

ECMS response to The Education State consultation paper

July 2015

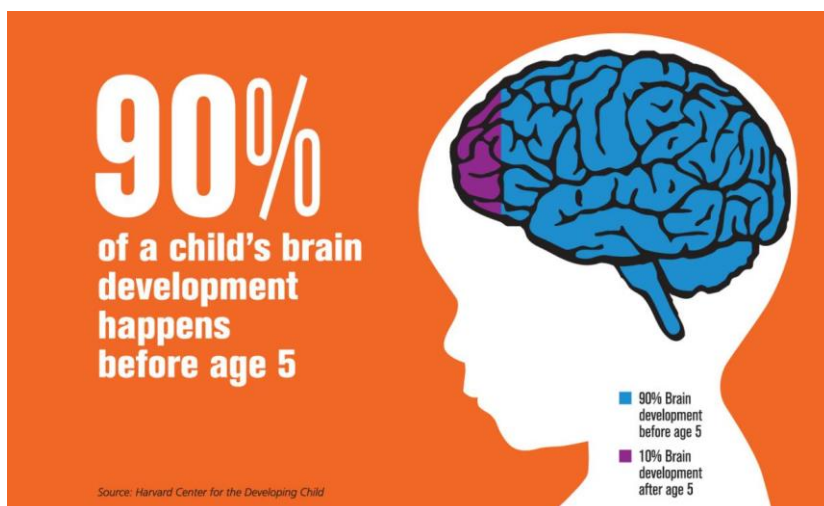


A focus on early childhood will shape the Education State

ECMS agrees; education is everything. But our economy and society is changing and our education system needs to change with it. We believe that if, as a State, we can get the policy settings right, early childhood education and care provides the opportunity to fast-track Victoria becoming the Education State. If Victoria invests in the early years, it will lay the necessary foundations for lifelong learning and build a prosperous future. We acknowledge that the Government is releasing a specific paper regarding early childhood education in August, however as the largest not-for-profit early childhood education and care provider in Victoria, we are compelled to contribute to this first stage of The Education State consultation to ensure that early childhood education is given increased emphasis.

Education starts at birth

The first five years of life is the most significant period of development in a child's life. Children's early experience and education has a direct effect on their cognitive, emotional and social development. The opportunity to influence outcomes in later life are profound. In fact, evidence suggests that children who attend early learning and care are far more likely to stay in school and contribute positively to society than those who do not. Given the compelling international evidence, we know that investing in the early years is empirically sound. Compared to the rest of the world, Australia does not invest enough in early childhood education and care. If Victoria is to become the Education State, the early years must become a priority and focus.



Leadership with a powerful vision for early childhood

Early childhood educators, service providers and experts are acutely aware of the incredible impact of the work that they do in shaping developmental, lifelong educational outcomes for children. Outside of the early childhood sector, these facts are not so well understood. We know that the general public's perception of the value of early childhood education and care does not reflect the evidence of its importance. ECMS believes that the Victorian Government has an opportunity to be the leading advocates for early childhood education across the country, to drive change within public perception and policy direction. Australian children need champions; leaders who are genuinely concerned with their needs and committed to their future prosperity.

Universal access to quality early learning for 3 and 4 year olds

ECMS respects and values the role of the parent as the child's first and most enduring educator. We also believe it is vital for a child to participate in good quality early learning and care experiences before they enter formal schooling. As outlined in the Early Years Learning Framework, quality early learning environments encourage a process of

Belonging, Being and Becoming. Through this process, children develop a sense of self and a sense of agency which positions them for success at school. Early identification and preventative action has a far greater impact and a much lower cost than later, reparative action when those children are older and developmentally delayed. This is particularly the case for vulnerable and disadvantaged children, who especially benefit from accessing universal education and care services early in life.

Globally, Australia is behind other leading countries like the UK and New Zealand who recognise the social and economic return of providing free access to 20-30 hours per week for every child over 3 years old. We encourage the government to consider how it can take a leadership role in promoting universal access to quality early learning for all three and four year old children.



Transitions have a lasting effect

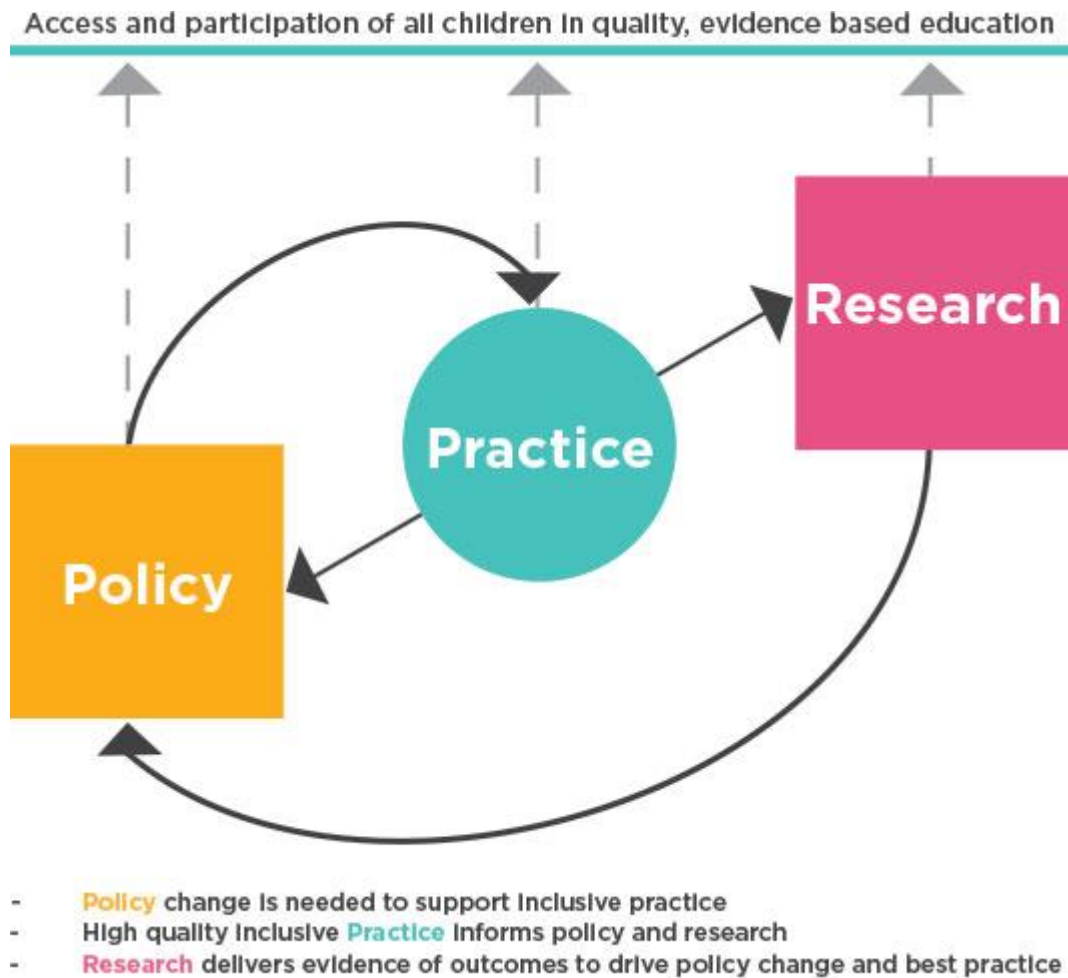
Transitions pose challenges to many young children. In our experience as large providers of early education and care services, we know there are opportunities for 0-3 year old children to practice transitions within their early learning experiences (ie. From room to room), prior to entering more formal three and four year old kindergarten. For many children, transitions are about coping with separation from their primary caregivers. We believe that applying a relational pedagogy with enriched

care giving very early in the life of a child within early childhood education and care services optimises their opportunity for better transition to school.

Transitions are a critical dynamic in how children experience the first weeks and months in kindergarten or school. It's important that we pay attention to children, parents and families in the transition process because how they start school has a direct impact on their learning outcomes later in school and life. Within Victoria and ECMS' service profile, we have experience of multiple models that do support positive transitions. Integrated hubs and on-school site kindergartens are just two contemporary service models which dramatically improve transitions to school. We invite further conversation with government around implementation of models and partnerships to deliver optimal transitions for all Victorian children.

Finding balance: Practice, Policy and Research

The links between educational practice, policy development and research and innovation need to be stronger and better balanced to ensure that future service models and service delivery are most effective. Evidence and research should inform policy, and policy should support practice (See below diagram). Researchers, policy makers and practitioners need a collaborative and integrated approach to ensure we deliver the best outcomes for Victorians. If the balance and integration is not adequate, we will not see the desired return on our investments in educational programs and initiatives.



Valuing expertise of early childhood educators

The Education State consultation paper raises the importance of educators and leaders being recognised as highly skilled professionals and that teaching is a respected and valued as a high status career. This picture of success must extend to include early childhood educators, promoting an equitable system. Early childhood educators are working with children during a rapid period of foundational brain development which directly impacts their success at school. These foundations are consolidated during primary school year before the second biggest brain development period during mid teen years. We believe that investment in early childhood education and educators will ensure Victoria keeps every student connected with education and engaged in learning. Early childhood educators offer a unique level of expertise and leadership that shapes future outcomes for children. With further investment, early childhood educators will propel Victoria to becoming the Education State.

A rare opportunity to act in children's best interests

ECMS warmly welcomes this consultation paper and we are very keen to be involved in contributing to shaping the Education State. We look forward to the opportunity for further discussion upon release of the early childhood education paper.

In a globalised economy, education creates necessary pathways for careers of the future. Early childhood education is the critical first step that sets our children and economy in the right direction. In shaping the Education State, it is vital that we acknowledge a key, incontestable fact: *education begins at birth*.