

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING UPDATE

With a range of projects in the pipeline as part of reforms to the early childhood agenda in Western Australia, the Office of Early Childhood Development and Learning (OECDL) is keen to keep all stakeholders up to date with progress.

The OECDL website is currently under construction. Comprehensive information on key projects will be available in Term 3.

Review of Early Childhood Services in Western Australia

The Government of Western Australia has given priority status to improving the quality and integration of early childhood development and learning services for children from birth to eight years of age. Dr Elizabeth Constable MLA, Minister for Education, has responsibility for early childhood development and learning in Western Australia.

Mr Brenton Wright from Morton Phillips has been commissioned to review the way the government provides children's services, and has met with a range of stakeholders from across early childhood education and learning in the last few weeks. The Office of Early Childhood Development and Learning will keep you up to date with the outcomes of the review as information becomes available.

Kindergarten for 11 – 15 hours: Early Childhood National Partnership

The WA and Australian Governments have signed the Early Childhood National Partnership Agreement to make sure that all children have universal access to quality, affordable early childhood education in the year before formal school starts (kindergarten in WA).

The priorities are to:

- make sure cost is not a barrier to access for families;
- ensure children have access to their local kindergarten;
- work with schools to increase program hours; and
- focus on increasing participation rates, particularly for children from Aboriginal families, children from non-English speaking backgrounds or children with special needs.

The agreement will see schools increase kindergarten program hours from 11 to 15 hours a week, 40 weeks a year, and delivered by four year university qualified early childhood education teachers.

To make sure the increase to 15 hours a week is delivered consistently across the State, the OECDL is working closely with private schools to implement the changes. It is planned that public and private schools in each locality will increase hours at the same time to avoid competition between schools.

It is currently planned that the increase to 15 hours a week will be implemented on a district basis with consideration given to the unique circumstances of different schools and districts. The OECDL is continuing to scope a range of issues (such as buildings, costs and availability of staff) and anticipates communicating details early in Term 3.

A summary of the questions and answers to the questions that were raised by stakeholders that attended the Early Childhood Education National Partnership (Universal Access) will be sent out in the next 2 weeks.

National Early Childhood Development Strategy: Investing in the early years

COAG has developed the National Early Childhood Development Strategy to deliver on the commitment to give every child the best start to life regardless of family circumstances. The strategy aims to improve the quality of early childhood education, care and health services to children (from birth to eight years of age) and their families.

Initiatives include:

- a national partnership between states and territories to make sure all children have access to quality early childhood education in the year before they begin full-time school by 2013;
- closing the gap for Aboriginal children, including the development of Children and Family Centres in areas of high need; and
- a National Workforce Strategy to provide four year university trained early childhood teachers in schools and child care.

Consideration will be given to workforce implications of the changes by COAG this year. The strategy has been recently approved by COAG and now will be publicly released.

Find out more:

W: deewr.gov.au

Early Years Learning Framework

The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) will guide early childhood educators in developing quality early childhood programs and will help parents support their child's early learning.

The framework will emphasise play-based learning and recognise the importance of communication and language (including early literacy and numeracy), and social and emotional development. It will outline how parents and educators can best support and enhance young children's learning from birth to five years of age, and how to help their transition to school. This will form the basis for making sure children in all early childhood education and care settings experience quality teaching and learning.

The framework was endorsed at the recent COAG meeting. It incorporates the key content from the Indigenous Early Childhood Education Framework so that there will be one inclusive framework for all children. Work is currently being undertaken to map the EYLF to the Curriculum Framework which is currently being reviewed by Professor David Andrich. Information on how the Early Years Learning Framework will be used in WA public schools is yet to be determined.

Find out more:

W: deewr.gov.au

National Quality Framework – Regulation Impact Statement

The Regulation Impact Statement (RIS) will gather information on the implications of a new national standard in childcare and early learning (kindergarten) centres.

It was reported in the media in a manner that indicated that the National Quality Framework had already been agreed. This is not true. The RIS has been endorsed for consultation by COAG, the associated documentation is available on the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) website.

A consultation on the National Quality Framework for Early Learning and Care will be conducted in Perth later this month. We will advise all stakeholders when further details become available.

The biggest issue arising from a national quality framework are staff-to-child ratios and staff qualifications. WA is already well placed in both areas, with childcare and kindergarten programs already meeting the requirements of the staff-to-child ratios proposed in the new framework. Many other states currently do not meet this standard.

If agreed to, the implementation of the framework will require planning for the up-skilling of qualified staff in childcare and kindergarten programs. While WA schools already meet the requirement of four year qualified early childhood teachers, not all early childhood teacher assistants meet the proposed Certificate III requirements.

If agreed, there will be a significant workforce issue for all states and territories with regard to the availability of trained early childhood teachers. This and other workforce issues are being investigated.

Find out more:

W: deewr.gov.au

Australian Early Development Index

The Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) is a data collection that provides information on the wellbeing of children in each community. It is a population measure with data that looks at communities collectively rather than monitoring individual students. Teachers have been asked to undertake data collection for every child enrolled in a pre-primary program as part of the AEDI, which will be completed by 31 July 2009.

The data will provide a snapshot of how children are developing in the years before full-time schooling on a community basis, giving schools, early childhood services and local agencies the opportunity to work together to better support families.

The checklist will cover physical health and wellbeing; social competence; emotional maturity; language and cognitive skills and communication skills and general wellbeing.

The AEDI has been endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG).

Further information is available from Gail Clark (Western Australian AEDI Coordinator) by email gail.clark@det.wa.edu.au or telephone 9264 5366.

Aboriginal Early Childhood Education Workforce Development project

The Indigenous Early Childhood Education Workforce Development project aims to facilitate opportunities for Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers and Education Assistants to obtain a four year university qualification in early childhood education. The project has resulted in 12 people enrolled in Murdoch University's scholarship program, with additional scholarship places available.

The Department encourages Aboriginal people in the Kimberley and Pilbara to apply for the scholarship to ensure early childhood education and care in these areas reflects the social and cultural values of these communities.

Children and Family Centres

Five Children and Family Centres will be developed across WA, as part of the commitment to close the gap for Aboriginal families and the national partnership between all states and territories to improve the wellbeing of Aboriginal children.

They will be in areas with a high Aboriginal population and where there is a demonstrated need for more or improved services. Four centres will be in remote and rural locations and one will be in the metropolitan area. These locations will be announced shortly.

The centres will integrate early childhood services to provide greater access to child, maternal and health services for Aboriginal families.

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