

Policy Title	<i>Access to Kindergarten (OA7)</i>
Policy Type	<i>Children's Services</i>
Responsibility	<i>Children's Services Management, Educators, Lentara UnitingCare central enrolment officer</i>

## POLICY

Lentara UnitingCare (Lentara) is committed to providing a fair and equitable process for access to three and four year old kindergarten programs.

## SCOPE

This policy relates to families wishing to access a kindergarten program managed by Lentara, Parent Advisory Committees (PAC) who may support the allocation of places process and all Lentara employees and volunteers.

With regards to the enrolment procedure, Lentara managed kindergarten programs can be divided into the following 3 groups:

A) Services where enrolments and allocation of places are managed centrally by Lentara:

Service Name	Kindergarten Program
Ivanhoe Uniting Church Kindergarten	Three Year Old
Kent Road Uniting Church Kindergarten	Three Year Old
Melton Uniting Church Kindergarten	Three Year Old
Pascoe Vale South Uniting Church Kindergarten	Three Year Old
St Andrews Sunbury Kindergarten	Three and Four Year Old

B) Services that self-manage the enrolment process and allocation of kindergarten places:

Service Name	Kindergarten Program
Cooke Court Child Care Centre	Four Year Old
Rupert Street Child Care & Kindergarten	Four Year Old

C) Services operating under Local Government Central Enrolment Schemes:

<b>Service Name</b>	<b>Kindergarten Program</b>	<b>Local Government</b>
St Andrews Uniting Church Kindergarten - Fairfield	Three and Four Year Old	Darebin
Uniting Church Kindergarten - Ivanhoe	Four Year Old	Banyule
Kent Road Uniting Church Preschool	Four Year Old	Moreland
Kookaburra Kindergarten	Three and Four Year Old	Darebin
Melton Uniting Kindergarten	Four Year Old	Melton
Merrilands Children's Centre and Kindergarten	Three and Four Year Old	Darebin
Pascoe Vale South Uniting Church Kindergarten	Four Year Old	Moreland
Roxburgh Park Community House and Children's Centre	Four Year Old	Hume
Welwyn Kindergarten	Four Year Old	Brimbank

## OBJECTIVES

The objectives of Lentara's Access to Kindergarten Policy (ATK) are to:

- Ensure that all eligible children receive a place at a funded kindergarten program the year prior to attendance at school
- Ensure that the ATK policy and procedures are aligned with State Government policy directions, national legislation, funding criteria and accountability (including fee subsidies).
- Increase access and sustained participation of children and families experiencing vulnerability in early years education services.
- Detail the timelines and process for accessing one of Lentara's Kindergarten programs.
- Provide an opportunity for children and families to participate in a kindergarten program that assists early childhood educators to identify children who may require additional support for their development. It may also offer links to targeted support services, ensuring children receive assistance and/or early intervention as soon as possible.
- Acknowledge a responsibility shared by government and other services to work together to prevent child abuse and neglect, reduce the impact when it does occur, and improve the outcomes for children and young people in the statutory child protection system.
- Provide a rigorous employment and recruitment process to protect children from harm.
- Acknowledge that every child has the right to access a year of funded kindergarten without bias and through a transparent, rigorous, fair and equitable process.

## DEFINITIONS

DET: Department of Education & Training.

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Funded kindergarten program:	Kindergarten program for children in the year before school for which per capita funding is received from DET. The Commonwealth Government provides funding to the Victorian Government to assist meeting the cost of the additional five hours of kindergarten funding in addition to the Victorian contribution for 10 hours. Advice on future Commonwealth funding arrangements is not yet known. The Department will advise Victorian kindergarten services on future funding arrangements once this advice has been received from the Commonwealth.
Lentara UnitingCare:	A not for profit organisation providing a wide range of services to the community including cluster management of early childhood services (childcare and kindergarten).
Parent Advisory Committee:	A collective of parent volunteers who support the kindergarten and represent all families attending the kindergarten
Staff:	A person employed for wages or salary.
Volunteer:	A person who is donating their time and/or skill.
Student:	A person formally undertaking study

## ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA TO ACCESS A FUNDED KINDERGARTEN

As per the Kindergarten Guide 2016 (KG), one year of funded kindergarten is available to all children who turn four years of age on or before 30 April of the year of kindergarten attendance. Children are eligible for a minimum of 15 hours per week, 600 hours per year, delivered by an early childhood teacher who holds an approved (Government gazetted) early childhood education qualification.

These children will not have attended a four year old kindergarten program previously unless approved by DET.

The DET funded Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) program is available to eligible children who turn three years of age on or before 30 April of the year of kindergarten attendance.

Parents/Guardians of children born in the months of January to April, have the choice of which year to enrol their child including the year the child is eligible to attend kindergarten or the following year.

Children enrolled in three year old kindergarten are not automatically enrolled in the four year old kindergarten program. An Expression of Interest Form must be submitted to Lentara.

All children must be current in their immunisations or meet the criteria for consideration as set by the *No jab no play legislation* 1<sup>st</sup> January 2016.

## ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA TO ACCESS THREE-YEAR-OLD KINDERGRATEN PROGRAM

Children are eligible to apply for one year of the three-year-old Kindergarten program provided they turn three years of age before 30 April in the year she/he will attend kindergarten

Children who are not 3 years old prior to commencement of term 1 can only attend the program in the care of a parent or guardian until the day of their 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday. Full terms fees will be charged to hold any places.

## PROCEDURE

### A) SERVICES WHERE LENTARA MANAGES THE ENROLMENT PROCESS

#### **Step 1**

Families complete an Expression of Interest Form and submit it to Lentara with a copy of the child's birth certificate.

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**Step 2**

Lentara collates and records all Expressions of Interest.

**Step 3**

Lentara sends an 'Offer of Place' letter to families, accompanied by an Acceptance & Declaration Form.

**Step 4**

Families complete the Acceptance & Declaration Form to confirm their acceptance of (or decline) the place and indicate their group preferences if applicable. *Note: placement in preferred group is not guaranteed.*

**Step 5**

Lentara provides the services with the details of families who have accepted places and staff at the service allocate group places.

**Step 6**

Service staff send out Information Session Invitations and Child Enrolment Forms to families. Parents/care givers attend the Information Session at the service and return the Child Enrolment Forms.

**Step 7**

Family and child commence attendance at service.  
*Note: a completed Child Enrolment Form must be submitted before a child can attend a service*

**Step 8**

Fee payment.  
Invoices will be sent to families in the first four weeks of Term 1 and the first two weeks of Terms 2, 3 and 4.

**ADDITIONAL NOTES:****Step 1 - Completion of an "Expression of Interest Form"**

Families submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) form. By doing so, families are only expressing an interest in attending one of Lentara's managed Children's Services programs. At any time prior to an 'Offer of Place' being made, families can withdraw their Expression of Interest.

In order to be accepted EOIs must be completed in full and accompanied by a copy of the child's birth certificate in order to verify their eligibility for the program.

Acceptance of EOI forms opens in the first week of March of the year prior to the child's attendance and closes on 30th June (or previous working day).

EOI forms received after the 30th of June will be considered after all other applicants have been offered a place, in line within the priority of access criteria.

Expressions of Interest Forms are available via:

- A) Lentara's website [www.lentarauc.org.au](http://www.lentarauc.org.au)
- B) Email [enrolments@lentarauc.org.au](mailto:enrolments@lentarauc.org.au)
- C) Collection from a Lentara Children's Service

An email will be sent to acknowledge receipt of the Expression of Interest form.

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## Step 2 – Collation of ‘Expression of Interest Forms’

Lentara is committed to making every effort to ensure that all children who have expressed an interest in being educated by one of our services receive a place. Delivery and service development is ongoing and is based on a range of information, including but not limited to:

- Demographic data
- Approved capacity of the service
- Projected number of possible enrolments

Lentara looks at all possible ways of delivering kindergarten which may include different models of service including sessional and rotational models. All models offer an educational curriculum that is tailored to suit individual children’s needs.

## Step 3 – Offer of Places

After June 30<sup>th</sup>, Lentara will send families an ‘Offer of Place’ in their preferred service where one is available, in accordance with the priority of access criteria. A written response will be required within a nominated timeframe on the form enclosed.

### Priority of Access

If more eligible children are seeking a place at a kindergarten service than there are places available, children are prioritised based on the following criteria:

#### High Priority children as required by DET

- Children at risk of abuse or neglect, including children in Out-of-Home Care
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children
- Asylum seeker and refugee children
- Children with additional needs, defined as children who:
  - require additional assistance in order to fully participate in the kindergarten program
  - require a combination of services which are individually planned
  - have an identified specific disability or developmental delay
- State funded 4 year old Kindergarten program only: children eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (see details in Step 4 notes).

#### Other priorities

- a) Sibling previously enrolled at the service (within a 10 year timeframe).
- b) Date EOI is received

#### Reserved Places

Places are reserved for children who have been approved for a second year of funded kindergarten by DET which are confirmed prior to the commencement of the kindergarten year.

The early childhood teacher is responsible for determining a child’s eligibility to receive a second year of funded kindergarten.

In June of each year prior to allocation of placements, information is sought from all kindergartens seeking confirmation of reserved places required for the following year. The number is approved by the management body and staff.

#### Allocation of Places

First round offers will be processed in accordance with vacancies and in collaboration with individual kindergartens.

Each kindergarten must operate within the DET approved capacity and at a viable occupancy rate in accordance with State Government funding obligations, which requires a minimum number of enrolments for each kindergarten program.

Each year Lentara negotiates with kindergartens the required number of kindergarten places to be made available at each of the centres based on:

- a) The number of applications received
- b) DET approved service capacity
- c) Policy direction
- d) Demographic analysis
- e) Population projections

Where EOI numbers exceed the number of places available at the first preference kindergarten, applicants will be notified of alternative placements (if available) or offered the choice to remain on the waitlist.

### **Outstanding Debt**

Places will not be allocated to children until any substantial debt owed by the family to the service is paid, or a payment plan is agreed to between the family and Lentara.

## **Step 4 – Return of Acceptance and Declaration Form**

### **Responses to Offers**

Families must complete and return the Acceptance & Declaration form, making one of the following choices:

- a) Accept the kindergarten placement that is offered
- b) Decline the offer and cancel their application

Where no response is received by Lentara within a specified timeframe as stated in the 'Offer of Place' letter, the EOI will be cancelled and the offer forfeited.

When applicants contact Lentara later than the required response date, their application will be reinstated to the waiting list of their preferred kindergarten according to their original receipt date.

All applicants on waiting lists are placed in order of date of receipt of their original Expression of Interest form. An applicant's position on the waiting list may change based on movements of other families.

Lentara cannot guarantee applicants will receive a place at the kindergarten of first preference due to the number of DET approved kindergarten places and State Government funding conditions.

Applicants remaining on the waiting list after all rounds will be advised of vacancies as they become available.

### **Group preferences**

Applicants are requested to advise their group preferences on the Acceptance & Declaration Form where the service provides more than one group.

***Please note that while we endeavour to support the request for a preferred group there is no guarantee of allocation to this group.***

Group allocations will be determined in line with the priority of access criteria.

Changes to groups in accordance with enrolment numbers may also impact on the proposed timetable of groups.

### **Administration Fee**

All applications, excluding those families eligible for the 4 year old Kindergarten Fee Subsidy, attract a non-refundable application fee as nominated on the Acceptance Declaration. The application fee

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is payable by credit card or money order (via post) or credit card (via post or email) when the Acceptance Declaration form is submitted. Receipts will not be issued to applicants.

The application fee is reviewed on an annual basis and is subject to increases based on the CPI (consumer Price Index). Fee increases come in effect as of 1 July each year. Regardless of when an Expression of Interest form is obtained and then submitted, the application fee at the time will preside over the fee nominated on the Expression of Interest.

### **Eligibility for Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (KFS)**

Children applying for a 4 year old kindergarten program, who meet any of the following criteria are eligible for the KFS and do not pay fees:

- Child identifies as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- Child is identified on their birth certificate as being a multiple birth child (triplets or more).
- Child holds or has a parent or guardian who holds, one of the following:
  - a Commonwealth Health Care Card
  - a Commonwealth Pensioner Concession Card
  - a Department of Veterans Affairs Gold Card or White Card
  - Refugee or Asylum Seeker visa (200-204, 786 or 866)
  - Bridging visas for any of the above Refugee or Asylum Seeker visas

If your family or child has a humanitarian or refugee visa listed by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection which is not included in the above list, please let us know as your child may still be eligible for the kindergarten fee subsidy.

### **Step 5 - Lentara sends information to the services & group allocation.**

After Lentara has received acceptances of offers, a detailed list of confirmed enrolments will be sent to each kindergarten including children's names, dates of birth and parents' contact details as identified on the Expression of Interest Form and group preferences where applicable.

It is the kindergarten's responsibility to manage this information in a confidential manner and to contact each individual family with details of the kindergarten's information evening, group allocation, orientation program, fees etc.

### **Allocation of Groups**

Staff at individual services will assess the list provided by Lentara and allocate groups. Any enquiries that relate to the allocation of groups at this stage need to be directed to the Kindergarten teacher. *Please note whilst we endeavour to support the request for a preferred group there is no guarantee of allocation to this group.*

### **Transfer of kindergarten groups**

Once a kindergarten placement has been accepted by an applicant, a transfer to another kindergarten or kindergarten group is permitted and is based on the availability of a place.

Requests for kindergarten group changes may be made directly with the kindergarten where placement has been accepted. Kindergarten groups are to be finalised within the first 3 weeks of Term 1 in accordance with the requirement to submit enrolment information to DET. After this time changes to groups will only occur if sanctioned by Lentara.

### **Step 6 – Information Sessions & Child Enrolment Forms**

The service sends out Information Session invitations to families.

At the Information Session parents/care givers receive important information regarding orientation sessions, group allocations and the kindergarten program.

Child Enrolment Forms are also sent out with the invitations which families need to fill out in full and bring with them to the Information Session along with the following supporting documentation:

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- Proof that the child’s immunisations are up to date for their age.  
An Immunisation History Statement from the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register can be used as evidence of up to date vaccination. An Immunisation Status Certificate from a medical doctor or a local council immunisation service may also be used.
- Proof of Health Care Card, Concession Card and/or immigration Visa (including card number and expiry date).
- Any relevant Medical Management Plans
- Any court orders, parenting orders or parenting plans

In the case of multiple births (such as twins or triplets), an application form needs to be completed for each child, indicating that he/she is part of a multiple birth on the enrolment form.

If families need any help completing the enrolment form they can request assistance from the service staff.

### **Step 7 – Attendance at Service**

Parents/Care Givers and children are invited to commence at the beginning of the school term unless otherwise invited at the end of term 4 for an orientation program.

In the event that a child’s enrolment form has not been submitted or is incomplete (such as if supporting documentation, authorisation signatures or eligible immunisation status details are not provided), in accordance with the National Legislation requirements the child named on the enrolment form can only attend the service when the information is provided and the form is deemed complete by the children’s services staff.

### **Step 8 – Fee Payment**

Invoices will be sent to all families in the first four weeks of term 1 and the first two weeks of terms 2, 3 and 4.

## **B) SERVICES THAT SELF-MANAGE THE ENROLMENT PROCESS**

### **Step 1**

Families complete an Expression of Interest Form and submit it to the service directly with a copy of the child’s birth certificate.

### **Step 2**

Service staff collate and record all Expressions of Interest.

### **Step 3**

Service staff send an ‘Offer of Place’ letter to families, accompanied by an Acceptance & Declaration Form.

### **Step 4**

Families complete the Acceptance & Declaration Form to confirm their acceptance of (or decline) the place and indicate their group preferences if applicable. *Note: placement in preferred group is not guaranteed.*

### **Step 5**

Service staff allocate group places where applicable.

**Step 6**

Service staff send out Information Session Invitations and Child Enrolment Forms to families.  
Parents/care givers attend the Information Session at the service and return the Child Enrolment Forms.

**Step 7**

Family and child commence attendance at service.  
*Note: a completed Child Enrolment Form must be submitted before a child can attend a service*

**Step 8**

Fee payment.  
Invoices will be sent to families in the first four weeks of Term 1 and the first two weeks of Terms 2, 3 and 4.

For additional information please see the 'ADDITIONAL NOTES' in section A) above.

## C) SERVICES OPERATING UNDER LOCAL GOVERNMENT CENTRAL ENROLMENT SCHEME

The remaining Lentara managed Kindergartens have a partnership with Local Government to manage access and enrolments centrally within the Local Government. For these services, Lentara works in collaboration with Local Government and abides by the policies and procedures of these Central Enrolment Systems to manage, primarily, 4 year old Kindergarten enrolments. Please refer to the relevant council for application timelines.

**Step 1**

Each service receives a list of allocated places from the Local Government Central Enrolment

**Step 2**

Service staff send out Information Session Invitations, along with group preference requests (where applicable) and Child Enrolment Forms to families.  
Parents/care givers complete the required information, attend the Information Session at the service and return the Child Enrolment Forms.

**Step 3**

Family and child commence attendance at service.  
*Note: a completed Child Enrolment Form must be submitted before a child can attend a service*

**Step 4**

Fee payment.  
Invoices will be sent to families in the first four weeks of Term 1 and the first two weeks of Terms 2, 3 and 4.

For additional information please see the 'ADDITIONAL NOTES' in section A) above.

## APPENDIX 1

### Application Timelines

The following timeline applies to services where the enrolment process is managed centrally by Lentara or self-managed:

- **First week of March of the year prior to attending**  
Applications open.

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- **March – end of June of the year prior to attending**  
Applications are processed in accordance with the priority of access guidelines.
- **End of June of the year prior to attending**  
Applications close for the processing of the first round offers of kindergarten places. (Please note applications received after this date will be included in the second and subsequent round of offers).
- **July-September of the year prior to attending**  
First round 'Offer of place' letters are posted out to families  
Families are required to respond with an acceptance by the date outlined in the letter of offer, or the offer lapses.
- **September-November of the year prior to attending**  
Second round 'Offer of place' letters are posted out to families.  
Families are required to respond with an acceptance by the date outlined in the letter of offer, or the offer lapses.
- **October-November of the year prior to attending**  
Kindergarten teachers receive confirmed offers of places and they allocate groups where applicable.

**All services:**

- **October-December of the year prior to attending**  
Families receive invitations to information sessions and child enrolment forms to be returned at these sessions.  
In services where enrolments are managed by local government, group preferences (where applicable) are also collected at this stage.  
Families attend Information Sessions and return Child Enrolment Forms

Places will continue to be offered until all vacancies are allocated

A waiting list will be kept as per priority of access guidelines and families will be offered a placement as vacancies arise.

## RELATED DOCUMENTS

- The Education and Care Services National Law 2010
- The Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011
- Early Years Learning Framework
- National Quality Framework
- Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework
- DET The Kindergarten Guide 2016
- Equal Opportunity Act 2010
- Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005
- Disability and Discrimination Act 1992
- Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006
- *Victoria's Vulnerable Children: Our Shared Responsibility Strategy 2013–2022*

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