

2.1 KINDERGARTEN FUNDING ADVOCACY

Responsible Director: Julie Salomon

MOTION

That Council:

- 1. Acknowledges the recent advocacy to the then Prime Minister of Australia, the Hon. Malcolm Turnbull MP, the then Minister for Education and Training Senator Simon Birmingham MP, and the then Minister for Social Services, the Hon. Daniel Tehan MP, along with the leaders of all major federal political parties, urging them to reconsider the Federal Budget decision and reinstate this important funding for our children undertaken in August 2018.*
- 2. Acknowledges the Federal Opposition's commitment to both permanent funding for 15 hours kindergarten and restoring national commitment to quality announced on October 4 2018 through a media release.*
- 3. Writes to the local Members of Parliament and leaders of the key political parties seeking bipartisan support for stable funding and a quality early childhood education base of fifteen hours per week prior to ensure that this is realised post the next Federal Election in 2019.*

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to inform Council of the recent announcement made by the Federal Opposition to provide permanent funding for 15 hours of kindergarten and the restoration of the national commitment to quality. This announcement comes following the advocacy of the Municipal Association of Victoria, councils including Monash, along with key stakeholder groups in the community.

BACKGROUND

The Federal Government's May 2018 Federal Budget confirmed it had not committed funding beyond December 2019 for the five hours of kindergarten each week, and had withdrawn from the *National Quality Agenda* partnership overseeing regulation and quality assessment of early childhood education and care services. Whilst the Federal Budget documents reveal the decision to withdraw funding for four year old kindergarten, a spokesperson for the Education Minister said the program was not scheduled to end until June 2020, which meant there was ample time to iron out policy settings with the States and Territories.

The families, children, those who manage kindergartens, the educators and the broader community need to have confidence that all children now and into the future, will be provided with the best possible start in life by receiving at least 15 hours of kindergarten in the year before they commence school.

DISCUSSION

Parents are now enrolling their children for four year kindergarten places in 2020 in the expectation that their children will receive 15 hours per week. Should these expectations not

be met, there would be considerable concern amongst families with young children who wish to access kindergarten programs in future years. A reduction in hours would also have significant implications for educators working in kindergartens

The Federal Opposition has now made the promise to provide permanent funding for 15 hours of kindergarten and will restore the commitment to the national quality agenda. The children of Monash deserve the very best opportunities to thrive and the year prior to school is one of the seminal influences on this. It is an obligation on Council to work toward ensuring this right is afforded to each and every child in Monash.

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

A withdrawal of funding will force most kindergartens to reduce program hours or increase fees. Only programs patronised by families with the capacity to pay the additional fees would be able to continue offering the longer hours. The children of families with the least capacity to pay will be most impacted. A further consequence of reduced hours will be a reduction in employment hours for kindergarten staff.

HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATIONS

The advocacy to local Members of Parliament is consistent with the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* and is consistent with the principle of freedom of expression.

The suggested approach supports equitable access to kindergarten for all members of the community.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications for Council of the recommendations of this report, however the financial impact on families in Monash would be significant, if kindergartens maintained 15 hours of kindergarten programs per week without the Australian Government funding contribution. Should the funding not continue and kindergartens cut their hours, this will have financial impacts for educators who would experience a reduction in their hours of employment.

CONCLUSION

Whilst this is very welcome news from the Federal Opposition, bipartisan support for permanent funding for 15 hours of kindergarten and the restoration of the national commitment to quality is sought.