

Optimising outcomes for Queensland children – Kindergarten review findings



Report summary

In 2019, the Queensland Government engaged Deloitte Access Economics to undertake an independent review of the Department of Education's early childhood education funding and delivery arrangements.

The *Optimising Outcomes for Children Review* was commissioned to ensure that the Queensland Government's funding and service delivery arrangements were optimised to enable all Queensland children to have the best start to life. The review was conducted in two phases, with the first phase focused on kindergarten and the second phase on early childhood development programs for children aged from birth to school age.

This summary provides an overview of the findings of phase one. Phase one included comprehensive stakeholder engagement to inform the review findings. Interviews were held with 45 services, nine peak organisations, the five Central Governing Bodies and nine parent focus groups. Four tailored online surveys were distributed with more than 1500 responses from services, families, educators and other interested parties.

Findings from the consultation, along with evidence-based literature and jurisdictional analysis informed the outcomes of the review.

Progress to date

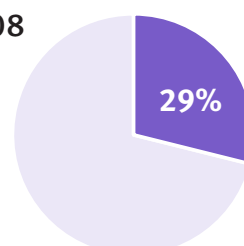
In 2008, all states and territories signed the first National Partnership Agreement to deliver Universal Access (NPAUA) to an early childhood education program (kindergarten) delivered by an early childhood teacher. At this time, only 29% of eligible-aged children in Queensland were



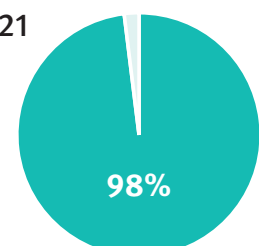
accessing a kindergarten program delivered by an early childhood teacher in the year before school. Fast forward to 2021 and the percentage of all Queensland children in an approved kindergarten program was 98%, with lower percentages of children experiencing vulnerability and/or disadvantage (80%).

Percentage of eligible-aged Queensland children accessing a kindergarten program delivered by an early childhood teacher in the year before school

2008



2021





Findings

Critical success factors

The review attributed the overall participation rate increase to a number of critical success factors. These success factors included:

- introduction of the Queensland Kindergarten Funding Scheme (QKFS); this model inclusive of direct distribution of funding across a mixed market, expanded the capability in the community kindergarten sector and introduced education programs into long day care
- reduction of cost as a barrier to accessing kindergarten, including additional support for families who need it most through the QKFS Plus and the rural and remote subsidy
- contribution of QKFS in improving the quality of kindergarten programs
- targeted communication campaigns heralding the benefits of kindergarten programs to families and the community
- initiatives to support access for children in rural and remote Queensland through kindergarten programs in state schools and eKindy

- flexible funding to support the inclusion of children with disability into kindergarten programs
- workforce initiatives that have helped build the capacity of Queensland's early childhood education and care workforce, and contributed to achieving the sector's vision for its workforce to be seen as 'professional, qualified and valued'.

Key themes

The key findings are grouped into four integral themes, which relate to access and quality, service viability, workforce and governance.

Access and quality

- Lower rates of approved kindergarten participation continue for some Queensland children, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children and families experiencing vulnerability and/or disadvantage, children with disability and children living in remote parts of Queensland.
- Access to high quality early education is vital to improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children experiencing vulnerability and/or disadvantage.

- Affordability remains a barrier for many families experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage.
- Communicating the importance of kindergarten to families and the community, while also improving inclusive practices, is essential to increasing participation.

Service viability

- Services in rural and remote areas face challenges in remaining viable due to large distances, low and variable populations and difficulties attracting and retaining qualified staff.

Workforce

- Important elements associated with ensuring higher quality service delivery include staff qualifications, access to professional development programs and non-contact time.
- Services, in particular long day care, experience difficulty attracting and retaining qualified staff. This is further exacerbated in rural and remote areas of the state.

Governance

- Systems that effectively support and govern the delivery of approved kindergarten programs are essential to drive participation and affordability objectives.
- Parent volunteer management committees require ongoing support to improve capability.

Future considerations

While the review concluded that the current funding and delivery arrangements for the provision of kindergarten in Queensland have been successful, it also identified a number of areas for improvement, for consideration by both government and the sector. These areas for improvement included:

Access and quality

- Improving access to culturally safe and responsive early childhood programs
- Increasing representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members to support the increase of participation rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

- Providing additional learning and development support to improve outcomes for children experiencing vulnerability and/or disadvantage
- Reducing affordability issues associated with accessing a kindergarten program for children and families who need it most
- Ongoing targeted campaigns to communicate the value of kindergarten to a new cohort of children and families each year

Service viability

- Developing and implementing solutions to service viability in consultation with the sector and community

Workforce

- Improving service capability to support inclusive practice and choice for families who have children with disability
- Increased access to professional development, training and non-contact time to improve service quality and staff retention

Governance

- Improved systems and support focused on continuous improvement that complements and aligns with funding arrangements
- Improvements to governance and support arrangements for parent volunteer management committees.

Conclusion

The findings of the review have informed the [new Kindergarten Funding Reforms announced](#) by the Queensland Government on 23 February 2022.

The Department of Education will work with the early childhood sector to implement these historic reforms to ensure that all Queensland children benefit.