

PRESCHOOL ENROLMENT POLICY

Policy Reference No.	POL/188
File No.	HCC10/599
Strategic Objective	1.1: Support and enhance skill development and educational opportunities to reduce disadvantage, improve employment prospects and quality of life
Adopted by Council	November 2011
Re-Adopted	10 July 2017
Date Reviewed	17 April 2019
Next Review	April 2024
Responsible Officer	Coordinator Children's Services
Department	Family, Youth & Children's Services

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1 POLICY STATEMENT

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that preschool places are allocated in a manner which ensures equity of access and demonstrates a transparent administrative process.

2 PURPOSE

- 2.1 The purpose and guiding principles of the Preschool Enrolment Policy (the Policy) are:
- 2.2 Preschool, also known as Kindergarten, is a universal early childhood program which is partially funded by the State Government for children in the year prior to commencing primary school. Under the Early Start Kindergarten Program, the State Government provides funded preschool to eligible three-year-old children of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent or children known to Child Protection. The Access to Early Learning Program is funded by the State Government to include 3-year-old children in 4-Year-old preschool, identified as meeting a number of vulnerability criteria.
- 2.3 Local Government, community organisations, schools, non-profit organisations and private operators are providers of preschool programs. Hume City Council currently provides the majority of preschool services in the municipality.
- 2.4 Preschool programs engage children in quality early learning experiences in community and centre-based environments. Research shows that quality early childhood education has a positive influence on longer-term educational and social outcomes, particularly for children experiencing educational and social disadvantage.
- 2.5 Families in Hume City have access to information, and a choice of high quality, flexible children services.
- 2.6 Collaboration between Council, community service providers, families and children enable Council to share knowledge and strengths and to plan and deliver seamless services.

3 SCOPE

- 3.1 In accordance with the Department of Education and Training Kindergarten Funding Guide, which detail funding and priority of access requirements for funded preschool in Victoria, one year of subsidised preschool is available to all children who turn four years of age on or before April 30 in the year of preschool attendance.
- 3.2 These children will not have attended 4-year-old preschool previously unless approved by the Department of Education and Training. As per the Kindergarten Funding Guide, Early Start Kindergarten and the Access to Early Learning Program is available to eligible children who turn three years of age on or before 30 April of the year of preschool attendance.

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4 OBJECTIVE

- 4.1 To facilitate the placement of children into preschools through a streamlined enrolment system.
- 4.2 To provide details of the eligibility criteria for applications, the prioritisation and reservation of places; timelines for lodging of applications and its procedures.
- 4.3 To ensure placements and procedures are in alignment with State Government policy directions, legislation, and funding criteria and accountability (including fee subsidies).
- 4.4 To ensure placements are provided according to the priority of access requirements detailed in the Kindergarten Funding Guide.

5 POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

5.1 Eligibility Criteria

- 5.1.1 In accordance with the Kindergarten Funding Guide, one year of subsidised preschool is available to all children who turn four years of age on or before April 30 in the year of preschool attendance.
- 5.1.2 These children will not have attended 4-year-old preschool previously unless approved by the Department of Education and Training.
- 5.1.3 In accordance with the Kindergarten Funding Guide, Early Start Kindergarten and the Access to Early Learning Program is available to eligible children of three years of age on or before 30 April of the year of preschool attendance.

5.2 Application Timelines

- 5.2.1 Applications can be made up to two years in advance. Children must turn two years of age on or by April 30 the year they apply. Applications open from March 1 (or the following business day) each year for placements two years hence.
- 5.2.2 To be eligible for consideration in the first round of offers, applications must be lodged at Council by 5.00pm June 30 (or previous business day) the year prior to attendance.

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5.2.3 Information on how to apply will be available on Council's website. Allocation of placements will be made in accordance with priority categories and date of receipt of the application.

5.2.4 Council cannot guarantee applicants will receive a Preschool place. Conditions in regard to the number of available preschool places and securing State Government funding will apply.

5.3 How to Apply

5.3.1 Application forms are available from the following locations:

- a) All Council operated preschools, and Childcare Centres.
- b) All Hume City Council customer service centres.
- c) Hume City Council website.

5.3.2 Application forms must be returned with the following relevant documents in order to be accepted and processed:

- a) Proof of child's age (such as the child's birth certificate, Australian Immunisation Record (AIR) or passport) and,
- b) One of the following to show proof of address (rates, gas or electricity bills or drivers licence) and:
- c) Non-refundable application fee, as detailed on the application form; or,
- d) If the child or family hold an eligible concession card as outlined in 5.17.11, the family is eligible to receive a fee subsidy from the State Government and they are not required to pay the application fee and/or term fee, so long as a current and valid card is provided to Council that covers from time of registration to the completion of the child's preschool year. Should the card expire during any part of the child's preschool year, it is the responsibility of the parents /guardians to produce another valid card, otherwise full fees are payable. A copy of the card must be provided.

5.3.3 In the case of multiple birth, an application form needs to be completed for each child indicating that the child is being registered along with his or her sibling as part of a multiple birth on the application form. A separate application fee is payable for each application submitted.

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5.3.4 Application forms can be submitted in any of the following ways. Forms must be complete and include all documentation in order to be processed:

- a) In person at one of Council's Customer Service Offices
- b) Via mail to PO Box 119 Dallas 3047

Application fees are payable via Cheque, Money Order, Credit Card or Cash at any Customer Service Centre or via cheque or money order if submitted via mail. Application fees do not apply where a valid Concession Card (as per clause 5.17.11) is attached to the application form.

5.3.5 Receipts will be issued to applicants and should be retained as evidence of application.

5.3.6 Children enrolled in three-year-old activity programs at Council's facilities are not automatically eligible for a place in four-year-old preschool. Families must submit a Preschool Application form and enrolment will be determined through the preschool enrolment application process.

5.4 Application Priorities

5.4.1 For children who turn four years of age on or before 30th April in the year they are to attend preschool, places will be allocated based on the priority category and on date of receipt of application — with the priority categories being:

Priority	Criteria	Process that could be used to verify need(s)
Priority 1	Children at risk of abuse or neglect, including children in Out-of-Home Care	The child is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attending a three-year-old kindergarten program through Early Start Kindergarten or Access to Early Learning, or is • referred by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Child Protection - Child and Family Services (family services referral and support team, Child FIRST /integrated family services /Services Connect case worker) - Maternal and Child Health nurse, or - Out-of-Home Care provider. Written referrals from Child Protection / Child FIRST / Community Case Workers may be requested.
	Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children	No evidence required.
	Asylum seeker and refugee children	An appropriate visa identifies the child and/or parents as a refugee or asylum seeker.

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	Children eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A child or parent holds a <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commonwealth Health Care Card, Pensioner Concession Card, Veteran's Affairs Card, or • Multiple birth children (triplets, quadruplets).
	Children with additional needs, defined as children who: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • require additional assistance in order to fully participate in the kindergarten program • require a combination of services which are individually planned • have an identified specific disability or developmental delay 	The child is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assessed as having delays in two or more areas and is declared eligible for a second funded year of kindergarten • holds a Child Disability Health Care Card • has previously been approved for Kindergarten Inclusion Support Package, or referred by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the National Disability Insurance Scheme • Early Childhood Intervention Service • Preschool Field Officer, or • Maternal and Child Health nurse.
Priority 2	Children of Hume City residents and rate payers	Attachment of evidence of living in Hume City, e.g. driver's license, rates notice, contract of construction.
Priority 3	Children of Non-Hume City residents	No supporting documentation required.

5.4.2 Evidence of eligibility for children with additional needs can be submitted up until 30 June of the year prior to attendance, if eligibility is not known at the time of initial registration.

5.4.3 Children of non-Hume City residents may not receive an offer until after the third round of offers.

5.5 Reserved Places

5.5.1 Families who have children who are eligible for a second year of preschool are required to submit a Second Year of Preschool Application form in order to access a reserved place.

5.5.2 A Preschool place will be reserved at the centre indicated on the Second Year of Preschool Application form.

5.5.3 A Second Year of Preschool Application form must be submitted for children deemed eligible, provided the child has met the eligibility criteria and it has been approved by the Early Childhood Teacher, to attend a second year of preschool. This must be lodged with Council by 30 June in the year of the child's first year of preschool.

5.5.4 A reserved place will be allocated for children who received an offer of a preschool placement the previous year, but elected to defer. The reserved place will be allocated at the centre that the offer was made.

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- 5.5.5** Reserved places will be available for allocation until the end of December prior to the commencement of the first term of preschool in the following year. The unallocated reserved places may then be released for those on the waiting list according to priority of access outlined in 5.4.1.

5.6 Late Applications

- 5.6.1** Applications will continue to be received after June 30 the year prior to attendance.
- 5.6.2** Late applications may be included in the first round of offers, in accordance with the priority of access and date of applications.
- 5.6.3** If no places are available, the applicant will be placed on the waiting list according to priority and date of receipt.

5.7 Changes to application details

- 5.7.1** When applicants wish to alter their original preschool preferences, a Change of Registration form needs to be completed and lodged at Council's customer service centres, or sent via mail to PO Box 119 Dallas, 3047 or via email to preschool@hume.vic.gov.au.
- 5.7.2** The Changes to Registration form must be lodged with Council by Close of Business of June 30 (or previous business day) the year prior to attendance in order to be considered in the first round of offers, and in order to maintain the original registration date.
- 5.7.3** Changes to preschool preferences lodged with Council after June 30 will result in a new application date being issued, which will be the date the change of details was lodged with Council. Minor changes to registrations such as change of family address will retain the original application date.

5.8 Commencement of Offers

- 5.8.1** All applications will be allocated according to priority and the receipt date upon submission of application.
- 5.8.2** Refer to clauses 5.2.2 and 5.4.1 in regard to lodgement date for first round offers and late applications.

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5.8.3 Where application numbers exceed the number of places available at the first preference preschool, applicants will be allocated their second or third preference based on availability of places. If there are no places available at any stated preferences, then the applicant will remain on the waiting list for the preschool preferences nominated on the registration form.

5.8.4 Placement offers will be made in writing to applicants by the end of Term 3 each year. A written response will be required within a nominated time frame.

5.9 Review of the remaining places

5.9.1 Offers are ongoing and will continue to be made until all placements are filled, including once the Preschool year commences.

5.9.2 Any children who remain on the waiting list after all places have been allocated; will be offered a placement appropriate to their priority as soon as a vacancy occurs at one of their preferred preschools.

5.9.3 Council aims to operate each preschool at viable occupancy rates according to State Government's funding requirements, which requires a minimum number of enrolments for each preschool program.

5.10 Responses to Offers

5.10.1 Applicants can select one of the following choices:

- a) Accept the preschool place that is on offer. Once a place has been accepted, applicants cannot remain on the waiting list for another preschool.
- b) Decline the offer of the preschool place and be placed on a waiting list for their preferred preschools as listed on their application form.
- c) Defer their child's placement to the following preschool year.
- d) Cancel their application.

5.10.2 Applicants must select in writing one of the responses above and respond by the date stipulated on the letter in order for the response to be processed.

5.10.3 Where no response is received by Council within the specified timeframe as stated in the letter of offer, the child's place will be cancelled. When families contact Council later than the required

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response date, their child will be reinstated to the waiting list with the appropriate priority, and with a new registration date.

- 5.10.4** When an applicant requests their child to be placed on a waiting list of their preferred preschools, they must forego any other place offered. The child is placed on the waiting list of their preferred centres according to category of priority. At this time, the applicant may request preferences be removed from their application, if their preferred preschool is listed as their second or third preference. Placement is not guaranteed at the preferred centre.

5.11 Deferral

- 5.11.1** In accordance with the Kindergarten Funding Guide and its successor agreements, an enrolment may be deferred within term 1, provided the registration has not been recorded on the DET Kindergarten Information Management System.
- 5.11.2** Families wishing to defer their enrolment should speak with the Preschool as soon as possible to discuss their child's readiness for preschool.
- 5.11.3** Families should complete a deferral form, whereby their enrolment will be re-offered the following year, with the application maintaining its original application date.
- 5.11.4** Deferrals are unable to be submitted after the registration has been submitted on the Kindergarten Information System.
- 5.11.5** After a deferral form is submitted, families may submit a 3 year old Activity Group application for that year, however, a new application date will be recorded for this application and there is no guarantee of a placement within this program.
- 5.11.6** A deferral can only be submitted where a preschool placement offer was made or accepted and the child has already attended in Term 1.

5.12 Second Year of preschool

- 5.12.1** A second year of preschool is only available to children who meet the eligibility criteria as set by the State Government.
- 5.12.2** Families identified as eligible to enrol in a second year of preschool must submit an application form before 30 June to be considered in the

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first round of offers. The application fee will not be payable in these circumstances.

5.12.3 Places will be reserved at the family's preschool of first preference.

5.12.4 Applications received after 30 June will be treated as a late application, however, will be given priority according to clauses 5.4 and 5.6.

5.13 Children who will turn six years of age during the preschool year

5.13.1 Children who turn six years of age during the preschool year must be exempted from attending school.

5.13.2 Parents need to apply for an exemption before the child starts preschool by filling in the appropriate State Government documentation.

5.13.3 If an exemption has not been granted by State Government, Council will not be in a position to accept the child into preschool.

5.14 Transfer of preschool places

5.14.1 Once a place has been allocated to a child, the child's place is not generally transferable between preschool centres. If an applicant believes their circumstances are exceptional, they may write to the Manager Family, Youth and Children's Services asking for consideration of their request.

5.14.2 Each request will be taken on its merit and considered in relation to the available vacancies and current waiting lists. There is no guarantee of transfer.

5.15 Children with additional needs

5.15.1 Children with additional needs are encouraged and welcomed to access Hume City Council's preschools.

5.15.2 Additional support is available to be provided to children with additional needs, families and services through the Preschool Field Officer program.

5.15.3 Applicants are encouraged to notify Council of their child's additional needs on the application form. This will help ensure that appropriate supports will be put in place for the child.

5.15.4 If the child has subsequently been identified with additional needs after registration, a letter of support as detailed in 5.4.3 is to be provided to Council in order to be considered as a priority 1.

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5.15.5 Disclosing your child's additional needs will not disadvantage your child's application.

5.16 Application Fees

5.16.1 Application fees for all children who are enrolling under Priority 1 (5.4.1) will be waived to reduce barriers to enrolment,

5.16.2 Children eligible to receive a preschool fee subsidy from the State Government will also have their application fee waived upon presentation of a valid Concession Card (see section 5.17.11 for eligibility).

5.16.3 Council's preschool services at times conduct special enrolment sessions within Hume City and on these occasions, it will be at the discretion of the Manager Family, Youth and Children Services to waive application fees.

5.17 Preschool Fees

5.17.1 The annual fee is determined each year as part of Council's budget and is charged on a termly basis. The rate of fees is dependent on the receipt of State Government grants and contributions and other influences on the service.

5.17.2 Successful applicants (now service users) will be notified of fee changes in a timely manner.

5.17.3 The term fee is charged regardless of attendance of the child during the term. However the families wishing to present exceptional circumstances for consideration in a fee review can put their request in writing to the Manager Family, Youth & Children's Services for consideration.

5.17.4 Pro rata fees or refunds do not apply where the service user withdraws from the program during the term, or where the family fail to notify the Preschool Enrolment officer of their withdrawal prior to the term commencing.

5.17.5 Full fees apply where a service user accepts an offer of placement/commences preschool part way through the term.

5.17.6 Term fees are required to be paid prior to commencement in the program and prior to each term, in order to continue to access the program. Non-payment of fees may impact upon access to other programs operated by Council.

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- 5.17.7** Families with twins or two children of different ages both attending four-year-old preschool in the same year shall be entitled to a fee discount of 50% of the term fee of the second child.
- 5.17.8** Families experiencing difficulties in paying fees are encouraged to discuss this with the preschool accounts officer. Fee payment plans can be established in consultation with Council's Finance Department. Service users are required to adhere to these plans.
- 5.17.9** Council will contact service users who are in arrears in order to rectify the situation through a range of actions, which may include payment options or suspension of service.
- 5.17.10** A placement may be held open for the term if full payment of fees is received or a valid Concession Card is presented, however this will be at the discretion of Council and consideration given to preschool demand (refer to 5.17.3 regarding payment of term fees).
- 5.17.11** In accordance with the Kindergarten Funding Guide, no preschool fees apply to families where evidence is provided that the child individually holds, or has a parent or guardian who holds one of the following current and valid cards/visas:
- a Commonwealth Health Care Card
 - a Commonwealth Pensioner Concession Card
 - a Department of Veterans' Affairs Gold Card or White Card
 - Refugee visa (subclass 200)
 - In-country Special Humanitarian visa (subclass 201)
 - Global Special Humanitarian visa (subclass 202)
 - Temporary Humanitarian Concern visa (subclass 786)
 - Protection visa (subclass 866)
 - Emergency Rescue visa (subclass 203)
 - Woman at risk visa (subclass 204)
 - Bridging visas A-E.
- 5.17.12** Council needs to be provided with a copy of a current and valid concession card, visa, travel document or letter of visa status and record its expiry date.

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5.17.13 If the concession card expires during the course of the preschool year, it is the service user's responsibility to provide the new card in order to be eligible for the fee discount. Concession cards must be presented before the end of the child's preschool year of attendance in order to be accepted (i.e., 31 December).

5.17.14 No preschool fees apply to families where the child is:

- a) Identified by a parent, carer or legal guardian as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- b) Identified on their birth certificate as being a multiple birth child, being triplets or more.
- c) An Early Start Kindergarten enrolment,
- d) An Early Start Kindergarten Extension Enrolment,
- e) An Access to Early Learning Enrolment.

5.18 Refunds

5.18.1 Application fees are non-refundable.

5.18.2 Service users, who withdraw from their preschool placement, will forfeit the fees paid to Council for that term, and will be liable for term fees in accordance with 5.17.4.

5.18.3 Pro rata fees or refunds do not apply where the service user withdraws from the program during the term, or where the family fail to notify the Preschool Enrolment officer of their withdrawal prior to the term commencing.

5.18.4 In exceptional circumstances, requests for refunds must be made in writing with copies of receipts forwarded to the Manager Family, Youth and Children's Services. Decisions will be made at the discretion of the Manager.

5.18.5 Service users who receive preschool fee subsidies from the State Government are not entitled to a refund of remaining fees.

5.19 Preschool operational sessions

5.19.1 Preschool operational session days and times and enrolment numbers will be reviewed annually as part of the allocation process and DET funding confirmation.

5.19.2 Sessions may vary from year to year at each centre. Council may make alterations to any preschool session dependant on applications or individual centre numbers at any time.

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5.19.3 Consultations will take place from time to time to ensure services continue to be responsive to the needs of the community.

5.19.4 Once enrolled, each child will generally be able to access fifteen hours of preschool per week during school terms.

5.20 Sessions and groups within preschools

5.20.1 For offers accepted in offer rounds 1-3, applicants will be informed of the proposed preschool sessions and timetable at each centre and requested to indicate their preferred group/s.

5.20.2 For offers accepted after round 3, applicants may be allocated to the remaining places within groups; however, Council officers will endeavour to consult with families where there are vacancies across the groups.

5.20.3 Council officers will endeavour to give applicants their preferences; however it cannot guarantee applicants will receive their preferred session or group within the centre.

6 DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

6.1 Preschool

Preschool is an interchangeable term for Kindergarten (the term Kindergarten is used by State Government) and is a universal early childhood program which is funded by the State Government for 4 year old children in the year prior to commencing primary school.

6.2 Second Year

A second year of preschool is approved and funded by State Government for children who meet the eligibility criteria for a second funded year of preschool.

6.3 Early Start Kindergarten Program

Early Start Kindergarten enable eligible children to access a preschool program in the year two years before school where the child is Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander or for children known to Child Protection or referred to Child FIRST/Integrated Family Services.

6.4 Access to Early Learning Program

The Access to Early Learning Program enables eligible children (who turn 3 years old by the 30th April in the year of attendance) to access a preschool program in the year before their funded 4 year old preschool program, where the family meet two of the following eligibility criteria, Known to Child Protection, Mental Health issues, Family Violence, Sexual Assault, Alcohol/ Drug Abuse, Physical or intellectual disability or trauma.

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6.5 Newly Arrived Families

Newly arrived families are defined as families who have arrived in Australia and moved into Hume City not before 1 July of the year prior to attendance.

6.6 Children with additional needs

The Preschool Field Officer program is available to services, families and children to provide assistance to support the inclusion, learning and development of children with additional needs.

7 RELATED DOCUMENTS

- Early Childhood Programs and Services Guide December 2015
- Early Childhood Agreement for Children in Out-of-Home Care
- Education and Care National Law Act 2010
- Education and Care National Law Regulations 2011
- Equal Opportunity Act (Victoria) 1995
- Kindergarten Funding Guide
- Memorandum of Understanding for non-Council Preschools participating in the Hume Central Enrolment Scheme
- Supplementary documents to the Kindergarten Funding Guide
- Children's Services Procedure Manual
- All About Preschool Guide (currently under development)

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