

Hon Dan Tehan MP
Minister for Education
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23 January 2020

Dear Minister and Treasurer

PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION TO THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT 2020-2021

About ELAA

Early Learning Association Australia (ELAA) is a peak body which works in partnership with early learning providers and parents to deliver our vision of excellence in learning for every child. Our diverse membership base of over 600 service providers managing services at nearly 1,300 locations includes early years management organisations, independent kindergartens, local governments, long day care services, government and independent schools and out of school hours care programs.

Together with our members and partners, ELAA is an influential advocate for excellence in early childhood education for all children. We also provide high quality service and support to our members in the areas of governance, quality, human resource management, industrial relations, safety, professional development and sustainability. Our vision is excellence in early learning for every Australian child.

Building a better future for all Australians

ELAA members were very pleased to learn of the Federal government's commitment to the National Quality Framework with the announcement of ongoing funding of Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA). ACECQA plays a vital role supporting the sector to improve outcomes for children through high quality education and care services.

ELAA is also pleased to see that the Preschool Attendance Strategies Project is underway working with communities to develop strategies to increase attendance rates. We look forward to seeing the results of The Smith Family project later this year.

This submission outlines ELAA's priorities for the consideration of the Morrison Government in the formulation of its budget for 2020-2021. Our four key policy priorities for early childhood education and care include:

1. Implementation of two years of funded preschool
2. Enhanced access of children to experiencing disadvantage to centre-based care
3. Development of an integrated workforce strategy
4. Sustainable environmental and climate policies to ensure a future for all Australian children.

The evidence on the value of children having access to high quality early childhood education and care is clear. Australia would benefit from the resulting reduced government expenditure, higher parental workforce participation, and importantly, improved school results leading to a workforce capable of managing the demands of the future. The combined effect of these factors will strengthen Australia's economy and, longer-term, lead to a smarter more innovative workforce which is able to compete internationally.

Critically, we urge the Morrison Government to adopt sustainable environmental and climate policies to ensure a future for all Australian children. The following pages in this submission outline ELAA's budget policy priorities in more detail. ELAA looks forward to continuing to collaborate with the Morrison Government in the interests of children and their families. For more information on this submission, please contact Lisa Minchin: LMinchin@elaa.org.au or 03 9411 4124.

Sincerely,



David Worland
Chief Executive Officer



Grant Boyd
President

CC: Hon Josh Frydenberg MP, Treasurer



Policy Priority 1:

Implementation of two years of funded pre-school

In December 2019 Australians learned that the performance of our school students is continuing its downward trend. The results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests show that students are significantly below the OECD average in maths (three-years behind Singapore, the country in number one position) and are continuing to decline in reading and science (Thomson et al, 2019). This is an untenable long-term position for the nation.

Only 15% of Australian three-year-old children participate in two years of funded kindergarten, compared to 68% across the OECD (Pascoe & Brennan, 2017). Children who attend a high-quality early childhood program in the years before school are up to 40% ahead of their peers by the time they reach year three in primary school (Haisken-DeNew, 2013).

Early learning amplifies children's natural skills and abilities, helps them become confident learners able to thrive and transition well to school and through life. The biggest difference that the government can make is ongoing funding of two years of preschool. Ages three to five years are considered the sweet spot for reducing disadvantage and enabling kids to catch up to their peers, altering their life trajectory. The benefits are not limited to children experiencing disadvantage; in fact all children in a classroom learn more if the average skill level in the classroom at the year's start is higher (Bartik, 2014).

The economic benefits of investing in preschool in our current system of 15 hours per week with a Bachelor qualified teacher in the year before school show a return of \$2 for every \$1 invested (The Front Project, 2019). Benefits of quality early childhood education and care include:

- Improved participation in schooling and higher educational attainment
- Improved health outcomes
- Improved employment outcomes and earnings capacity
- Increased rates of home ownership
- Reduced participation in the legal system.

The benefits are projected to grow significantly with an additional year of preschool.

There are substantial risks of not investing in two years of preschool. Without intervention:

- The performance of school students is likely to continue to decline
- Health, education and justice costs will grow
- Disadvantage will become more entrenched, resulting in greater reliance on benefits
- Parental workforce participation will stagnate
- The workforce will be less adaptable.

In the interest of Australia's long-term future, ELAA's members strongly advocate for the implementation nationally of two years of funded-preschool. It will be to everyone's benefit.



Policy Priority 2:

Enhanced access of children experiencing disadvantage to centre-based care

More than one in six Australian children live in poverty (ACOSS/UNSW, 2019). Poverty has lasting social, economic and health implications which, without intervention, are transmitted from one generation to the next (University of Queensland, 2019). By age 4, children from lower socio-economic and educational backgrounds will hear 19 million fewer words than children with more educated parents (Numerous, 2018).

High-quality childcare is particularly beneficial for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, as early childhood education provides cognitive and non-cognitive stimulation not available in the home learning environment. Early childhood education interventions, such as quality child care help to reduce inequalities in educational outcomes for disadvantaged children at the time of school entry (Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, 2017).

Children's opportunity to learn and develop should not be dependent on the activities of their parents. Providing all children with access to up to 24 hours of subsidised child care per week will yield higher developmental, social, and economic returns than those provided at later stages of life. ELAA members want to see removal of the Child Care Subsidy (CCS) activity test to allow all children to access up to 24 hours of child care per week.

Unfortunately, Australia also currently finds itself impacted by a climate crisis that has produced catastrophic fire conditions across the country. In light of this, ELAA proposes in all declared disaster areas immediate waivers for the CCS activity test and CCS (and robodebt) debt recovery. Reducing burdens on families at this time is essential to allow them to care for their children and to begin the recovery process.

Policy Priority 3:

Development of an integrated workforce strategy

The evidence is clear that effective teaching, that is educators who can skilfully combine explicit teaching of skills and concepts with sensitive and warm interactions, is at the core of quality early education (Torii, 2017). Play-based preschool programs delivered by qualified early childhood educators improve children's learning and developmental outcomes and are particularly important for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Taggart & K Sylva, 2015).

More than a fifth of Australian early childhood education and care services are currently working towards the National Quality Standard (ACECQA, 2019). With the 2016 Workforce Census showing that the average length of experience in the ECEC sector for paid contact staff was just 6.6 years and fewer people are being attracted to early childhood teacher positions, the capacity of the sector to meet the National Quality Framework requirements is in doubt (Social Research Centre, 2017; McKinlay et al, 2018). Retaining, attracting, developing a quality early childhood education and care workforce is currently a critical risk for the sector.

A national workforce strategy will sustainably raise standards and enhance the sector's professional culture to deliver improved educational outcomes for children when it matters most for their future.



Policy Priority 4:

Sustainable environmental and climate policies to ensure a future for all Australian children

The climate in Australia and globally is warming. Multiple studies published in peer-reviewed scientific journals show that 97% or more of actively publishing climate scientists agree: Climate-warming trends over the past century are due to human activities (J. Cook, 2016). In addition, most of the leading scientific organizations worldwide have issued public statements endorsing this position (NASA, 2019). Scientific results from Australia's CSIRO and Bureau of Meteorology proves that the excessive amount of greenhouse gases entering the Earth's atmosphere due to human activity is causing our climate to change dramatically (CSIRO & Bureau of Meteorology, 2018).

All over Australia, families and communities are currently being devastated by the bushfire emergency. Homes are being destroyed and livelihoods lost. The toll on our unique ecosystems and diverse wildlife is immeasurable. The health and wellbeing impacts are pervasive with young children, older people and those with health conditions most at risk. (Climate and Health Alliance, 2020)

The impact on future generations of climate change can no longer be ignored, particularly in light of Australia's climate projections for the coming decades:

- Further increase in temperatures, with more extremely hot days and fewer extremely cool days
- Ongoing sea level rise, with further warming and acidification of the oceans around Australia
- More frequent, extensive, intense and longer-lasting marine heatwaves
- A decrease in cool-season rainfall across many regions of southern Australia, with more time spent in drought
- More intense heavy rainfall throughout Australia, particularly for short-duration extreme rainfall events
- An increase in the number of high fire weather danger days and a longer fire season for southern and eastern Australia
- Fewer tropical cyclones, but a greater proportion of high-intensity storms, with ongoing large variations from year to year (CSIRO & Bureau of Meteorology, 2018) .

Despite these trends, there is currently no overarching national policy that establishes a clear vision for the protection and sustainable management of Australia's environment. We urge the Federal Government to make climate change management a significant policy and funding priority. This approach must incorporate Australia urgently reducing its greenhouse gas emissions as part of a strong global effort (Climate Council Australia, 2019). The future of Australia, our society, our environment, our economy and our children, all depend on it.

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