

3 YEAR OLD ACTIVITY GROUP ENROLMENT POLICY

Policy Reference No.	POL/144
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	13 May 2013
Re-Adopted	13 November 2017
Date for Review	June 2021
Responsible Officer	Manager Family, Youth and Children's Services
Department	Family, Youth and Children's Services

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1 POLICY STATEMENT

- 1.1 The purpose of this policy is to ensure that 3 Year Old Activity Group places are allocated in a transparent and accessible manner.
- 1.2 Hume City Council is a child safe organisation with zero tolerance for child abuse. Council adheres to the Victorian Child Safe Standards and related legislation. Council acknowledges the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of all children, especially children from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, or culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and those with a disability.

2 PURPOSE

- 2.1 This 3 Year Old Activity Group Enrolment Policy (the Policy) is underpinned by the goals set by the Hume Early Years Framework 2014 – 2018 which include that:
 - 2.1.1 3 Year Activity Group programs engage children in quality learning experiences in a community and centre-based environment. Research shows that quality early childhood education exerts a positive influence on longer-term educational and social outcomes, particularly for children experiencing educational and social disadvantage;
 - 2.1.2 Families in Hume City have access to information, and a choice of high quality, flexible children's services;
 - 2.1.3 The service system recognises community diversity, can respond to particular needs and encourage participation;
 - 2.1.4 Collaboration between Council, community service providers, families and children enables Council to share knowledge and strengths and to plan and deliver seamless services;
 - 2.1.5 Families have access to family-friendly infrastructure, which is flexible and adaptable.

3 SCOPE

- 3.1 3 year old Activity Groups are provided to children who turn three years of age on or before April 30 in the year of attendance.

4 OBJECTIVE

- 4.1 Facilitate the placement of children into 3 year old Activity Groups through a central enrolment system.
- 4.2 Provide details of the eligibility criteria for applications, the prioritisation and reservation of places; time lines for lodging of applications and its procedures.

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5 POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

5.1 Eligibility Criteria

- 5.1.1 The 3 year old Activity Group is available to all children who turn three years of age on or before April 30 in the year of attendance.
- 5.1.2 Children who turn three years of age between the commencement of term one and April 30 are only able to participate in the program with a parent or guardian and will remain in the care and under the responsibility of the parent or guardian.
- 5.1.3 Council reserves the right to limit the number of children participating in the program with a parent or guardian in order to ensure the quality and supervision of the program is not compromised through the volume of adults in the room.

5.2 Enrolment Timelines

- 5.2.1 Enrolment applications can be made up to one year in advance. Enrolments open on March 1 (or the following business day) each year for placements one year hence.
- 5.2.2 Children must turn two years of age on or before April 30 the year they enrol.
- 5.2.3 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. Advertisements to enrol will appear each year in a variety of locations including Council Early Years Services, the Council website and the Customer Service Centres.
- 5.2.4 Allocation of placements will be made in accordance with priority categories and date of receipt.
- 5.2.5 Council cannot guarantee applicants will receive an offer, or a place at their preferred location.

5.3 How to Apply

- 5.3.1 Application forms are available from the following locations:
 - a) Council operated preschools, childcare and Maternal and Child Health Centres.
 - b) Hume City Council customer service centres.
 - c) Hume City Council website.
- 5.3.2 Application forms can be posted or returned to one of Council's Customer Services Centres with a copy of the following relevant documents:
 - a) Proof of child's age (such as the child's birth certificate)
 - b) Proof of address (such as rates, gas or electricity bills or driver's licence)

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- 5.3.3 In the case of multiple births (such as twins, triplets or quadruplets), an application form needs to be completed for each child and indicate that it is part of a multiple birth on the application form.
- 5.3.4 The application needs to enclose non-refundable administration fee as detailed on the application form (posted with money order or cheque) or be paid in person at one of the Council's Customer Service Centres when application is submitted.
- 5.3.5 Receipts will be issued to applicants as evidence of enrolment.
- 5.3.6 Children enrolled in three year old Activity Group programs at Council's preschools are not automatically eligible for a place in four year old preschool. Enrolment in four year old preschool will be determined in accordance with the Preschool Enrolment Policy.

5.4 Late Applications

- 5.4.1 Applications will continue to be received after June 30 the year prior to attendance, but will be deemed as a late application.
- 5.4.2 Late applications will be allocated to available Activity Group places after the first round of offers are completed. If no places are available, the applicant will be placed on the waiting list according to priority and date receipt.

5.5 Changes to application details

- 5.5.1 When applicants wish to alter their original enrolment details, a Change of Details Form needs to be completed and lodged at Council's Customer Service Centres.
- 5.5.2 Changes must be lodged with Council by June 30 (or previous business day) the year prior to attendance in order to be considered in the next round of offers.
- 5.5.3 Changes of preferences lodged with Council after June 30 will result in a new application date; which will be the date the Change of Details Form was lodged with Council. Minor changes such as change of address will retain the original application date.

5.6 Application priorities

- 5.6.1 For children who turn three years of age on or before 30th April in the year they are to attend three year old Activity Group, places will be allocated based on the priority category and on date of receipt of application - with the priority categories being:

- a) **Priority 1** - Children of Hume City residents who are identified by parent, carer or guardian as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent.
- b) **Priority 2** - Children of Hume City residents and rate payers.
- c) **Priority 3** - Children of Non Hume City residents.

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5.7 First Round Allocations

- 5.7.1 All applications will be allocated according to priority and the receipt date upon submission of application.
- 5.7.2 Refer to clauses 5.2.1 and 5.2.2 in regard to lodgement date for first round offers and late applications.
- 5.7.3 Where application numbers exceed the number of places available at the first preference location, applicants will be allocated their second, and then third preference based on availability of places. If there are no places available at all stated locations, then the applicant will be placed on a waiting list at their preferred locations.

5.8 Review of the remaining places

- 5.8.1 A review of the remaining places will take place, which includes applications on the waiting lists and applications received after the 30th June the year prior to attendance.
- 5.8.2 Applications will be allocated to available places according to category of priority and date receipt. If no places are available, applicants will be placed on waiting lists according to priority.

5.9 Offer of Placement

- 5.9.1 Placement offers will be made in writing to applicants, commencing between August and October of the prior preschool year. A written response will be required within a nominated time frame.
- 5.9.2 Children not offered a placement in the first round remain on the waiting list for the centres of their preference in order of priority and receipt date. A review of available Activity Group placements will be conducted after first round offers.
- 5.9.3 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 their preferred locations.

5.10 Responses to Offers

- 5.10.1 Applicants can make one of the following choices:
- Accept the Activity Group place that is on offer;
 - Refuse the offer of the Activity Group place and request to remain on the waiting list for the centres identified in their preferences;
 - Cancel their application.

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5.10.2 Where no response is received by Council within the specified time frame as stated in the letter of offer, the child's place will be cancelled. When families contact Council later than the required response date, their child will be reinstated to the waiting list with the appropriate priority.

5.10.3 When an applicant requests their child be placed on a waiting list of their preferred location, they must forego any other place offered. The child is placed on the waiting list of their preferred centre according to category of priority. Placement is not guaranteed at the preferred centre.

5.11 3 Year old Activity Group age requirements

5.11.1 3 Year Old Activity Groups are operated and staffed in accordance with the child to staff ratios of the Education and Care National Law Act 2010 and Regulations 2011 for children aged three and over. Different staffing requirements are legislated for children under three years of age.

5.11.2 Children who turn three years of age between the commencement of term one and April 30 are able to accept a placement and, in consultation with educators, are able to participate in the program whilst supervised by a parent or guardian.

5.11.3 The child/ren will remain in the care and under the responsibility of the parent or guardian for the duration of the child's participation in the program prior to their third birthday.

5.11.4 Full term fees will apply where a placement has been accepted including where the child has not yet turned three years of age or where a placement has been accepted and the child does not commence until their third birthday.

5.11.5 Children are able to attend the program without remaining in the care of a parent or guardian in the session on or after their third birthday.

5.12 Children with additional needs

5.12.1 Children with additional needs are welcome to access Hume City Council's Activity Groups.

5.12.2 Applicants should notify Council of their child's additional needs on the application form in order to assist educators to prepare for individual children's needs within the program.

5.13 Application Fees

5.13.1 Application fees for Activity Groups are not subsidised by the State Government and fee discounts are not applicable on presentation of a Concession card.

5.13.2 Council's Children's Services at times conduct special enrolment sessions within Hume City and on these occasions it will be at the discretion of the Manager Family,

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Youth and Children's Services to waive application fees in order to enhance the receipt of applications for enrolment.

5.14 Activity Group Fees

- 5.14.1 Fees are determined each year as part of Council's budget. The fee amounts charged are dependent upon the operating costs of the program and other influences on the service.
- 5.14.2 Successful applicants (now service users) will be notified of fee changes in a timely manner.
- 5.14.3 The yearly fee is charged on a termly basis and all fees are payable in advance for the term. Service users are notified when payments are due
- 5.14.4 The term fee is charged regardless of attendance of the child during the term. However families wishing to present exceptional circumstances for consideration in a fee review can put their request in writing to the Manager Family, Youth and Children's Services for consideration.
- 5.14.5 The term fee is charged regardless of when the child commences within the term.
- 5.14.6 Term fees are required to be paid prior to commencement in the program and prior to each term. Non-payment of fees may have an impact on access to the 3 year old Activity Group programs and other programs operated by Council.
- 5.14.7 Families having difficulties in paying fees are encouraged to discuss this with the relevant Activity Group staff. Fee payment plans can be established in consultation with Council's Finance Department. Service users are required to adhere to these plans.
- 5.14.8 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 cancellation of enrolment.
- 5.14.9 A placement can be held open if full payment of fees is received for that place for the term, however this will be at the discretion of Council if there is strong demand for Activity Group places.

5.15 Refunds

- 5.15.1 Application fees are not refundable.
- 5.15.2 Service users who withdraw from their Activity Group placement will forfeit the fees paid to Council for that term.
- 5.15.3 Requests for refunds can be made in exceptional circumstances. Refund requests must be made in writing with copies of receipts forwarded to the appropriate Council staff member.

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5.15.4 Where the exceptional circumstances have been identified, the remainder of the fees paid may be credited to the service user.

5.16 Activity Group operational sessions

5.16.1 Activity Group operational sessions and enrolment numbers will be reviewed annually as part of the allocation process. Sessions may vary from year to year at each centre. Council may make alterations to any Activity Group session dependent on applications or individual centre numbers at any time.

5.16.2 Consultations will take place from time to time to ensure services respond to the demand of the majority of applications.

5.17 Sessions and groups within Activity Groups

5.17.1 Where more than one group operates at a centre, families will be informed of the proposed group and session times and will be given the opportunity to indicate their group preferences.

5.17.2 Staff will endeavour to give applicants their preferences, however it is not guaranteed that applicants will be given their preferred session or group within the centre.

5.17.3 Staff will place children into Centre groups and inform families of the orientation process.

6 DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

3 year old Activity Group: 3 year old Activity Group is an interchangeable term for Activity Group and is an educational program funded by Council and offered to 3 year old children, generally in the year prior to 4 year old preschool.

7 RELATED DOCUMENTS

- Children's Services Act 1996
- Children's Services Regulations 2011
- Equal Opportunity Act (Victoria) 1995
- Education and Care National Law Act 2010
- Education and Care National Law Regulations 2011

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