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Early Learning for Three Year Olds

Frequently Asked Questions

Why is early learning important?

Early learning gives children the best possible start in learning and in life.

Research shows that play-based learning is a powerful way to support children in a period of rapid development, from birth to age five.

Quality early learning programs and services benefit all children, and especially benefit children and families who are experiencing vulnerability.

States and territories across Australia are exploring how to expand access to quality early learning programs for children and their families in the two years before compulsory school begins.

In Tasmania, there is very strong participation in Kindergarten for children who are four years old, however more than a third of all three year olds do not participate in early learning delivered through an Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) service in the year before they start kindergarten.

What is the Early Learning for Three Year Olds initiative?

The Tasmanian Government has made a commitment that all children in Tasmania will have access to early learning in the year before kindergarten.

The Early Learning for Three Year Olds (EL3) initiative aims to increase access to early learning for three years olds in partnership with the ECEC sector, families and communities.

Under the EL3 initiative, Trial Sites are being established in communities across Tasmania to test different models of early learning service delivery to meet local community needs.

DECYP has partnered with the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector and the Catholic and Independent education sectors since 2023 to co-design and deliver the EL3 initiative.

The Universal Access to Early Learning Advisory Group provides advice and guidance to DECYP to inform the design and implementation of initiatives to increase access to early learning and is co-chaired by Ros Cornish and Jenny Burgess, Associate Secretary, DECYP.

Further work will be done to understand how all three year olds in Tasmania can have access to quality early learning over time. This includes engagement with the ECEC sector to understand the opportunities and challenges and to plan a way forward.

The 2023-24 State Budget provides $6.04 million over four years for the EL3 initiative to establish up to six early learning services designed in partnership with ECEC services and local communities.

How will Early Learning for Three Year Olds be delivered?

ECEC services are best placed to provide quality early learning for three year old children in Tasmania. They are regulated under National Quality Standards and employ professionals who specialise in education and care through play-based learning for young children.

Under the EL3 initiative, Trial Sites are being established in areas where there is low or no capacity of existing ECEC services. This means that through the process of establishing the Trial Site, ECEC services (as the preferred provider), DECYP, families and communities can work together to increase access to early learning in their area. This could include innovative approaches and partnerships aligned to the key principles, between ECEC services and DECYP schools or Child and Family Learning Centres.

The EL3 initiative will be evaluated by an independent organisation, and the findings will provide important information on the effectiveness of different models.

Where will Early Learning for Three Year Olds be available in 2025?

EL3 Trial Sites at East Devonport, Bruny Island and Fingal (Break O'Day) will begin operating in Term 1, 2025. These Trial Sites are all unique and responsive to community need in areas where there is little to no access to early learning.

DECYP has worked in partnership with ECEC services (as the preferred provider), families, communities and other early years services to establish the trial sites, through a place-based approach to make sure the services meet community needs and build on community strengths.

East Devonport

The East Devonport Trial Site will commence in Term 1, 2025 as a regulated ECEC service under a partnership model between Uniting Vic/Tas Early Learning, the East Devonport Primary School and Child and Family Learning Centre.

Bruny Island

The Bruny Island Trial site will be located at the Bruny Island District School during school terms. It will begin in Week 2, Term 1, 2025. The Trial Site is an outreach service from the Saltbush Child and Family Learning Centre and will include a range of early learning opportunities and supports for children from birth to 4 years with priority for three year olds. Supports include drop-in and play sessions and Adjunct Care while parents or carers engage in a range of activities on site.

Fingal (Break O'Day)

The Fingal (Break O'Day) Trial Site will commence in Term 1, 2025 and will be an expansion of an existing service at the Fingal Valley Neighbourhood House which currently offers 1 day of Occasional Care. The Trial Site service will offer an additional day to the original service for three year old children, regulated under the Tasmanian Child Care Act and delivered by qualified ECEC educators.

Other communities that are working together to establish EL3 Trial Sites are:

Flinders Island and Cape Barren Island (Flinders LGA)

- Queenstown, Strahan, Zeehan and Rosebery (West Coast LGA)

Further information will be made available to communities in early-2025.

For more information on any of the EL3 Trial Sites please contact el3@decyp.tas.gov.au

How were the Trial Sites selected?

A Co-Design Planning Group with ECEC, Independent and Catholic sector representatives guided the selection of the Trial Site communities. This included broad community engagement and a criteria for assessment of suitability.

In March and April 2023, DECYP held 32 workshops in 26 towns and cities across Tasmania, and released an online survey, to hear from communities around Tasmania about the future of quality and affordable early learning in their community.

This community engagement was guided by key questions and principles developed by the Co-Design Planning Group. Over 340 people had their say through the process.

What we heard: Community Engagement on Early Learning for Three Year Olds is a report on what communities across Tasmania said about early learning for three year olds.

In June 2023, the Co-Design Planning Group developed and endorsed a 'Criteria for Assessment' to guide the selection of communities. The selection of communities was undertaken by DECYP with recommendations for decision provided to the Minister for Education, Children and Youth.

How are the Trial Sites being set up?

Trial Sites are being established using a place-based approach, where ECEC services (as the preferred provider), families and communities will work together.

Community workshops were held in all Trial Site communities in August and September 2023. The purpose of the workshops was to gather information and ideas to inform the design of Trial Sites. These workshops helped build a shared understanding of what quality early learning to meet local community needs could look like.

Local Enabling Groups were set up in each Trial Site community in September and October 2023. This means ECEC services, families and community representative can work together on the design and establishment of services.

The EL3 Advisory Group, with representatives from the ECEC sector and Catholic and Independent education sectors, is providing advice and guidance on the establishment of the EL3 Trial Sites.

What will Early Learning for Three Year Olds cost for families?

Participation in the EL3 Trial Sites for 2025 will be free for families.

A key principle of the EL3 initiative is that cost will not be a barrier to participation. However, the costs for families in the future are yet to be determined.

Will Early Learning for Three Year Olds be available in Hobart or Launceston in 2024?

Hobart and Launceston have not been selected as Trial Site locations in 2025. However, in 2024 DECYP engaged Ernst & Young to undertake stakeholder engagement and economic modelling to better understand issues, barriers to ECEC service expansion and opportunities to overcome them, including in Greater Hobart and Greater Launceston. Findings from this project will help to better understand the supports and action needed for future expansion of early learning for three year olds in Tasmania.

When will Early Learning for Three Year Olds be available for my child/all children?

Findings from an independent evaluation of the Trial Sites, stakeholder engagement and economic modelling on the availability of, and demand for services, will inform future expansion.

Community updates will be provided on the Department for Education Children and Young People website at:

https://www.decyp.tas.gov.au/about-us/community-and-engagement/early-learning-for-three-year-olds/

What's the difference between Early Learning for Three Year Olds, Working Together and Pre-Kindergarten?

The EL3 initiative is one of a number of Tasmanian Government initiatives that aim to increase access to early learning for young children in Tasmania.

EL3 complements the Working Together initiative which supports children and families who may need additional assistance to overcome barriers to access and participate in early childhood education and care services.

Working Together provides free access to 20 hours per week of early learning with additional wrap-around supports for children in the year before Kindergarten.

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.

Does Early Learning for Three Year Olds affect the school starting age?

No, the EL3 initiative will not affect the school starting age in Tasmania.

Children in Tasmania start their first year of school in the year after they turn five years old, and they start kindergarten in the year after they turn four years old.

How can ECEC services, families or communities find out more and/or get involved?

For more information or to get involved:

Visit: https://www.decyp.tas.gov.au/about-us/community-and-engagement/early-learning-for-three-year-olds/

Or Contact: el3@decyp.tas.gov.au