Early Learning for Three Year Olds ECEC Roundtable

Summary of discussion questions and feedback

DATE & TIME	THURSDAY 14 DECEMBER 2023 @9.30 AM – 12.30 PM
LOCATIONS	(1) Northern Venue: East Devonport CFLC (2) Southern Venue: putalina Room, Ground Floor, 4 Salamanca Place, Parliament Square (3) Online/remote attendance available via Teams
ATTENDEES	31 ECEC Service Reps, 3 External Organisations (Neighbourhood House, Independent School, TasTAFE), 1 Council, 4 EL3 Advisory Group, 7 DECYP

The first ECEC Roundtable was held for the Early Learning for Three Year Olds initiative (EL3) on 14 December 2023. The purpose of the Roundtable was to bring together ECEC providers from across the state to:

- Share information about the Early Learning for Three Year Olds (EL3) initiative, including the approach we are taking to design and implementation.
- Hear questions or wonderings and provide responses or take questions on notice.
- Seek ECEC expertise, ideas and reflections across key areas of implementation.
- Hear from ECECs about how best to have ongoing engagement and communication.

Feedback on the proposed ECEC Service Models to test during the trial phase

The Local Enabling Groups in the five trial site communities have proposed three models to test during the trial phase and the EL3 Advisory Group have provided feedback on these models:

1. Hub Model
2. Partnership Model Co-Located on School Site
3. Regional Model.

Roundtable attendees were stepped through these models and given the opportunity to provide feedback, summarised below.

Hub Model

This model utilises an existing street-facing building located on a school site and next to East Devonport Child and Family Learning Centre. This hub model provides opportunities to support successful transitions for children, families and services, increases ECEC-CFLC-School communication and opportunities to access wrap around services and supports.

Feedback from the Roundtable detailed possible challenges such as proximity to a school site, possible impact on existing ECEC services in the region, children already accessing ECEC

services from the trial site community, eligibility criteria for the trial, and possible transport solutions for families.

Partnership Co-Located on School Site

This model utilises existing infrastructure based on school sites. This enables ECECs to be co-located in regulated venues, in regions that lack suitable community venues, and increases opportunities for collaboration and shared supports between ECECs and schools.

Roundtable feedback included consideration of impact on existing ECEC providers, how to address transport barriers for families, the suitability of school sites for ECEC providers, and challenges for schools if rooms are used for EL3 and existing early years programs.

Regional Model

Some attendees likened this model to a satellite or a rotating model, with the benefit of using existing community and ECEC infrastructure to expand services into regional areas. Cross-sector partnerships will be crucial to this model's success.

This model has the advantages of limiting travel distances for families, limiting exposure of young children to windy roads and car sickness, and lessening fuel expenditure and travel times for families. The model also presents an opportunity to work with community organisations to upskill local members with qualifications, increasing attraction and retention into the ECEC workforce.

The Roundtable attendees expressed concern about the remoteness and viability of ECEC services in those regions, challenges with staffing a regional model across multiple venues, and placing additional pressure on early years staff in ECECs and schools.

Feedback on the Research and Development Project

Attendees were interested in the project and its progress alongside current national, state and territory reforms and research. ECECs want to be involved and kept informed of the project's progress. Feedback on ways to engage with the sector included targeting communication and taking the time to make sure all voices are heard and giving adequate notice. Wonderings from the Roundtable attendees included if the consultations will be extended to ECECs beyond Hobart and Launceston and about the appetite of the initiative to invest in capital and new buildings (see responses to these questions below).

Feedback on engagement and communication with the ECEC sector during 2024

Attendees expressed an interest in having quarterly ECEC Roundtables in 2024, held face-to-face, possibly following other sector meetings such as EYSAC. Written communications were best sent through one channel, in the form of communiques or updates and not as part of other business.

Feedback re Commencement Age for EL3

Attendees provided brief feedback on the possible commencement age for the EL3 trial sites, with comments that a 1st January commencement age would align with current kindergarten commencement and school starting age definitions, provide consistency and certainty for families and services and lessen the administrative load of rolling enrolments on ECEC services. Noting that participation in EL3 is voluntary.

Note the PowerPoint presented at the Roundtable provides the information that was shared during the session and provides further context to this summary.

Questions and Wonderings during the session, from the Padlet, Online Chat and Evaluation Survey included the following:

1	*Will EL3 trials be delivered by schools or CFLCs?* EL3 trials will be delivered by ECEC service providers as the preferred providers. Partnership and co-located models between ECEC services and schools or CFLCs may be established as innovative service models on EL3 trial sites, if there are areas of low or no ECEC provision.
2	*Will EL3 only be delivered in schools?* No. EL3 trials will be delivered through ECECs services as the preferred providers at suitable venues. Co-location on a school site, with service delivery through ECEC service providers, is being investigated in trial site communities where appropriate, particularly in areas facing barriers to ECEC provision.
3	*What regulatory frameworks are the EL3 trial sites being governed by?* EL3 trial sites will be regulated under the National Quality Framework or the Child Care Act (Tasmania) 2001.
4	*What's the difference between Early Learning for Three Year Olds, Working Together and Pre-Kindergarten?* EL3 and Working Together – supporting early learning, are both Tasmanian Government initiatives that aim to increase access to early learning in Tasmania and contribute to the long-term goal of Universal Access to early learning for three year olds. Both initiatives are being delivered in close partnership with the ECEC sector, Independent and Catholic education sectors, families and communities. Working Together complements the delivery of early learning by Tasmania's ECEC services through additional support to children and families who may need assistance to overcome barriers to access and participate in early learning. Working Together provides eligible children free access to 20 hours per week of early learning in an ECEC service over 50 weeks in the child's year before Kindergarten, with additional wrap-around supports for the child and their family to access and benefit from the program. EL3 aims to identify how ECEC service capacity and availability can be supported to increase access for all children in both existing services, and in areas where there is currently low or no supply of ECEC, in partnership with the ECEC services, families and communities. EL3 and Working Together are different to Pre-Kindergarten. Pre-Kindergarten is usually run in Term 4 and provides three year olds with the opportunity to attend the school where they will be enrolled for Kindergarten in the year after they turn four years old, to support their transition.

5	*How long is the trial period for?* Trial period is being determined and the EL3 Advisory Group will provide advice.
6	*What is the budget for the EL3 Initiative?* The 2023-24 State Budget provides approximately $1.5 million to commence the pathway to providing universal access to early learning for three year olds and will support the establishment of the trial sites, project resourcing, consultants for the evaluation of the trials and the Research and Development Project and ongoing stakeholder engagement.
7	*What facilities and building upgrades are covered by the EL3 initiative?* The EL3 Initiative will fund building upgrades to proposed trial site venues where needed to ensure compliance with relevant regulations. At this stage there is not a commitment for new buildings.
8	*How were the trial site venues and buildings for EL3 selected?* Buildings and venues were recommended by LEGs based on availability and suitability as a trial site venue. This included ECU site assessments for suitability under relevant regulations.
9	*Were existing ECEC services in the trial site communities approached during the trial site discussions?* Yes. ECEC services within trial site communities were contacted during the LEG formation process and encouraged to attend LEG meetings.
10	*Why isn't the East Devonport trial site being trialled at an existing service in Devonport?* To ensure the trial is place-based and meets needs, such as access, within the community, venues within East Devonport were investigated by the East Devonport LEG. The Greater Devonport area was not selected as a trial site community. Trial sites were assessed on criteria including regions where there is no current ECEC service provision or the current ECEC service is unable to meet community need, readiness of the community to support design and implementation of the trial, and considerations that existing ECEC services are not to be negatively affected in terms of existing and future demand.
11	*Urban based approach is very different to Flinders Island or the West Coast. Do we have any urban trials?* The East Devonport trial site will provide some evidence into an urban based approach. The Research and Development Project will investigate urban expansion, particularly in Hobart and Launceston.
12	*How was the projected population of East Devonport calculated? Devonport is huge.* Projected populations on the number of three year olds in East Devonport was calculated from current Australian Bureau of Statistics Census Data. The East Devonport projection was calculated independently from the whole of Devonport region. LEGs and the EL3 Advisory Group use projected populations as a guide only.

13	*What is the projected population of Flinders Island?* 4-7 three year olds in 2024.
14	*Will there be eligibility criteria for enrolments in the trial sites?* The EL3 Advisory Group and LEGs will investigate if there is a need for eligibility criteria at each trial site and if required how it will be effectively determined and applied to participants in the trial sites.
15	*If there currently aren't any eligibility criteria or zoning for EL3, why limit it to the projected population? (eg. why limit EL3 to 54 three year olds in East Devonport? People will drive anywhere).* Eligibility criteria will be investigated if it is considered there will be possible impacts on surrounding ECEC services enrolments. Projected population data does not provide a limit on service numbers.
16	*Are local government and RTOs part of LEG groups in all trial sites?* Yes, local councils and RTOs have been invited and their attendance at LEGs has been encouraged and welcomed.
17	*Will community LEGs provide ongoing guidance and support into the EL3 trial sites?* Yes, community LEGs will continue to meet throughout the trials and work in partnership with all key stakeholders to provide ongoing support and advice during the trials.
18	*Who can submit tender submissions for the EOI/RFTs for services at the trial sites?* All ECEC service providers are welcome to submit tender submissions for EL3 trial sites.
19	*Can ECEC service providers submit tender submissions with alternate service delivery models in their submissions?* Yes.
20	*If an ECEC service has signed for a period with WT, does that preclude them from offering those spaces for EL3?* No.
21	*What age groups will be funded under the EL3 initiative and how much is this funding?* Three year olds that are enrolled in EL3 Trial Site services will be funded. The EL3 Advisory Group and DECYP are investigating how the commencement age requirements at each trial site should be determined.
22	*Can other aged children join the service alongside EL3 eligible children?* EL3 trial sites will be funded to provide access to EL3 to three year olds up to 15 hours per week.
23	*If under NQF, can EL3 programs qualify for CCS, and who pays any gap?* During the duration of the EL3 trial sites three year olds will be funded by the EL3 initiative to attend an ECEC service for up to 15 hours per week.

24	*In trial site communities where they will be multiple venues across separate towns, can services submit tenders for only part of the trial site?* Yes, service providers may submit tenders for part or whole of a trial site, as each location is a different service, during the Request for Tender (RFT) stage.
25	*Delivering in a regulated space can be a challenge where there are no facilities or spaces? Are we able to look at innovative models of delivery that meet the quality benchmark outside of this parameter? If not, will there be a commitment to building new facilities?* Yes, this will be investigated as part of the EL3 trials, noting that venues and buildings must meet relevant regulatory requirements. At this stage there is not a commitment for new buildings.
26	*Can Occasional Childcare venues be a site for delivery of EL3?* Yes, such venue options are being investigated within trial site communities where appropriate, particularly in areas where there isn't ECEC provision. Noting EL3 trial sites will be regulated under the NQF or The Child Care Act (Tasmania) 2001.
27	*For the successful services operating the EL3 trial sites, what supports for administrative tasks, building upgrades, salary, professional development, workers' compensation and staff leave be incorporated into the Service Agreement?* As part of the RFT, ECEC providers can include costs and supports required for trial site setup, including supports for administrative assistance, building upgrades, staff professional development, workers' compensation and staff leave, if applicable.
28	*Would there be funding to support staff relocation and housing costs, where necessary?* As part of the RFT, ECEC providers can include costs and supports required for trial site setup, including staff relocation, housing costs if applicable.
29	*Will the Research and Development Project only focus on Hobart and Launceston, and will regional ECEC providers be able to contribute?* The Research and Development Project is designed to complement the work of the trial sites. The project will begin with a focus on Hobart and Launceston ECECs, however ECEC services across the state will have the opportunity to contribute to the project to help get a clearer picture of the opportunities and challenges for ECEC services across the whole state.
30	*How can current workforce barriers be addressed? How can we increase the number of Diploma qualified educators? Will workforce barriers, such as training, attraction and retention, be investigated by the EL3 Initiative?* Workforce and training barriers will be investigated as part of the Research and Development Project and also through other existing projects and programs (i.e. EYSAC, community organisation partnerships)
31	*How far does 'universal access' extend regarding rural and remote communities or in 'thin market' areas?*

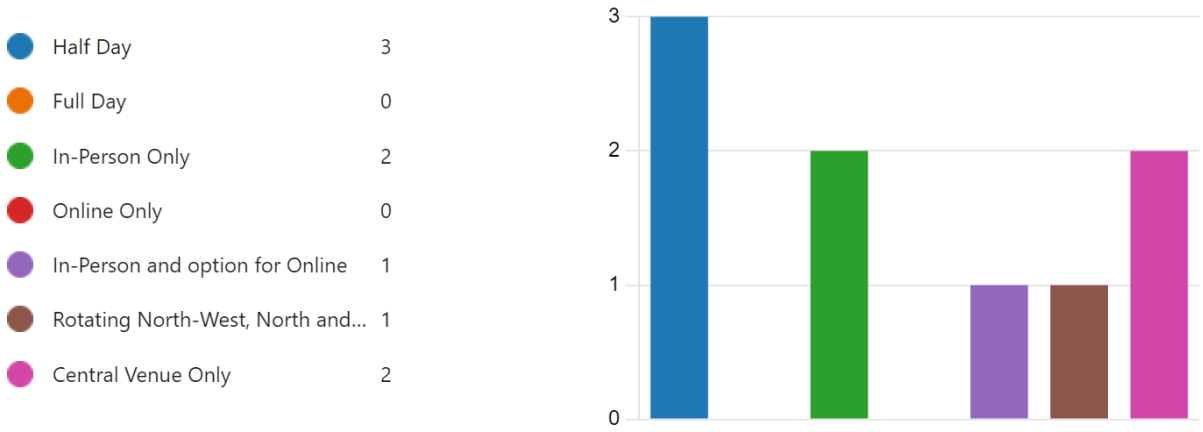
	The Research and Development Project will investigate and provide information how expansion into rural and remote areas might occur for universal access.
32	*I am wondering if the trials will give enough insight into what this would look like as this is rolled out statewide for all 3 year olds to access in the future. Would it be more beneficial to have a range of sites, for example how will we find out how this would work in a service at full capacity already?* The purpose of the trial sites is to identify innovative models of service delivery in areas of low or no ECEC supply than can be tested and evaluated. Findings from the evaluation of the trial sites will inform how universal access will be achieved in future years, along with findings from the Research and Development Project, and in the context of any broader Australian Government reforms. EL3 delivery and service capacity, including those at capacity, will be investigated as part of the Research and Development Project.

Further information about EL3 and FAQs can be found here.

Responses from the Evaluation Survey

- For you, to what extent was the purpose of the Round Table met? (4.67 out of 6)
- Was the information about EL3 presented in a manner that you could understand? (4.67 out of 6)
- Were you able to voice your questions and wonderings? (4 out of 6)

Preference for future ECEC Round Tables: Half Day, In-Person. Undecided on having a rotating or central venue, and whether to include an option for attendance online:



- Face to face was preferred, with more time for smaller group discussions before feeding those discussions back into the larger group.

Three suggestions were given for preference for future engagement and communication:

- Email and Communique
- Regular updates – focused on EL3 and not part of other newsletters
- Q&A on website.

~ Reviewed by the Early Learning for Three Year Olds Advisory Group ~