

The Hon Julia Gillard AC  
Commissioner  
Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care  
GPO Box 11025  
Adelaide SA 5001

28 February 2023

Dear Commissioner,

Thank you for your letter addressed to the Vice Chancellor and dated 21 December 2022, inviting the University of South Australia to make a submission to the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care.

The University has a strong history of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) training, particularly in the Early Childhood space, and is pleased to provide a submission to inform the discussion as to what universal pre-school for three-year-olds could look like for future generations in South Australia (see Attachment I). This has been prepared by the UniSA Education Futures Executive Leadership Group, which is the Academic Unit within the University that delivers ITE training and undertakes Education research.

At present, UniSA Education Futures offers programs across Early Childhood Education, Primary and Secondary teaching, at both the Bachelor and Master levels, with more than four thousand students enrolled in 2023. The University is ranked number one in South Australia for graduate careers in teaching<sup>1</sup> and is listed in the world top 100 for Education research<sup>2</sup>.

The University would be pleased to meet to discuss and expand on the contents of our submission with Royal Commission staff. Please feel free to contact my office directly to coordinate this (████████████████████).

We look forward to contributing to the important work of the Royal Commission, in what is a critical space not only for the University but for the state as a whole.

Yours sincerely

Professor Joanne Cys  
Provost and Chief Academic Officer  
University of South Australia

---

<sup>1</sup> ComparED (QILT): Graduate Outcome Survey 2018-20, Full-time Employment Indicator (Undergraduate). SA-founded universities only.

<sup>2</sup> 2023 Times Higher Education Subject Rankings.

# Submission to the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care

27 February 2023

## Introduction

The University of South Australia welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care. The University has considered the Royal Commission's Terms of Reference and the following summarises its response and suggestions in relation to achieving universal 3 year old preschool. Of the many issues to be considered, addressing workforce challenges, and embedding a diversity and inclusion approach for children and communities are considered by us to be the most compelling areas of focus.

### 1. Addressing workforce challenges

The University is committed to exploring and implementing initiatives to increase the supply of Early Childhood Educators in Birth-5 year old (B-5) settings. To meet the necessary workforce requirements to achieve universal access to preschool for 3-year-olds, the University recommends the implementation of a nationally recognised, specialised 3-year Bachelor degree program focused explicitly on B-5 education. Establishment of the program would also require the capability for graduates to become registered as early years teachers, that are equipped to work in B-5 settings. Importantly, the success and long-term viability of this program is contingent on the program being recognised by the Australian Government, the Department of Education, State and Territory Governments and the relevant Departments for Education. Some states, such as Queensland and Victoria, already offer this type of program illustrating the inconsistent standards in operation nationally. The lack of consistency in operations, standards, staffing and qualifications in early years services for children necessitates an overhaul of the system to create high quality education environment. Achieving this goal requires significant changes to the current system, including pay equity for early childhood workers and ensuring that all early years settings have access to highly trained graduates. The University is currently investigating the feasibility of such a programme with key stakeholders, including the South Australian Teachers Registration Board.

### 2. Diversity and inclusion

We acknowledge that our teaching staff in Early Childhood education have provided an additional submission to the Commission that has focused on the preparation of teachers in a fit-for-purpose birth-5 early childhood program, its curriculum requirements, and the need to cater equitably for children of all social strata, geographic locations, and languages and cultures backgrounds. The following adds to the submission to raise awareness of the needs of First Nations and migrant communities.

Supporting child and community diversity are key for successful universal preschool for 3 year olds. This diversity includes linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and opportunities for mother tongue/home language maintenance and bilingualism, consistent with international standards and practice, and Australian policy settings. The inclusion of First Nations' and migrant communities' languages as a medium of instruction, with English, is critical to enabling minority language families to access and maintain engagement with Early Childhood Education providers. Bilingual preschools

have had extensive success in increasing the uptake of preschool education by families from diverse communities. The Victorian Program<sup>1</sup> is a leading example in this space (see online [here](#)). An elaboration of a model for bilingual preschools is included below.

## Bilingual preschool model

150 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are spoken in Australia, by around 10% of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, with this number rising as efforts to revitalise these languages increase. Two years into the UN International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032), Australia has committed to increasing opportunities for First Nations' peoples to learn and use their languages, and to be culturally safe, including in our schools and preschools, in support of the UN Resolution on Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2019):

(Recognising) the importance to indigenous peoples of revitalizing, using, developing and transmitting to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literature (UN Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2019).

More than 27% of Australians were born overseas, and over 50% are themselves or have a parent born overseas (ABS, 2022). More than 25% speak a language other than English at home (ABS, 2022), with Chinese (Mandarin), Arabic, Vietnamese, Cantonese, Punjabi, Greek, Italian, Tagalog, Hindi, and Spanish being the most common (ABS, 2022). The Australian Government supports Community Languages Australia in projects to 'improve early learning' through 'supporting access to quality community languages programs' (Community Languages Australia, 2023).

The research literature is also unequivocal on the cognitive, learning, and sociocultural benefits of bilingualism for young learners (Morgan et al, 2022). All children benefit from multilingual environments, and bilingual learning opportunities (Bialystok, 2011).

In this context of Australian linguistic and cultural diversity, achieving universal access and utilisation of 3-year-old preschool must reference the language(s) to be used in preschools. Extensive literature on bilingual preschools points to the benefits for communities and children, as mother tongue, home and community languages are used, revitalised and maintained, alongside English. Families that might not otherwise access preschool services experience a sense of belonging when their language is spoken at the preschool. Australians who speak only English also benefit from and frequently elect to offer their children the opportunity to experience preschool in two languages.

Bilingual preschools ideally have bilingual staff, including registered teachers and support staff, who can engage with the children in either language. Dedicated time for learning in both languages is also provided, while recognising the need for play-based approaches, and allowing the children agency in their own learning, activity and language choices.

Where there may be difficulty in sourcing registered teachers and support staff who are also speakers of additional languages, several models for providing bilingual learning are used. One is the addition of a speaker of the additional language above staff allocation for the preschool, providing 7 hours (of total 15 hours/week preschool hours) of bilingual support. A 'lighter touch' version of this approach is providing an additional bilingual speaker for 3 or 4 hours, across one or two days of the program. More contacts a week is better than a single occasion for improving proficiency (Morgan et al, 2022).

Preschools need to respond to local community needs, in determining which languages are used in the preschool. Communities should determine these decisions. When communities are self-determining, take-up of and commitment to programs increases. Remote and regional communities

---

<sup>1</sup> Supporting Bilingualism, Multilingualism and Language Learning in the Early Years

should also be offered this same choice, while recognising that not all languages of the community may be possible. Indigenous languages, and the most spoken community languages (e.g. Chinese, Arabic, Vietnamese, Greek, Punjabi, Hindi, Italian and Spanish) should be prioritised.

Some examples of quality bilingual preschools include:

- Almost French Early Learning Centre (French, Victoria) <http://www.almostfrench.com.au>
- Doris Blackburn Preschool Centre (Chinese, Victoria)  
<https://www.dorisblackburnpreschool.vic.edu.au/our-program>
- Amigoss Preschool and Long Day Care (Spanish, NSW) <https://amigosspreschool.com.au/wp/>
- Caulfield Primary Early Childhood Centre (Japanese, Victoria)  
<https://www.caulfieldps.vic.edu.au/page/247/Early-Childhood-Centre---Kindergarten>

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care.