

The Early Years Commitment

Start Strong Sector Consultations

Summary Report: Long Day Care Services - September 2022

The Department of Education (the Department) engaged ARTD to consult with Long Day Care (LDC) services on proposed changes to Start Strong including implementation of new Affordable Preschool Funding.

Expressions of interest were requested from services to participate, and different service types from a range of locations were selected for an online workshop (90 minutes) or interview (30 minutes). This is a summary of what we heard.

Weighting and scaling of funding for priority children

Start Strong funding is currently weighted and scaled to promote equity of access for children who are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, and for services in lower SEIFA banded areas.

For example, children who are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander who are enrolled in 600 hours+ are allocated higher funding. We asked services if they thought weighting and scaling helped services increase enrolments for these children.

Services were uncertain about whether weighting and scaling improves access to LDC in this way due to circumstances that make enrolling more complex for many centres. These factors include comparatively higher LDC fees given their longer hours and meals, enrolment capacity constraints, difficulty experienced by families experiencing inequity when navigating the preschool enrolments process and the complexity of accessing enrolment support.

Affordable Preschool funding and reporting

Affordable Preschool funding will provide fee relief to families for all 4 and 5-year-olds attending preschool in a LDC service.

Services appreciate fee relief but are concerned about administrative complexity and additional reporting requirements.

Many services would like to have the information they already report to the Australian Government for the Child Care Subsidy (CCS) to be used for Affordable Preschool, rather than having to duplicate it. Reporting on the funding in fee statements to parents would need to be negotiated with 3rd party software management systems providers.

Funding for all 4-5 year old children

We spoke to the participants about the distribution of Start Strong funding to all 4 and 5-year-olds, instead of only children in the year before school.

The concept was well received although this prompted discussion about the way many LDCs tend to have a

child-focused approach to education rather than on based on age.

They would not want to separate children by age if this did not align with their developmental progress. Hence some services are concerned age-targeted funding may limit best practice approaches.

Additional funding for 3 year old preschool

Services supported NSW Government funding for 3-year-olds to attend preschool in LDC services, but LDC models tend to be based on development rather than age.

Most would like the flexibility to implement preschool programs that meet individual needs of the children

in their centres. Many services have early childhood teachers (ECTs) for all age groups and want to ensure that education remains focused on developmental stages of learning for infants.

Expanding spending rules to attract and retain teachers

Participants welcomed the proposal to expand spending rules enabling services to use Start Strong funding for measures to attract and retain teachers.

They would like to provide paid professional development, higher salaries and bonuses and need clarity about how the funds may be used. Some services raised that all LDC staff should benefit, not only ECTs. Participants advocated to use the new funding to offset pre-existing measures to attract and retain staff.

A shift from financial year to calendar year funding

Many services support the proposed transition to calendar year funding in line with enrolments and fee changes.

Some are concerned about the administrative burden of the transition and said current financial year funding would have already been allocated.

Data collection and the proposed Digital Hub

The main challenge for services in data and reporting is data collection for different audiences and systems that are not integrated.

The Digital Hub is welcomed if it can extract existing data without additional work for staff. We heard that attendance reporting may be uncomplicated for services with digital check-in if the data can be downloaded without reformatting, but it would be challenging with manual systems.

Support for ongoing quality improvement

Start Strong supports reflective practice and continuous quality improvement.

Services expressed support for programs, tools and training that supported quality uplift. Some services expressed that finding the time to participate can be a challenge.

Role of Early Childhood Teachers

Services agree having Early Childhood Teachers (ECTs) delivering programs drives quality in the sector and many services already do this.

Some support the proposed potential rating system with a “tick” for services with programs delivered by ECTs but note that access to trained teachers is limited for small and rural services. Therefore, as ECTs cannot always be on the floor with the children, services must have flexibility regarding how ECTs spend their time.

Perspectives on mandatory Transition to School Statements

Some said Transition to School Statements (TTSS) are well designed but most are wary of making them mandatory as they perceive that some primary schools rarely use them, and often prefer Best Start information or their own data.

Most agree on the need to liaise with primary schools about the transition to school and many already do this in a variety of ways, including hosting transition visits and talking to primary school teachers about children. They noted the need for collaboration with primary schools about the best way of supporting transition.

Find out more

We will work with families, communities and early childhood education services as we roll out these changes, so that no child misses out.

For more information about the Early Years Commitment, visit our website, follow us on Facebook or send us an email.

 facebook.com/NSWECE

 education.nsw.gov.au/early-years-commitment

 EarlyYearsCommitment@det.nsw.edu.au

