



Review of the Universal Access National Partnership

Discussion Paper

6 September 2019



We seek your views on national funding and policy for education of children in the year before full-time school (preschool)

An independent review (the Review) is being conducted into 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 has been 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.

This Discussion Paper provides background on the Review and sets out key questions to which you are invited to respond through submissions or an online survey. Details below explain how to do this. Everyone is welcome to contribute.

Early childhood education is delivered by States and Territories, local government, not-for-profit organisations and/or private operators in a variety of settings. This can include school-based programs (government and non-government), standalone facilities and centre-based day care¹ settings. The terms used for these programs vary across the country – they are referred to variously as preschool, kindergarten or Pre-Prep². For simplicity we use the term ‘preschool’ throughout this paper.

An important point to emphasise is that the Review is focused on the national funding for preschool - specifically, programs that provide structured play-based early childhood education delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher in the year before full-time school. It is not a review of child care or child

care subsidies, though it will consider how the Universal Access National Partnership funding intersects with related funding (including child care subsidies) in the delivery of preschool. Neither is it a review of the specific funding and delivery arrangements in States and Territories.

The funding is provided through a national agreement aimed at facilitating widespread participation in preschool

The Australian Government makes a contribution to preschool funding under an agreement with all States and Territories called the National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education, also known as the Universal Access National Partnership (UANP). The UANP aims to ensure that all children have access to at least 600 hours per year of quality preschool in the year before full-time school. A succession of these funding agreements have been in place since 2008. Under the current UANP, the Australian Government will provide \$449.5 million to States and Territories for the 2020 school year.

In entering into the UANP, all Australian governments recognised their mutual interest in improving outcomes in early childhood education and the need to work together to achieve those outcomes. This is reflected in the nationally-agreed [Early Learning Reform Principles](#), which set out the key features that should underpin future federal arrangements to improve outcomes for children and their families³. The related design principles are set out below.

¹ Centre-based day care is also known as long day care.

² In the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), New South Wales (NSW) and the Northern Territory (NT), early childhood education programs are called preschool. In Queensland, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia (WA), they are known as kindergarten. In South Australia (SA) they are known as preschool or kindergarten.

³ Early Learning Reform Principles, Council of Australian Governments, 2018.

National Early Learning Reform Principles – Design principles

- All jurisdictions are committed to **cooperation and shared responsibility** for early learning
- All jurisdictions maintain **flexibility to deliver services** in a way that adapts to local circumstances, encourages innovation, and supports choice for families
- National arrangements for early childhood are **cohesive, effective and efficient; funding is sustainable and transparent; and services are high quality, accessible, equitable and inclusive**
- **Reforms are evidence-based, child and family-centred**, and complement existing arrangements
- **Roles and responsibilities are clear**, and **jurisdictions are accountable** under **agreed and measurable evaluation frameworks**, which are supported by accessible, meaningful and reliable data.

The Australian Government’s funding contribution via the UANP tops up States’ and Territories’ own significant contributions to support delivery of preschool programs, and has made possible the expansion of both the number of hours of preschool available and/or participation in preschool. State and Territory contributions that pre-dated the UANP have continued, taking on different forms in different places and supporting services to align to local contexts and community needs.

The collective investment by all governments reflects a shared understanding of the importance of providing quality preschool programs in the year before full-time school – a point supported by evidence and reaffirmed in the [‘Lifting Our Game’](#) report and elsewhere⁴. This report highlights evidence of the positive impact that quality preschool has on children’s later performance at school, and its link ultimately to higher levels of employment and income, as well as to improved health outcomes. The report notes that the benefits are especially marked for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage⁵.

Consistent with this evidence, the UANP has a strong focus on increasing preschool participation by children with these backgrounds. This can be seen in the targets set within the UANP (refer to Page 4, which reproduces the stated outcomes, outputs, performance indicators and benchmarks in the UANP) and in the performance framework that accompanies the funding agreement.

The UANP and its predecessor agreements appear to have contributed to a significant increase in enrolment by children in the year before full-time school and the number of hours available. According to one source, in 2017, the proportion of children enrolled in a 600-hour a year preschool program delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher was 96 per cent nationally, compared to 12 per cent in 2008⁶. Enrolment by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children has shown a particularly marked increase.

While this progress is encouraging, there are challenges with data collection methodologies and potential areas for further improvement. Among other things, the Review is open to considering better targets and measures to use in future funding agreements, and to other advice that might support continued improvement in the collection and use of data.

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⁴ ‘Lifting Our Game’: Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools through Early Childhood Interventions, 2018.

⁵ There is currently no nationally agreed definition of ‘vulnerable and disadvantaged’ children under the National Partnership on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education - 2018 and 2019. The UANP’s performance indicators use Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage, which is a nationally consistent measure of disadvantage available from the National Early Childhood Education and Care Collection. States and Territories may use different measures in their individual Implementation Plans as agreed bilaterally with the Australian Government.

⁶ See Table 2 in the [National Report: National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education - 2016 and 2017](#).

The UANP outcomes, outputs, performance indicators and performance benchmarks

OUTCOMES

Providing universal access to and improving participation of all children in affordable, quality early childhood education program(s), including that:

- i. vulnerable and disadvantaged children have access to, and participate in, an affordable, quality early childhood education program;
- ii. Indigenous children have access to, and participate in, an affordable, quality early childhood education program; and
- iii. all Indigenous four-year-olds in remote communities have access to early childhood education.

OUTPUTS

Implementing accessible, quality early childhood education programs which meet the needs of parents and communities at a cost which does not present a barrier to participation, particularly for vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

Delivering strategies and actions targeting the participation of vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

Delivering strategies and actions targeting the participation of Indigenous children, including in remote areas.

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 preschools or long day care centres.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Implementing accessible, quality early childhood education programs which meet the needs of parents and communities at a cost which does not present a barrier to participation, particularly for vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

Delivering strategies and actions targeting the participation of vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

Delivering strategies and actions targeting the participation of Indigenous children, including in remote areas.

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 preschools or long day care centres.

1. TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS	2. ACCESS TO QUALITY PROGRAM	3. ACCESS TO A QUALITY 600- HOUR PROGRAM	4. ATTENDANCE
The proportion of early childhood education programs delivered by a degree qualified early childhood teacher who meets the National Quality Framework requirements.	The proportion of children enrolled in quality early childhood education program(s) in the year before full-time school.	The proportion of children enrolled in quality early childhood education program(s) for 600 hours per year, in the year before full-time school.	The proportion of enrolled children who attend quality early childhood education program(s) for 600 hours per year, in the year before full-time school.
Performance benchmarks/ targets	Performance benchmarks/ targets	Performance benchmarks/ targets	Performance benchmarks/ targets
95 per cent ⁷	95 per cent of children; 95 per cent of Indigenous children; and 95 per cent of vulnerable and disadvantaged children.	95 per cent of children; 95 per cent of Indigenous children; and 95 per cent of vulnerable and disadvantaged children.	Annual targets agreed in Implementation Plans taking into account a jurisdiction's starting point and moving to 90 per cent over time.

⁷ Since 1 January 2014, changes to the National Quality Framework resulted in a requirement that all centre-based day care and preschool services providing care must have access to an early childhood teacher. Consequently, for the purpose of the UANP, Performance Indicator 1 is taken as achieved.

The UANP is designed to enable preschool delivery that is aligned to local needs and contexts

In 2018, there were 342,479 children aged 4 or 5 years old enrolled in a preschool program in Australia across 11,695 services and schools⁸. While all preschool programs must align with the National Quality Standard, how programs are delivered can vary according to the particular needs of the children concerned (e.g. children from culturally and linguistically diverse families), the communities being served, and the historical context in which the preschool system has developed in each State and Territory.

One of the strengths of the Australian system is that it avoids a one-size-fits-all approach, with the mix of delivery models differing significantly across States and Territories⁹. For example, in New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria, preschool programs are predominately delivered in settings separate to schools, including through centre-based day care providers and stand-alone services. By contrast, preschool in the Australian Capital Territory, Northern Territory, South Australia, Tasmania and Western Australia is mostly delivered through government and non-government preschools, often closely integrated with the school system.¹⁰ Note that this Review is not reviewing the method that States and Territories have selected to deliver the UANP.

We welcome your perspectives and experiences

The objectives of the Review are to assess:

the degree to which the agreed objectives, outcomes and outputs of the UANP have been achieved since 2014

the broader benefits that have been achieved for the community and economy as a result of the UANP

the efficiency, effectiveness and equity of current funding, measurement and performance arrangements

future arrangements to maintain and improve the benefits already achieved and the benefit of pursuing any new objectives, outcomes or outputs.

The Review will also help to develop a national picture of the different preschool systems across all States and Territories, to better understand the context in which UANP funding is used and how it interacts with other publicly-funded supports for children in the year before full time school. This will provide evidence-based findings to inform consideration of future funding and policy settings.

A challenge for this Review is singling out the difference made specifically by the national funding provided through the UANP, given that it complements and contributes to other State and Territory funding that also supports the delivery of and access to universal access to 600 hours per year of preschool. Private contributions (including fees from parents and carers, especially in centre-based day care settings and non-government preschools) are also made. This is why it is vital to gain a more detailed view of how the UANP funding and the terms of the agreement has changed things on the ground for preschool providers and for users of their services.

To guide your input, we have set out five key questions in Table 2, based on the [Review's Terms of Reference](#). **These questions are intended as a guide to frame and structure your submissions.** All of the questions are optional, and we recognise that not everyone will have an informed view on all of these. Information on how to share your submissions is provided below.

Targeted versions of these questions appear in the online survey for those who wish to provide their views quickly and easily.

Information on how to complete the online survey appears further below.

⁸Australian Bureau of Statistics, 4240.0 - Preschool Education, Australia 2018.

⁹2017 ABS Preschool Education, Australia (Cat. No. 4240.0).

¹⁰Ibid.



Key consultation questions related to the Review's Terms of Reference

QUESTION 1:

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

The objective of the UANP is to “maintain universal access to, and improve participation in, affordable, quality early childhood education programs for all children”. Specifically, the purpose is to ensure that every child in Australia has access to a minimum of 600 hours per year of preschool delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher in the year before full-time school, in a way that meets the needs of families and while ensuring that cost is not a barrier.

We are interested in your views about whether and how this objective has been met.

QUESTION 2:

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

The UANP’s performance indicators, benchmarks and targets focus effort on maintaining universal access to and improving participation in affordable, quality preschool, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage.

We are interested in your views about the focus of the UANP funding agreement and whether performance or success is being tracked and measured in the right way.

QUESTION 3:

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

Notwithstanding progress to date under the UANP, there may be opportunities to improve the impact of this national funding for preschool in the year before full-time school, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children in regional and remote areas, and children experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage.

We are interested in your views on the use of UANP funding, based on your own experience and knowledge of the system either within your local community or more broadly. We also welcome your perspectives on the appropriateness of a performance-tied funding framework.

QUESTION 4:

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

The context in which the National Partnership agreement operates is important to understanding its achievements and future directions. The UANP allows for flexibility in how and where preschool is delivered; it can be delivered in schools, stand-alone preschools or within centre-based day care. It can reflect different approaches and involve connections to other services – as long as it is delivered by a teacher whose qualifications meet National Quality Framework requirements.

The Review is interested in understanding more about how models of delivery vary to meet the contexts and needs of different communities or different cohorts of children. This includes understanding how that UANP funding complements other government funding (local government, State and Territory, and Australian Government) and any private investment, particularly with respect to lifting participation in quality preschool.

Please note that the Review is not reviewing the specific funding and delivery arrangements in States and Territories, but how the UANP complements existing models of preschool delivery.

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?

This is an opportunity to provide any additional comments that you think are relevant to the design of future preschool arrangements, including taking into account each State and Territory’s context and the interaction of the UANP funding and other funding including Child Care Subsidy payments.

For example, we would appreciate any further views on how funding might be better used to maintain and improve universal access to preschool and learning outcomes for children, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children in regional and remote areas, and children experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage. We would also welcome suggestions on changes that could usefully be made to the UANP agreement itself (e.g. its objective, outcomes, outputs indicators, benchmarks and targets) to ensure children receive the full benefits of accessible, affordable quality preschool.



You can contribute in two ways

More information about the Review can be found at the Review website:

<http://www.uanpreview.nousgroup.com.au/>

YOU CAN MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD IN TWO WAYS:



Send a submission

Send a submission with your responses to the consultation questions. You can email your submission to uanpreview@nousgroup.com.au or mail your submission to Level 19, 567 Collins St Melbourne VIC 3000. Please provide information about you and the organisation you represent (if applicable). Submissions will be deemed publishable unless you indicate that your submission should be treated as confidential.



Complete an online survey

You can access the survey at the Review website: <http://www.uanpreview.nousgroup.com.au/>

The public submission period opens 6 September 2019 and closes at 11.59pm (Australian Eastern Standard Time) 6 October 2019. We are not able to accept survey responses or public submissions after this period.

Two 45-minute webinars will be held to present the material included in this Discussion Paper and answer your questions about the Review process. These webinars will not provide an opportunity to share your views. Each webinar will present the same information. The webinars will be held on:



- 2pm to 2.45pm, Friday 20 September 2019 (Australian Eastern Standard Time)
- 12.30pm to 1.15pm, Wednesday 25 September 2019 (Australian Eastern Standard Time)

Visit <http://www.uanpreview.nousgroup.com.au/> to learn more about these webinars.

We look forward to hearing from you.

*Have
your
say*