

Performance Report



Early years



Early years

Overview

The Office for Early Childhood Education and Care was established on 1 January 2009, bringing the responsibility for early childhood development and education policy and childcare services in Queensland into one agency.

Taking lead responsibility for children's early development, the office is managing the implementation of universal access to kindergarten, including:

- rolling out a significant program of additional kindergarten infrastructure
- managing regulation and licensing of early childhood services
- supporting the delivery of integrated early childhood services
- supporting the childcare sector
- providing extra support where needed so that all children can access quality early education services.

Our goal

All Queensland children and families will have access to quality early childhood education and care services. To achieve this goal, the Office for Early Childhood Education and Care is focusing on:

- universal access to kindergarten
- regulations and licensing
- integrated programs and services.

Our outcomes

- Development of a Queensland early years strategy to articulate the vision and priorities for action for early childhood development services across Queensland.
- By mid-2013, all 3½- to 4½-year-old Queensland children will have access to a quality kindergarten program delivered for 15 hours per week, at least 40 weeks per year.
- Kindergarten programs will be delivered by four-year qualified early childhood teachers or registered teachers with early childhood qualifications by mid-2013.
- Children from disadvantaged, rural and remote communities participate in kindergarten at a similar rate to the broader kindergarten age cohort.
- Provision of integrated early years education, care, health and family services targeted to community needs.
- Early childhood education and care services in Queensland achieve high quality standards.
- Establishment of four early years centres in Nerang, Caboolture, Browns Plains and Cairns.

Our measures

- Proportion of Queensland children enrolled in a quality kindergarten program.
- Proportion of Indigenous children and children in disadvantaged communities enrolled in a quality kindergarten program.
- Proportion of early childhood education and care service providers meeting national quality standards.

Note: The office is developing additional performance measures to report progress against priority early childhood education and care outcomes for Queensland children. During 2009–10, the office will collaborate with the Australian Government and other states and territories to improve data collection and to undertake research and evaluation on early childhood interventions for performance monitoring and accountability purposes. This will include the collection and analysis of data against the outcomes, outputs and performance indicators in the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education and the National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development. Baseline data will provide a basis for monitoring and evaluating progress over time. For more detailed information see the development and implementation of these measures.

Achievements

Universal access to kindergarten

Key achievements

- A mobile kindergarten program where teachers move between services was piloted in five rural, remote and disadvantaged communities at a cost of \$1.8 million.
- The former preschool site at Mackay (Victoria Park) was refurbished for use as an early childhood education and care service.
- The implementation of Bound for Success pre-Prep early learning programs (akin to kindergarten) continued across 35 Indigenous communities.
- \$21.8 million in grants was provided to fund non-government organisations to deliver early childhood education and care services, family support and parenting programs across Queensland.

Our measures

| Outputs | Performance indicators | 2008–09 baseline position |
|---|--|--|
| Bilateral agreement on achieving universal access to early childhood education | | |
| Children have access to an early childhood education program for 15 hours per week for 40 weeks per year in the year prior to Prep | <p>The proportion of children who are enrolled in an early childhood education program</p> <p>The number of teachers delivering programs who are four-year qualified early childhood teachers or registered teachers with early childhood qualifications</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 29% • 600 |
| Disadvantaged children have universal access to an early childhood education program | The proportion of disadvantaged children enrolled in an early childhood education program | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representation of cohort (13%) • Proportion of cohort enrolled (20%) • Participation of cohort (46%) |
| Indigenous children (including those in remote Indigenous communities) enrolled in and attending an early childhood education program | The proportion of Indigenous children who are enrolled in an early childhood education program | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 29% of all Indigenous 3½- to 4½-year-old children are enrolled in an early childhood education program • 6% of the total Queensland 3½- to 4½-year-old cohort are Indigenous • Indigenous children enrolled as a percentage of all kindergarten enrolments: 6%¹ |

Note:

1 It is anticipated that Indigenous children enrolled as a proportion of total enrolments will marginally decrease due to the anticipated larger number of non-Indigenous children accessing increased kindergarten places. This trend relates to the total number of Indigenous and non-Indigenous children in Queensland and is not inherently negative.

Regulations and licensing

Key achievements

- Continuity of care was facilitated for parents and children in ABC Learning Centres across Queensland through seamless transfers of licences to new service providers, and providing support to parents and children in finding alternative care providers where centres closed.
- 8334 monitoring visits were made to childcare providers across the state.

Integrated programs and services

Key achievements

- Integrated early childhood services, child care, family support and child and maternal health services were provided at early years centres at Caboolture and Nerang.

Future directions

Universal access to kindergarten

During 2009–10 the Office for Early Childhood Education and Care will:

- collaborate with the Australian Government and other states and territories to improve data collection and to research and evaluate early childhood interventions for performance monitoring and accountability purposes. This will include collecting and analysing data against the outcomes, outputs and performance indicators in the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education. Baseline data will provide a basis for monitoring and evaluating progress over time.
- achieve universal access to kindergarten in Queensland by mid-2013 through the provision of a new funding scheme for kindergarten programs and supporting projects including:
 - mobile and outreach services
 - assistance for children with additional needs
 - workforce skilling strategies

- Queensland kindergarten learning guidelines and resources for teachers
- improved information management to track enrolment details and provide performance data.

Regulations and licensing

During 2009–10, the Office for Early Childhood Education and Care will review the *Child Care Act 2002* and the Child Care Regulation 2003 to ensure quality early childhood education and care is supported by a legislative framework that reflects contemporary best practice and a robust evidence base.

Integrated programs and services

During 2009–10, the Office for Early Childhood Education and Care will:

- develop and implement a Queensland early years strategy to provide greater integration of early years services for families and children
- achieve greater integration of infrastructure and service delivery planning that is responsive to community needs by:
 - investing \$321 million over five years to establish up to 240 additional kindergarten services by 2014
 - completing an early years centre at Browns Plains, and commencing an early years centre at Cairns. This will realise a \$32 million commitment to establish four early years centres providing integrated early childhood education and care, family support and child and maternal health services
 - providing \$8.4 million to establish early childhood education and care services on or near school sites at Nanango, Beenleigh, Toowoomba North, Ayr, The Gap, Beaudesert and Acacia Ridge
 - providing \$3.6 million to expand childcare capacity in the Bowen Basin communities of Moura, Clermont, Moranbah, Theodore, Blackwater and Middlemount
- establish early learning and care centres and integrated children and family centres, in collaboration with the Australian Government, including nine integrated Indigenous child and family centres to be rolled out over five years. These centres will provide early childhood education and care, and health, parenting and family support services for Indigenous children aged 0–8 years and their families.

Universal access to kindergarten

The office is working to deliver on a commitment of up to \$889 million over five years to ensure every 3½- to 4½-year-old Queensland child can access an approved kindergarten program delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher and deliver an extra 240 kindergarten services.

Currently, there are about 53 000 kindergarten-aged children in Queensland, but only 12 000 of them attend an early childhood education program led by a qualified teacher in a community kindergarten or childcare setting.

A total of 29 000 kindergarten-age children attend childcare centres in Queensland, but only 7 per cent of these have access to an education program delivered by a qualified teacher.

There are also an estimated 12 000 kindergarten-age children who do not attend any early childhood education or childcare service. This includes children cared for by their parents or grandparents, and those attending family day care services.

Queensland's kindergarten participation rate of 29 per cent is very low compared with other states, where participation rates range from 85 to 96 per cent.

In 2008–09, the office began planning key initiatives to deliver universal access to kindergarten by mid-2013, addressing infrastructure, funding strategies, workforce issues and access for children in remote or disadvantaged communities.

Infrastructure

To achieve universal access, the Queensland Government has committed \$321 million to rollout an extra 240 kindergarten services across Queensland by 2014.

Planning is underway for eight new kindergartens to open in 2010 at:

- Seaforth State School, near Mackay
- Beaconsfield State School, Mackay
- Oonoonba State School, Townsville
- St Andrews College, Redlynch, Cairns
- Mudgeeraba State School, Gold Coast
- Stretton State College, Brisbane
- Moorooka State School, Brisbane
- Prince of Peace Lutheran College, Everton Hills, Brisbane.

The additional 240 kindergarten services will cater for the 12 000 children of 3½ to 4½ years of age who are not currently accessing any early education or care services. Where possible, these will be co-located with schools.

Locations for future kindergartens will be based on assessment of local need, taking into account population and availability of existing childcare and kindergarten services.

Funding

In 2008–09, the office provided more than \$39 million to support the operations of community kindergartens through the Department of Education Community Kindergarten Assistance Scheme (DECKAS). The purpose of this funding is to offset the cost of employing a teacher and assistant for each kindergarten unit.

To achieve universal access to kindergarten, the office is developing a new funding scheme for kindergarten to support delivery of quality kindergarten programs in community kindergartens and long day care services.

This funding scheme will be designed to offset kindergarten fees to parents and target government resources to areas of need.

Delivering a kindergarten program in a long day care setting will improve access and choice for working parents.

Workforce initiatives

During 2008–09, the department continued its commitment to upskilling the early childhood education and care workforce through the Children’s Services Skilling Plan 2006–09. 6000 individuals attained Certificate III, Diploma and Advanced Diploma qualifications through the plan. In 2008–09, the office began to develop workforce skilling strategies to increase the number of qualified early childhood teachers in Queensland. By 2013, it is expected that an additional 900 four-year qualified early childhood teachers will be needed to provide universal access to kindergarten.

To assist in meeting workforce needs for teachers, a range of initiatives, including annual scholarships over the five years commencing in 2010, will be offered to existing early childhood professionals to upgrade their qualifications.

Mobile and outreach services

To achieve universal access to kindergarten for all Queensland children, regardless of their circumstances, a range of service delivery approaches is needed.

Mobile and outreach kindergarten services, which cater for children living in regional and remote areas, are an important priority.

In 2008–09, the office worked with C&K and the Australian Government to pilot five mobile kindergarten programs across a range of early education and care settings, including community kindergarten, long day care and family day care. Pilot programs were delivered in the Gulf, Far North West, South West and South East Metropolitan communities.

Mobile and outreach services aim to address key barriers to kindergarten, such as geographic and social isolation, socioeconomic disadvantage, difficulty in attracting tertiary-qualified early childhood teachers, and lack of family support services in disadvantaged communities.

Regulation and licensing of early childhood services

The Office for Early Childhood Education and Care regulates early childhood education and care services to ensure they are safe and achieve required legislative standards.

In 2008–09, 2547 childcare services in Queensland were licensed under the *Child Care Act 2002* including:

- 596 school-age care services
- 84 home-based services (family day care)
- 1867 centre-based services, including long day care services and kindergartens.

A significant national program of reform is underway to improve quality assurance systems for early childhood education and care services. In 2008–09, the office worked with the Australian Government through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) to progress the National Quality Agenda, which will continue as a priority in 2009–10.

Licensing and compliance

The office conducted 8334 visits to childcare services in 2008–09, and the results of these visits revealed a high level of compliance with legislative requirements.

In 2008–09, 76 compliance notices were issued to licensed child care services. Compliance notices deal primarily with less serious licence breaches such as broken toys, leaking taps or failure by the centre’s management to keep its program of activities updated.

While stronger enforcement measures are available for more serious breaches, no licence suspensions or revocation measures were invoked in 2008–09.

In 2008–09, 830 complaints were made to the office regarding childcare services. The majority of these complaints related to:

- health and safety concerns
- staffing and qualifications
- interaction
- accidents and incidents
- group sizes.

All licensed early childhood education and care services in Queensland were visited by an authorised regulation officer in 2008–09. Almost 89 per cent of services received at least two visits.

ABC Learning Centres

Following the collapse of ABC Learning in November 2008, the Office for Early Childhood Education and Care worked with the Australian Government to minimise the impact on Queensland families.

Parents and children in ABC Learning Centres across Queensland received continuity of care through seamless transfers of licences to new service providers. Additionally, the office supported parents in finding alternative care for children where centres closed.

Review of legislation

The *Child Care Act 2002* is being reviewed in the context of the commitment by COAG to the National Quality Agenda. As a matter of priority, the review has examined options for the publication of non-compliance information in Queensland.

Integrated early childhood development programs and services

Providing quality, integrated early years services results in better outcomes for families, children and the community.

The Office for Early Childhood Education and Care will develop and implement a Queensland early years strategy to provide a comprehensive, whole-of-government approach to enhancing the health, development, learning, safety and wellbeing of young children and their families.

The early years strategy will give Queensland families certainty about services they can expect in areas of family and child health, parenting and family support, and early childhood education and care.

The office is also managing a significant program of capital works to establish facilities for providing integrated early childhood education and care programs and services.

In 2008–09, the office began working with the Australian Government to establish early learning and care centres and Indigenous children and family centres in Queensland.

The office also continued rolling out an infrastructure program, commenced by the Department of Communities, to establish early years centres and early childhood education and care centres.

In 2008–09, grants funding continued for a range of early childhood development programs.

Children and family centres

In 2008–09, the office began working with the Australian Government to establish nine children and family centres by 2012, with operational funding provided through to 2014.

The first children and family centre will be opened in Mount Isa and is expected to start operating from mid-2010.

Children and family centres will provide quality early childhood education, care, parenting and family support services for Indigenous children from birth to eight years of age.

Early learning and care centres

In 2008–09, the office began working with the Australian Government to establish early learning and care centres in Queensland.

These centres will provide affordable, age-appropriate early learning programs, delivered by a qualified teacher, for children in the year before formal schooling. Each centre will provide at least 50 long day care places catering for children from 0 to 5 years of age.

Early years centres

In 2008–09, two early years centres began offering services to children and families. Service delivery from Caboolture and Nerang early years centres commenced in November 2008.

These one-stop shops focus on families with children aged birth to eight years, and provide early childhood education and care, family support and health services.

Once established, these centres will assist up to 4000 families each year. At these centres, early childhood education and care services will link with additional support services for some of Queensland's most vulnerable families.

Construction of an early years centre at Browns Plains and planning for a further centre at Cairns is underway. Once completed, these centres will finalise a \$32 million commitment to establish four early years centres that provide integrated early childhood education and care, family support, and child and maternal health services.

Early childhood education and care centres

In 2008–09, the Office for Early Childhood Education and Care continued a program of refurbishing former preschools to provide access to child care or kindergarten and other child and family services on or near school sites.

As part of this program, service delivery commenced in September 2008 from an early childhood education and care centre at Victoria Park in Mackay.

This program of work will continue in 2009–10, with \$8.4 million provided for establishing further early childhood education and care services.

Funding for non-government organisations

The Office for Early Childhood Education and Care provides grants to non-government organisations to deliver early childhood education and care services and programs across Queensland.

In 2008–09, \$21.8 million was committed to funded services, including \$13.5 million in triennial grants and \$8.3 million in one-off grants.

These grants fund service provision in areas of high need and in disadvantaged communities. In 2008–09, programs funded by the office included:

- \$2.1 million for remote area Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child care — to fund 28 Indigenous organisations to provide 45 childcare and family support services in 31 Indigenous communities
- \$1.5 million for childcare hubs — to provide early childhood education, and care and family support services for young children and their families in small, often rural, local communities
- \$430 000 for rural and remote children's centres — to deliver long day care, kindergarten services and limited hours care to families living in rural, remote and isolated areas
- \$925 976 for early intervention and family support services — including Parentline and Uniting Church Frontier Services — to support parents and children wherever they live through phone and mobile services
- \$1.2 million for limited hours care — to operate a licensed occasional childcare service for small groups of children under school age. This provides a valuable resource to communities, particularly in rural, remote and isolated areas where families do not have extended support.