

FEES POLICY

Quality Area 7

PURPOSE

This policy will provide clear guidelines for:

- the setting, payment and collection of fees
- ensuring the viability of Hume City Council Early Years Services, by setting appropriate fees and charges
- the equitable and non-discriminatory application of fees across the programs provided by Hume City Council.

POLICY STATEMENT

VALUES

Hume City Council is committed to:

- providing responsible financial management of the service, including establishing fees that will result in a financially viable service, while keeping user fees at the lowest possible level
- providing a fair and manageable system for dealing with non-payment and/or inability to pay fees/outstanding debts
- ensuring there are no financial barriers for families wishing to access an early childhood program for their child/children
- maintaining confidentiality in relation to the financial circumstances of parents/guardians
- advising users of the service about program funding, including government support and fees to be paid by parents/guardians
- providing equitable access for families eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy.

SCOPE

This policy applies to the Approved Provider, Person with Management and Control, Nominated Supervisor, Person in Day-to-Day Charge, educators and parents/guardians with an enrolled child, or who wish to enrol a child at any Hume City Council Early Years Service.

BACKGROUND AND LEGISLATION

BACKGROUND

The Department of Education and Training (DET) provides funding for each child who is enrolled and attending a funded kindergarten program in the year before school. Income from other sources, primarily fees, is required to meet all the additional costs incurred by the service in the delivery of the children's program. In addition, the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (refer to Definitions) enables eligible children to attend a funded kindergarten program free of charge in the year before school.

DET also funds Early Start Kindergarten for three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children known to Child Protection, to access kindergarten programs as outlined in The Kindergarten Funding Guide (refer to Sources).

Regulation 168(2) (n) of Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011 requires that funded services have a comprehensive written fees policy, and the content of this policy must be communicated to families. The policy must include a written statement about the fees to be charged and the payment process. All families must be informed of applicable term and annual fees at the time of enrolment. Services must also advise eligible families of the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy arrangements. The fees charged must comply with the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy requirements (refer to Definitions), and be responsive to the local community and the viability of the service. The Kindergarten Funding Guide (refer to Sources) outlines the criteria to be covered in the policy.

LEGISLATION AND STANDARDS

- Relevant legislation and standards include but are not limited to:
- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006 (Vic)
- Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)
- Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)
- Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010
- Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011: Regulation 168(2)(n)
- Equal Opportunity Act 1995 (Vic)
- National Quality Standard, including Quality Area 7: Governance and Leadership

DEFINITIONS

The terms defined in this section relate specifically to this policy. For commonly used terms e.g. Approved Provider, Nominated Supervisor, Regulatory Authority etc. refer to the General Definitions section of this manual.

Application fee: A payment to cover administrative costs associated with the processing of a child's application for a place in a program at the service.

Approved child care: Approved child care services are services that have Australian Government approval to receive the Child Care Subsidy (refer to Definitions) on behalf of eligible parents. Approved child care includes centre based day care, including long day care and occasional care, family day care, outside school hours care and in home care.

Child Care Subsidy (CCS): A Commonwealth Government means tested subsidy to assist eligible families with the cost of child care. Payments are paid directly to approved child care providers. Further information can be found at: <https://www.education.gov.au/child-care-subsidy-0>

Early Start Kindergarten: A funding program that enables three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children known to Child Protection to attend a kindergarten program that is planned and delivered by an early childhood teacher for up to 15 hours per week. Details are available at: www.education.vic.gov.au

Fees: A charge for a place within a program at the service.

Health Care Card: A Commonwealth Government entitlement providing concessions for low-income earners and other eligible people. Details are available at: www.humanservices.gov.au

Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (KFS): A state government subsidy paid in addition to per capita grants to subsidise the costs of parent fees and enable eligible children to attend a funded kindergarten for 15 hours free of charge (The Kindergarten Funding Guide (refer to Sources)).

Late collection charge: A charge that may be imposed by the Approved Provider when parents/guardians are late to collect their child/children from the program (refer to Attachment 1 – Fee information for families).

SOURCES AND RELATED POLICIES

SOURCES

- The Kindergarten Funding Guide (Department of Education and Training): www.education.vic.gov.au
- Hume City Council Code of Conduct

POLICIES

- Complaints and Grievances Policy
- Delivery and Collection of Children Policy
- Enrolment and Orientation Policy
- Excursions and Incursions Policy
- Inclusion and Equity Policy
- Privacy and Confidentiality Policy

PROCEDURES

The Approved Provider and Persons with Management or Control is responsible for:

- reviewing the current budget to determine fee income requirements
- developing a fee policy that balances the parent's/guardian's capacity to pay, with providing a high-quality program and maintaining service viability
- implementing and reviewing this policy in and ensuring it is in line with the requirements of DET's The Kindergarten Funding Guide (refer to Sources)
- considering any issues regarding fees that may be a barrier to families enrolling at Hume City Council Early Years Services and removing those barriers wherever possible
- reviewing the effectiveness of the procedures for late payment and support offered
- considering options for payment when affordability is an issue for families
- ensuring that the Fees Policy is readily accessible at the service (Regulation 171)
- providing all parents/guardians with fee information (refer to Attachment 1)
- providing all parents/guardians with a statement of fees and charges (refer to samples in Attachments 2 and 3) upon enrolment of their child
- providing all parents/guardians with a fee payment agreement (Complying Written Agreement (CWA) for Long Day Care)
- ensuring fees are collected and receipted
- collecting all relevant information and maintaining relevant documentation regarding those with entitlement to concessions, where applicable
- complying with the service's Privacy and Confidentiality Policy regarding financial and other information received, including in relation to the payment/non-payment of fees
- notifying parents/guardians a minimum of 14 days of any proposed changes to the fees charged or the way in which the fees are collected (Regulation 172(2))

The Nominated Supervisor and Persons in Day to Day Charge is responsible for:

- implementing and reviewing this policy and ensuring it is in line with the requirements of DET's The Kindergarten Funding Guide (refer to Sources)(Long Day Care Only)
- considering any issues regarding fees that may be a barrier to families enrolling at Hume City Council Early Years Services and removing those barriers wherever possible

- considering options for payment when affordability is an issue for families
- providing all parents/guardians with fee information (refer to Attachment 1)(Long Day Care Only)
- providing all parents/guardians with a statement of fees and charges (refer to samples in Attachments 2 and 3) upon enrolment of their child, and ensuring that the Fees Policy is readily accessible at the service (Long Day Care Only)
- providing all parents/guardians with a fee payment agreement (Complying Written Agreement (CWA) for Long Day Care)
- collecting all relevant information and maintaining relevant documents regarding those with entitlement to concessions, where applicable
- complying with the service's Privacy and Confidentiality Policy regarding financial and other information received, including in relation to the payment/non-payment of fees
- notifying parents/guardians within 14 days of any proposed changes to the fees charged or the way in which the fees are collected (Long Day Care Only).

All other staff are responsible for:

- informing the Approved Provider of any complaints or concerns that have been raised regarding fees at the service
- referring parents'/guardians' questions in relation to this policy to the Approved Provider.
- collection of fees for Occasional Care services and collection of concession information for families with children attending kindergarten services (if applicable)

Parents/guardians are responsible for:

- reading the Hume City Council Fee information for families (refer to Attachment 1), the Fee Payment Agreement Complying Written Agreement (CWA) for Long Day Care) and the Statement of Fees and Charges (refer to Attachments 2 and 3)
- signing and complying with the Fee Payment Agreement (Complying Written Agreement (CWA) for Long Day Care)
- notifying the Approved Provider if experiencing difficulties with the payment of fees
- providing the required documentation to enable the service to claim the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy for eligible families (refer to Attachment 1 – Fee information for families).

EVALUATION

In order to assess whether the values and purposes of the policy have been achieved, the Approved Provider will:

- regularly seek feedback from everyone affected by the policy regarding its effectiveness, particularly in relation to affordability, flexibility of payment options and procedures for the collection of fees
- monitor the implementation, compliance, complaints and incidents in relation to this policy
- monitor the number of families/children excluded from the service because of their inability to pay fees
- keep the policy up to date with current legislation, research, policy and best practice
- revise the policy and procedures as part of the service's policy review cycle, or as required
- notify parents/guardians at least 14 days before making any changes to this policy or its procedures (Regulation 172(2)) unless a lesser period is necessary because of a risk.

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1: Fee information for families
- Attachment 2: Fees Invoice for Four Year Old Kindergarten

AUTHORISATION

This policy was adopted by Hume City Council Early Years Services on **31 March 2020**.

REVIEW DATE

31 March 2023.

ATTACHMENT 1: FEE INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES

1. General Information

The Department of Education and Training (DET) provides funding for each child enrolled and attending kindergarten in the year before school as a contribution toward the costs of providing the program. Services meet the balance of costs through charging fees.

DET provides a Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (see below) that enables children from eligible families to attend a kindergarten program free of charge in the year before school.

DET also provides funding to assist eligible three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children known to Child Protection, to access kindergarten programs.

Hume City Council provides a range of support options to parents/guardians experiencing difficulty with payment of fees (see below).

2. How Fees are Set

As part of the budget development process, Hume City Council sets fees each year for the programs of the service, taking into consideration:

- the financial viability of the service
- the level of government funding provided for the program, including the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy
- the availability of other income sources, such as grants
- the fees charged by similar services in the area
- the capacity of parents/guardians to pay fees
- reasonable expenditure in meeting agreed program quality and standards
- requirements of The Kindergarten Funding Guide (Department of Education and Training) available from the DET website: www.education.vic.gov.au

Once fees are set for the year, they will only be reviewed in extraordinary circumstances.

3. Other Charges

Other charges levied by Hume City Council Early Years Services are included on an invoice which is provided to families for payment. Other charges include:

- Late collection charge: Hume City Council reserves the right to implement a late collection charge when parents/guardians are frequently late in collecting a child from the service. This charge will be set at a level determined by Council.

4. Subsidies

4.1 Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (Four Year Old Programs Only)

The Kindergarten Fee Subsidy is provided by DET and enables eligible children to attend 15 hours of kindergarten free of charge. Eligibility conditions may change from time-to-time and must be checked in the most recent edition of the Kindergarten Funding Guide (refer to Sources).

Families may be eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy in the year before school if their child:

- is Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander; or
- holds, or has a parent/guardian who holds a Humanitarian or refugee Visa; or
- is a multiple birth child (triplets or more); or
- holds, or has a parent who holds a Commonwealth Health Care Card, Pensioner Concession Card or Veteran's Affairs Card.

Exclusions and exceptions: Not available for approved child care services in receipt of Commonwealth Child Care Subsidy.

Where a child is identified by a parent, carer or legal guardian as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, no verification is required.

In all other instances, supporting documentation should be sighted by the service on acceptance of a place or on commencement in the program, however where there are delays, such as in obtaining health care cards for children in out-of-home care, the delay should not provide a barrier to the child accessing the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy. Families are eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy for the full term in which their concession is valid. Contact the service for further information.

4.2 Early Start Kindergarten Fee Subsidy

Three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children known to Child Protection are eligible to attend a funded early childhood program that is planned and delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher free of charge. The service receives funding for children who meet the eligibility criteria. Contact the Central Enrolment Officer for further information.

4.3 Child Care Subsidy (CCS)

Child Care Subsidy (CCS) is an Australian Government subsidy that can assist eligible families with the costs of childcare at an approved child care provider. Hume City Council is an approved care provider.

Approved child care are providers that meet certain standards and requirements, and are approved by the Australian Government. Approved child care providers must:

- hold the required approvals or licences to provide child care in the state or territory that the service/s operate in
- ensure the provider and any individual who is or will be a Person with Management or Control of the Provider is fit and a proper person to administer the CCS (requirements set out in Section 194E of A New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999.
- be financially viable and is likely to remain so
- ensure that required fit and proper checks are carried out for each Person with Management or Control of the Provider and Persons with Responsibility for Day-to-Day Operation of the Service

The amount payable is determined by the circumstances of the applicant's including the family income, the hourly rate cap and the hours of activity undertaken by the parents. Further information for parents can be found here: <https://www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/child-care-subsidy>.

Exclusions and exceptions: Not available for providers that primarily provide an early educational program to children in the year that is two years before grade one of school (three or four year old kindergarten).

5. Payment of Fees

Hume City Council will regularly review payment options and procedures to ensure that they are inclusive and sensitive to families' cultural and financial situations.

Fees will be invoiced to parents/guardians directly and must be paid by the date indicated on the invoice. Each invoice will be accompanied by payment instructions. The first term's fees must be received in full prior to the child commencing at the service. Pro Rata Fees do not apply for children enrolled after the commencement of a term. Receipts will be provided for all fee payments.

Parents/guardians experiencing difficulty in paying fees are requested to contact the Central Kindergarten Accounts Officer to arrange a suitable alternative payment plan. The Privacy and Confidentiality Policy of the service will be complied with at all times in relation to a family's financial/personal circumstances.

6. Unpaid Fees

If fees are not paid by the due date, the following steps will be taken.

- An initial reminder letter will be sent to parents/guardians with a specified payment date, and will include information on a range of support options available for the family.
- Where payment is still not received, parents may discuss the range of support options available and establish a payment plan.
- Failure to discuss alternative options and continued non-payment may result in a second and final notification advising parents/guardians that the child's place at the service may be withdrawn unless payment is made or a payment plan is entered into within a specified period of time. This notification will also include information on a range of support options available for the family.
- Hume City Council will continue to offer support and will reserve the right to employ the services of a debt collector.
- If a decision is made to withdraw the child's place at the service, the parents/guardians will be provided with adequate notice in writing (Long Day Care only).
- No further enrolments of children from the parents/guardians will be accepted until all outstanding fees have been paid (Long Day Care only).

7. Refund of Fees

If a family becomes eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy during a term, a full refund of the applicable term fees will be provided.

In any other case, fees are non-refundable (exceptional circumstances may apply – these are at the discretion of the Manager, Family Youth and Children's Services). There will be no refund of fees in the following circumstances:

- a child's short-term illness
- public holidays
- family holiday during operational times
- closure of the service for one or more days when a qualified educator is absent and a qualified reliever is not available
- closure of the service for staff training days
- closure of the service due to extreme and unavoidable circumstances.

In addition, there will be no refund where a family chooses not to send their child to the program for the maximum number of hours for which they are enrolled.

8. Children turning Three during the year of Enrolment

Full payment from the first day of Term 1 is required if a place is to be reserved for a child in the three-year-old program. Children can only commence the program when they have turned three. If the parents choose to enrol their child prior to them turning three years old, the parents of the child must be in attendance with the child in the program.

9. Support Services

Families experiencing financial hardship often require access to family support services. Information on these services may be available from the kindergarten service provider or alternatively families may contact council.

10. Notification of Fee Changes during the year

Fees set for the year would only be reviewed in extraordinary circumstances. Parents/guardians will be notified in advance of any required fee increase and will be offered the option to request a payment plan.

ATTACHMENT 2: FEES INVOICE FOR THREE AND FOUR YEAR OLD KINDERGARTEN

[Date]

20__ KINDERGARTEN FEE DETAILS

Dear Families,

Please find below important information regarding the 2020 Kindergarten fee payment schedule and payment methods.

Fees are required to be paid prior to commencement of the Term. Anticipated invoice dates and due dates are listed on the below table. Invoices will be posted to your mailing address and need to be paid before the start of each term.

Total Fee for 20__ Fee Amount

Term Fee (x4 Terms) Fee Amount

The preferred method of payment for fees is Direct Debit. Please see the information below for payment options. Please call our office should you wish to discuss alternative arrangements.

Payment Option	Invoice Dates - Due Dates	Amount
Term Fee	Due Dates: Term 1 - [Date Range] Term 2 - [Date Range] Term 3 - [Date Range] Term 4 - [Date Range]	[Amount]
Monthly	Any set date from the 1st to the 20th of the Month	[Amount]
Fortnightly	24 Payments	[Amount]
Weekly	48 Payments	[Amount]

Attached to this letter is a Direct Debit form for you to complete and return to Hume City Council. Please complete the form upon receipt of the invoice and return to council via email at preschoolaccounts@hume.vic.gov.au.

If payments are not made by the due dates listed above, your child's position in the program may be compromised. Please refer to section 5.17 in the Kindergarten Enrolment Policy regarding Kindergarten Fees: <https://www.hume.vic.gov.au/files/sharedassets/public/residents/family-youth-and-childrens-services/childrens-services/kinder/2021-kindergarten-enrolment-policy.pdf>

Council's current process of further collection proceedings will be exercised on unpaid accounts.

Concession holders must provide proof of a current/valid concession card in order to determine eligibility for subsidy.