



Early Childhood Australia
A voice for young children

**OUR
VISION:
EVERY
YOUNG
CHILD IS
THRIVING
AND
LEARNING**

MEDIA RELEASE

Monday 31 October, 2016

Australian children deserve the benefits of two years of high quality play-based early learning

Early Childhood Australia (ECA), the peak body for children under eight, their families and early childhood professionals, supports the Mitchell Institute findings on the benefits of children attending two years of early childhood education before starting school, and endorses the recommendation to extend Australia's national agreement on Universal Access to pre-school to children as young as three.

"As outlined in the report: *Preschool - Two years are better than one*, there is strong evidence in Australia and overseas that shows improved performance in school and in later life when children attend two years of quality early learning, compared with children who attend just one year, or no early learning before starting school," said ECA CEO Samantha Page.

"The proviso is that they attend quality early learning that is age-appropriate with a play-based curriculum."

"Because of differences across Australian jurisdictions, the details of how to provide age appropriate play-based pre-school programs to three year olds would need to be worked through between Federal and State/Territory Governments. It is important that services meet the standards under the National Quality Framework for early childhood education, that programs are age appropriate and delivered by qualified early childhood teachers," said Ms Page.

"Good quality early learning programs help children understand and manage their own emotions, learn to collaborate with other children and adults and develop oral language skills. Early learning programs can support children to make smooth transition to school and identify children experiencing difficulties or needing additional support."

"The fact is that Australia's participation of three year olds in early learning is low compared with other economically developed countries. In the UK and New Zealand 97 percent of three year olds are enrolled in early learning, in Australia our rate is just 67 percent. Of most concern, the children most at risk of developmental vulnerability are those least likely to be attending a preschool program in Australia."

"ECA supports the call for the Universal Access Agreement that provides federal subsidies to the states to support all children to access 15 hours per week of early learning in the year before school – to be extended to cover two years."

"Since the introduction of 'Universal Access' five years ago, the participation rate of four year olds in early learning increased from just 67 percent to about 99% today. Given this dramatic success rate, it makes complete sense to use the same approach to increase our participation of three year old."

Vulnerable and disadvantaged children will benefit the most from earlier access to quality early learning, and a universal approach is the best way to reach the most vulnerable children.

Early Childhood Australia is the peak advocacy body for children under eight, their families and early childhood professionals

For factsheets and full report: <http://www.mitchellinstitute.org.au/reports/two-years-preschool/>

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