

NSW kicks off first steps of Universal Pre-Kindergarten vision with launch of design and pilots program ^[1]

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The New South Wales Department of Education has confirmed that it will be launching a series of program design and trial initiatives to progress its long term policy commitment to introduce a free pre-kindergarten year for all children in the year before school.

The ambitious policy was first announced in the NSW Budget 2022-23 with an expected cost of around \$5.7 billion over ten years, however little additional information was provided at the time as to how it would actually be rolled out.

This latest announcement marks the first tangible details of the policy implementation, and involves a series of design and pilot schemes in four diverse catchments across NSW.

Minister for Education and Early Learning Sarah Mitchell said families and services in the first stage of the universal pre-K reforms will help shape the rollout of the initiative across the state.

"This first stage of universal pre-Kindergarten will allow us to gather crucial information ahead of implementation of the program across NSW," Ms Mitchell said.

Eligible services and providers in pilot locations invited to work on design elements

Eligible ECEC services and providers in Mt Druitt, Wagga Wagga, Kempsey-Nambucca and Bourke-Cobar-Coonamble are now invited to work with the Government to design and trial universal pre-Kindergarten.

The four locations were selected to capture the diverse needs of children, families and communities across metropolitan, inner regional, outer regional and remote NSW.

Participating services will participate in collaborative design workshops, interviews or other interactive activities to share knowledge and ideas in early 2023 with funds to support early childhood teachers and educators to engage in the design stage also provided.

Learnings from the first phase of pilots will guide future design and trial work that will be considered for 2024.

Meanwhile the department will continue to have ongoing conversations with the ECEC sector, schools, families and communities to better inform their understanding of the best models for pre-Kindergarten that meets the needs of all children in NSW.

Pilots to focus on five elements of Universal pre-kindergarten programs

Towards the second half of 2023 the process will move from design to pilots in which successful applicants will test key elements of universal pre-Kindergarten, exploring what works for their community and how the needs of local children can be met.

During this phase applicants will work with the Department to select and trial elements of universal pre-Kindergarten and opt-in to trial one or more of the following features:

- Transition to school
- Increased attendance beyond 600 hours per year or 15 hours per week
- Extending the hours of operation beyond 7.5 hours
- Making universal pre-Kindergarten work for every child
- Implementing the Early Years Learning Framework in a pre-Kindergarten context.

Participating services will implement activities tailored to the feature(s) that they are trialing, be able to access ongoing support from the Department and will collate and share their findings for evaluative purposes.

As with the design stage funds will be made available to support early childhood teachers and educators with participating in the trials.

Services and providers to apply to participate through expression of interest process

Interested services and providers located in the target catchments will be required to submit an expression of interest (EOI) regarding their intention to participate in the design and pilot phases.

Details of eligibility requirements can be reviewed in the Guidelines document provided by the Department of Education with key criteria including:

1. They are approved and located in the selected pilot locations.
2. They are either long day care, community preschools, mobile services, aboriginal child and family centres (ACFCs) or multipurpose aboriginal children's services (MACS).
3. They deliver a quality early childhood education preschool program by a qualified early childhood teacher in accordance with the requirements under the National Quality Framework, including using the Early Years Learning Framework.

4. They are rated by ACECQA as Meeting the National Quality Standard, or above.
5. They are willing and have the capacity to participate in a number of pilot activities including but not limited to workshops, interviews and trialling features in the service.
6. That their Approved Provider, and other authorised representative as required, is supportive of their participation in the pilot.

Interested services and providers can apply through the **SmartyGrants online application portal** [3] with the submission deadline confirmed as midnight on 16 December 2022.

Webinar sessions have been planned for late November which will guide interested parties through the expression of interest process.

Bourke-Cobar-Coonamble [4] will take place 21 November, **Kempsey-Nambucca** [5] 22 November, **Mt Druitt** [6] 23 November, and **Wagga Wagga** [7] 24 November.

Region: Australia and New Zealand [8]

Tags: pre-kindergarten [9]
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