



THE STRUCTURES OF PRESCHOOL EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

Preschool education is an integral and vital part of early childhood education. Across most of Australia, 4 year olds have access to a preschool education that is part of the public school system.

Access to preschool education

Every state and territory offers preschool education to children in the year prior to entry into the preparatory or reception year of school. The name of the year level also varies.

Some systems also offer access to preschool education to younger children.

Children attend for between 10 hours and 12 hours 30 minutes per week around the country.

The full time preparatory school year, which precedes Year 1, is also offered by every state except Queensland. In Western Australia, the pre-primary year will move from four days to five days in 2002.

Age of entry to preschool services

Children are usually aged four in this preschool year, although the actual age of entry differs from state to state.

The age of entry varies from four by 1 January to four by 30 July, with two systems offering continuous entry after the child's fourth birthday.

These differences in age of entry for preschool are also reflected in the age differences for the preparatory year and Year 1.

Participation rates

In 1999-2000, approximately 241,160 children attended preschool services in the year prior to commencing school. This is about 91.6% of all 4 year olds across Australia, although actual participation rates vary from state to state.

ACT: 87.3%
NSW: 88.9%
NT: 100.7%
QLD: 98.4%
SA: 91.9%
TAS: 95.5%
VIC: 95.7%
WA: 65.3%

(SRCSSP 2001)

Responsibility for preschool education

In the majority of systems, preschool education is the responsibility of the Department of Education. In some, the Education Department is also responsible for other children's services such as child care.

ACT: Preschool education is part of the public education system and offered through 80 preschools funded and staffed by the Department of Education and Community Services, which is also responsible for child care. The most common model is a purpose built facility in close proximity to a primary school, and often on the same site. In new suburbs, preschool and childcare facilities are to be co-located on primary school sites.

NSW: There are 75 public preschools operated by the Department of Education but the Department of Community Services funds and is responsible for the vast majority of preschool services. There are more for-profit places than community places. They operate under the same licensing requirements as do long day care centres. All centres must employ a qualified early childhood teacher if they have 30 or more places. Smaller preschools (around 44%) are not required to employ a teacher.

Northern Territory: Preschool programs are integrated with the public school system and located within primary schools and part of the school budget and operations. A small number of nongovernment schools are also funded.

Queensland: Preschool education for four year olds is offered as part of the public primary school program and is the responsibility of the Department of Education. Some nongovernment school programs are also funded. In addition, the Department of Education provides funding for community kindergartens affiliated with the Creche and Kindergarten Association of Queensland. These cater for children aged 3-5 but about two thirds of children enrolled are younger, suggesting that they transfer to a preschool program in a school for their second year.

South Australia: The Department of Education, Training and Employment operates, staffs and funds public preschool services. The Children's Services section of the Department is also responsible for child care. Preschool centres are located in community facilities or within schools, as Child Parent Centres. New preschools will be built on school sites. A small number of Catholic school programs are also funded.

Victoria: Preschool education is the responsibility of the Department of Human Services. The largest group of providers are community providers, but local government councils and primary schools also offer preschool education. In addition, funded provision has been extended to nongovernment schools and to long day care centres offering preschool programs within the framework of the preschool education regulations.

Western Australia: Following a major review of early childhood education, the Western Australian

system has been transformed. During recent years both pre-primary (preparatory) and kindergarten (preschool) services have become the responsibility of the Education Department. Preschool education is now offered as an integral part of local primary schools and all children are guaranteed a preschool place in a government school. Only 42 community kindergartens remain. The age of entry has been changed to bring it closer to that of other systems.

AEU National Plan

The AEU National Plan calls for the development of national goals and frameworks for preschool education, and Commonwealth funding in partnership with the states and territories to ensure that all children have access to a quality preschool education.

See www.aeufederal.org.au/Ec/index2.html

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PRESCHOOL EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA 2001				
State	Name of program	Age of entry	Weekly Hours	Provider
ACT	Preschool	4 by 30 April	10 hrs 30min	Dept. of Education and Community Services
NSW	Preschool	4 by 31 July	12 hrs 30 mins	Dept of Community Services; Dept of School Education
NT	Preschool	continuous entry after 4 th birthday	12 hrs	Dept of Education
QLD	Preschool	4 by 31 December in preceding year	12hrs 30 mins	Dept of Education
SA	Kindergarten	continuous entry after 4 th birthday	10hrs 30 mins	Dept of Education, Training and Employment
TAS	Kindergarten	4 by 1 January	10 hrs	Dept of Education
VIC	Preschool	4 by 30 April	10 hrs	Dept of Human Services
WA	Kindergarten	4 by 30 June	11 hrs	Education Dept

Major sources:

EDWA and various Departmental web sites

Kronemann M., 1998, *Towards a National Plan for Preschool Education*, AEU

Moyle et al, 1996, *Children's services in Australia 1996, Services for children under school age*, AIHW

Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision 2001, *Report on Government Services 2001*