to understand what works, for whom, under what circumstances – and understand the variability masked by these overarching effect sizes.

• Barnett et al 2013
A key strategy for boosting performance

1. Increase the duration of kindy by 1 year
2. Increase by 1% the proportion of students attending kindy
3. Reduce ratios by 1 child
4. Spend an extra dollar on kindy

Starting Strong 2017

Structural inputs to improving performance at age 15
Why universal?

Why do we need the national partnership?

- All children benefit from high quality early learning, but not all children participate
- Investing in early education reaps dividends for whole society
  - Better educational outcomes – short term, school readiness, long term
  - Better social outcomes
  - Higher parental workforce participation
  - Better long term prospects – employment, justice, health, wellbeing
- Equity, access, inclusion
  - Hard to perfect targeting – where is the cut off?
  - Children from all walks of life can experience developmental and learning risk and vulnerability
- Ensures we provide ECEC for all young children, regardless of their family circumstances
What about targeted approaches?

- Need to be responsive, strategic, child-centred
  - Maintain developmentally appropriate ECEC practice
  - Provide additional wrap around services at point of need

- Some children will need more:
  - Proportionate universalism – same service, higher intensity, higher dose

- ECEC is not the be all and end all
  - Some children will have more complex needs that require responses from other providers/sectors
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2 years of what?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responsive educators with a strong understanding of how children learn</td>
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<tr>
<td>Play, inquiry, exploration: child directed -&gt; co-directed -&gt; educator directed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Language rich</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent engagement with children’s learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social interaction with peers</td>
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Skills & knowledge young children need

Effective Early learning

Skills for learning

Skills for life
How children gain skills and capabilities

Effective early learning

- Problem solving
- Turn-taking
- Cooperation
- Empathy
- Curiosity
- Perseverance
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Foundations for capabilities in the early years</th>
<th>General capabilities in the Australian Curriculum</th>
<th>Soft skills for business success (Deloitte Access Economics, 2017)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language acquisition and pre-literacy</td>
<td>Literacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Counting, numeric awareness, shapes, patterns</td>
<td>Numeracy</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Information and communication technology</td>
<td>Critical and creative thinking</td>
<td>Critical thinking Innovation Problem solving Enterprise skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Executive function skills – focus, impulse control, completing tasks, solving problems, organising information</td>
<td>Personal and social capability</td>
<td>Teamwork Communication Emotional judgement Self management</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regulation – self, emotional, behavioural, attentional</td>
<td>Ethical understanding Intercultural understanding</td>
<td>Professional ethics</td>
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<td>Empathy, social skill development</td>
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What if children start school behind?

Environments where children can catch up

- Engaging, child focused learning
- Family engagement
- Early identification and targeted support
Early childhood  Primary school  High school  Tertiary
Thank you

- Educational opportunity in Australia 2015: Who succeeds and who misses out

- How Australia can regain centre stage on education

- Quality Early Education for All
  www.mitchellinstitute.org.au/reports/quality-early-education-for-all

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