

THE FRONT PROJECT

Educational and Developmental Gains in Early Childhood (EDGE)

SEQUENCING POLICY REFORM LESSONS

Executive Summary

Victoria's rollout of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten is one of the most detailed and documented examples of large-scale early childhood reform in Australia. Backed by almost a decade of policy development, a \$5 billion funding commitment, and a deliberate staged implementation strategy, it offers policymakers and practitioners planning similar reforms a rare resource: not just evidence that large-scale reform is achievable, but a documented account of how it was done.

This report distils the key lessons. It draws on four publications from the Educational and Developmental Gains in Early Childhood (EDGE) study, a five-year independent evaluation led by the University of Melbourne in partnership with The Front Project and the support of the Victorian Department of Education: three Front Project reports and a peer-reviewed journal article by Page et al. (2025). The report addresses three questions every jurisdiction planning similar reform will face: What conditions need to be in place? How should capacity be prioritised and sequenced? And how do you test, learn and scale without losing quality or equity along the way?

Key findings

Conditions must be defined and contracted before anything else.

Victoria's non-negotiables, including universal access, 15 funded hours, qualified teachers, and quality settings, provided the framework within which all subsequent decisions were made. Critically, these conditions were embedded in funding agreements and contractual arrangements, not merely stated in policy. Where expectations exist in policy but not in contracts, providers, particularly in a mixed market, can and do fall through the gaps. Inclusion shows what it looks like when this is done right. Victoria expanded its School Readiness Funding and Kindergarten Inclusion Support alongside the rollout, giving services and educators the capability and resources to support children not just to access 15 hours, but to genuinely benefit from them.

The workforce is the highest-impact and most under-managed lever.

High turnover was a challenge throughout the rollout, creating a direct burden on mentoring and undermining continuity for both new teachers and the children in their care. Professional pay, adequate planning time, professional recognition, and career pathways must accompany any workforce expansion strategy. Addressing recruitment alone, without resolving retention, only defers the same workforce pressure to a later stage of reform.

Quality Preschool is Achievable Everywhere

Preliminary EDGE analysis using the CLASS instrument reveals that circumstances still matter - socio-economic indicators of more disadvantage are associated with lower quality teacher-child interactions on average. However, where high quality teacher-child interactions were observed, they occurred in services across all socio-economic areas at equal rates – that is quality preschool is achievable everywhere.

This evidence connects the structural conditions that governments control to what children experience in the room and makes clear that the benefits of expanding access require a focus on ensuring quality.

Staged implementation, done well, is a strategic asset.

Beginning with six regional LGAs in 2020 and expanding progressively allowed Victoria to learn, adapt, and identify problems before they became system-wide. The hub-and-spoke governance model, with the Department of Education at the centre and ECIBs, the Victorian School Building Authority, LGAs, and services as delivery spokes, was central to managing that complexity. Where relationships between hub and spokes were strong, implementation succeeded; where they were less clear, gaps and friction emerged.

Earlier consultation reduces avoidable friction.

A consistent EDGE finding was that some consultation with sector experts and providers occurred after key decisions were made, generating implementation challenges that earlier engagement may have mitigated. The lesson is to consult with service providers, directors and teachers before decisions are locked in, particularly on workforce conditions, service models, and inclusion requirements.

Where things stand now

Six years after the initial tranche of delivery, three-year-old kindergarten is an embedded feature of Victoria's early learning system, a genuine achievement that has survived election cycles, a global pandemic, and sustained workforce pressure.

At the national level, momentum is building toward two years of preschool across other jurisdictions. Victoria's documented experience, on sequencing, governance, and the relationship between structural conditions and children's outcomes, is a reference point available to every state and territory planning that journey. The core lesson is transferable: conditions before capacity, capacity before scale, and learning embedded throughout.

Nearly a decade of planning and implementation has produced something rare in social policy: a large-scale early childhood reform with real gains for children, and a documented account of how those gains were achieved. That evidence carries its own responsibility. It exists to be used: by jurisdictions planning their own expansions, by governments weighing the sequencing of investment, and by the communities and families who stand to benefit most from getting it right.

Introduction

Governments across Australia are making significant new commitments to early childhood education. The policy ambition is clear. What is less well understood is what it takes to translate ambition into practice, at scale, across a diverse sector, in communities with vastly different starting points.

Victoria's experience offers a rare opportunity to find out. The rollout of three-year-old kindergarten, beginning in 2020, progressing to statewide coverage in 2022, and continuing toward full delivery of 15 hours by 2029, is the largest early childhood reform in the country's history. It is also one of the most thoroughly evaluated. That combination of scale, ambition, and documented evidence is what makes the Victorian experience useful to others.

The Educational and Developmental Gains in Early Childhood (EDGE) study is a five-year independent evaluation led by the University of Melbourne in partnership with The Front Project and the support of the Victorian Department of Education. This report draws on four publications from that study: Evidence from EDGE study summary¹, two Front Project reports^{2,3} and a peer-reviewed journal article by Page et al. (2025)⁴. Together, those publications draw on interviews with 36 stakeholders in The Front Project's (2024b) case study, 44 teachers in Page et al.'s (2025) study, EDGE domain findings across policy systems, insights from professional practice, data on children's outcomes, and analysis of implementation experience across government, local authorities, providers, educators, and families.

The lessons are organised around three questions that any jurisdiction planning similar reform will face:

- What conditions need to be in place
- How should capacity be prioritised and sequenced,
- And how do you test, learn and scale without losing quality or equity along the way.

The Victorian experience demonstrates there is no single blueprint. But there are clear patterns in what works, what stalls, and what is consistently underestimated, and those patterns are what this report is designed to make visible.

Two years of preschool: Every Child. Everywhere. A pathway to national universal three-year-old preschool

This report by The Front Project (2024a) outlines a vision for universal two years of preschool for all Australian children, arguing that high-quality early childhood education delivers lasting benefits for children's development, families' wellbeing, and broader society.

¹ Eadie, Patricia; Levickis, Penny; Page, Jane; Bryson, Hannah (2026). 'Are two years better than one?' Evidence from the Educational and Developmental Gains in Early Childhood (EDGE) Study. The University of Melbourne. Presentation. <https://doi.org/10.26188/33770317.v1>

² The Front Project. (2024). Implementing large-scale social policy reform: Three-year-old kindergarten roll-out in Victoria. https://www.thefrontproject.org.au/images/research/Implementing%20Large-scale%20Social%20Policy%20Reform_November%202024.pdf

³ The Front Project. (2024). *Two years of preschool: Every child. Everywhere. A pathway to national universal three-year-old preschool*. <https://www.thefrontproject.org.au/images/research/Jurisdictional%20Roadmap%20-TFP%20and%20The%20EDGE%20study.pdf>

⁴ Page, J., McFarland, L., Young, S., Eadie, P., & Levickis, P. (2025). Implementing 3-year-old kindergarten in Victoria: Teachers', educators' and directors' perspectives. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 54, 1065–1078. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-025-01907-w>

Building on Australia's existing National Preschool Reform Agreement, the proposal calls for extending quality preschool access to three-year-olds across all jurisdictions. Delivery is organised around five capability areas spanning workforce, infrastructure, quality, inclusion, and wraparound supports, and held together by four implementation levers: capacity building, change management, coordination, and consultation.

Drawing on lessons from Victoria's rollout of three-year-old kindergarten, the report maps each state and territory's current progress and poses guiding questions for policymakers to assess their readiness to deliver this reform equitably and effectively.

Implementing Large-scale Social Policy Reform: Three-year-old kindergarten rollout in Victoria

This case study by The Front Project (2024b) examines Victoria's rollout of three-year-old kindergarten from its origins in 2017 through to early implementation in 2022, drawing on interviews with 36 stakeholders and document analysis.

It traces the reform through four stages: initial discussions and internal planning, announcement, development and design, and rollout. It also highlights how a strong evidence base, political will, capable public servants, and sustained advocacy from outside government all combined to drive a complex, decade-long policy change.

Key lessons include the importance of early and meaningful sector consultation (noting that some consultation occurred too late, creating avoidable implementation challenges), the value of building on existing policy foundations, and the critical role of coordinating infrastructure, workforce, and change management through a hub-and-spoke governance model.

The report concludes that large-scale social reform of this kind demands long development timelines, robust evidence, cross-sector collaboration, and persistence, and that the benefits for Victorian children, families, and the broader economy are expected to be lasting.

Implementation Lesson: Learnings from the EDGE Study about the rollout of three-year-old kindergarten

This implementation lessons paper from The Front Project (2025) draws on findings from the EDGE study to distil practical insights from Victoria's rollout of three-year-old kindergarten between 2020 and 2024. It examines both program and practice dimensions including teaching younger children, managing mixed age groups, and enabling early intervention, alongside the structural conditions needed to sustain reform, such as workforce support, quality frameworks, and change management.

Key findings include:

- Teachers' existing skills provided a strong foundation for teaching three-year-olds, though many identified areas for further professional learning, including supporting young children's language development and behaviour regulation, and using assessments designed for three-year-olds.
- Mixed-age groups delivered comparable quality to single-age settings.
- Experienced teachers have the greatest impact on children's outcomes, making retention a priority.
- High turnover can undermine quality delivery.

The paper concludes that successful large-scale early childhood reform requires deliberate investment in workforce capability and conditions, clear policy expectations around quality and inclusion embedded in funding agreements, flexible implementation structures that allow local adaptation, and strong collaborative relationships across government, providers, and communities.

Key Lessons

Victoria's phased rollout of three-year-old kindergarten between 2020 and 2029 offers a comprehensive case study in large-scale social policy reform. As the EDGE Study preliminary analyses demonstrate⁵, two years of funded kindergarten provides measureable gains in children's learning and development, as well as the potential to promote a more equitable start to school. The following lessons span conditions, capacity, and change management across all stages from inception to implementation, describing what is required to enable positive outcomes.

Conditions

Bold, clear policy that names non-negotiable conditions underpin everything else.

Victoria's experience demonstrates that naming core conditions: universal access, 15 hours, qualified teachers, and quality settings, created the framework within which all other decisions could be determined.

The most important lesson is to define non-negotiables early. Universality and 15 hours dosage of funded kindergarten were the anchors of Victoria's reform.

Once those were fixed, everything else: delivery model, provider mix, funding mechanisms, could be worked out pragmatically without compromising the core promise to children and families.

Critically, those conditions need to be embedded in funding and contracting, not just stated in policy. Funding agreements proved to be a powerful mechanism for driving quality, access and inclusion requirements consistently across both sessional kindergartens and long day care settings. This matters because stating expectations in policy but leaving them out of contracts creates a gap that providers, particularly in a mixed market, can fall through.

Inclusion deserves particular attention here. It is too often treated as an aspiration rather than a delivery condition. Victoria's School Readiness Funding is a practical example of what it looks like when inclusion is designed into the system rather than bolted on: funding tied to capability uplift, allocated on the basis of need, and contracted as a delivery condition rather than an optional extra. When inclusion is written into the contract, it gets resourced. When it isn't, it tends to be the first thing squeezed.

On quality, preliminary findings from the EDGE study are providing important Australian evidence, drawing on observations of teacher-child interactions using the Classroom

⁵ Eadie, P., Levickis, P., Page, J., & Bryson, H. (2026). 'Are two years better than one?' Evidence from the Educational and Developmental Gains in Early Childhood (EDGE) Study. The University of Melbourne. Presentation. <https://doi.org/10.26188/3377031>

Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). Its most encouraging finding is that excellence is achievable everywhere. About one in three EDGE services (32.7%) had mid-to-high scores across all three CLASS domains, and these services were found in every socio-economic area at a similar rate. However, circumstances still matter. Area disadvantage, NQS ratings and teacher experience were all associated with CLASS scores. But high-quality practice is not confined to advantaged settings, and among the services reaching that standard, teacher experience was the main distinguishing characteristic. Victorian rooms scored strongly on emotional support and classroom organisation, while instructional support was the main area for improvement, a pattern also seen internationally.⁶

Victoria's mixed market of sessional kindergarten and long day care meant reform had to work across services with different funding arrangements, industrial conditions and operating models. EDGE found that observed quality was, on average, similar across service types, so high-quality kindergarten can be delivered in both settings. The challenge is more complex than service type alone. Page et al. (2025) documented how differences in funding, industrial conditions and expectations between settings created challenges during implementation and shaped the experience of teachers, educators and directors. What matters is that the conditions that support quality, such as experienced and well-supported teachers, clear expectations and stable funding, are in place wherever a child attends, so that the quality of their experience doesn't depend on which kind of service happens to be available in their community.

Capacity

Capacity, meaning the system's ability to deliver reform at scale, across workforce, infrastructure and organisational readiness, was one of the three central implementation pillars, alongside infrastructure and change management.

Lessons from the reform highlighted that capacity gaps, particularly in the workforce, can constrain delivery even when policy conditions are clear and political will exists.

Teacher experience matters.

EDGE found that teacher experience is one of the characteristics associated with the quality of teacher-child interactions. Of the 94 rooms (across 49 services) that scored in the mid-to-high range on all three CLASS domains, teacher experience was the main factor that set them apart.

Retention strategies must accompany recruitment.

Some participants noted disproportionate attention was given to recruitment when retention was an equal or greater challenge. Conditions including remuneration, planning time, leave entitlements, and professional recognition were identified as key retention factors.

Existing capacity in long day care was an under-utilised asset.

The Department of Education identified that long day care services had more unfilled places than sessional kindergartens in some areas, creating an opportunity to deliver funded kindergarten hours through an existing but underused part of the system. Leveraging this required navigating different funding models and managing unintended consequences, particularly around reduced long day care places in some communities.

Professional learning is essential.

Teachers found professional support assisted their implementation of three-year-old kindergarten. Leadership and peer support among teaching teams were effective in building

⁶ Eadie, Patricia; Levickis, Penny; Page, Jane; Bryson, Hannah (2026). 'Are two years better than one?' Evidence from the Educational and Developmental Gains in Early Childhood (EDGE) Study.. The University of Melbourne. Presentation. <https://doi.org/10.26188/33770317.v1>

supportive environments, together with the support of Preschool Field Officers and professional networks.

Change Management

Change management was the third implementation pillar and arguably the most complex, requiring coordination across a fragmented sector, multiple tiers of government, and diverse community contexts. It is fundamentally about people: their assumptions, their relationships, their readiness to do things differently, and the trust they place in the institutions asking them to change.

The hub-and-spoke governance model was central.

The Department of Education served as the central hub; Early Childhood Improvement Branches (ECIBs), the Victorian Schools Building Authority (VSBA), LGAs, and services as spokes. Strong relationships between hub and spokes were essential, described by public servants as impossible to deliver without the ‘governance overhead’.

Staged implementation enabled learning.

Beginning with six regional LGAs in 2020 and expanding progressively allowed the system to learn, adapt, and address gaps before full rollout. This approach made the policy scalable, resilient to election cycles, and grounded in real implementation evidence.

Consultation earlier reduces friction.

A key finding was that earlier consultation with sector experts and providers would have produced a smoother rollout. Some consultation occurred after decisions were made, resulting in challenges that earlier engagement could have mitigated.

Flexibility and accountability must be balanced.

Local flexibility was identified as crucial because each community brings different demographics, existing service infrastructure, provider mix, and family needs, but needed to operate within a consistent framework of accountability. KISPs (Kindergarten Infrastructure and Service Plans) were developed as joint DoE-LGA assessment tools to support this balance. They provided a structured mechanism for understanding local supply and demand at a granular level, identifying gaps, and planning responses that were tailored to community context while remaining anchored to the universal access target.

Relationships are the engine of reform.

Investing in relationships, between DoE and LGAs, between service types, between educators and families, enabled local empowerment and success. Where relationships were absent or poorly managed, suspicion, dissatisfaction, and implementation gaps emerged. Page et al. (2025) identified ‘leading and responding to change’ as a central theme in their interviews with directors, teachers and educators, finding that leadership at the service level shaped how reform was navigated and implemented.

Cultural change takes time.

Initial concerns from teachers and parents about three-year-olds being ‘too young’ for universal preschool were countered by experience. For some teachers, working with three-year-olds required a genuine adjustment in pedagogy, routine and expectations.

Page et al. (2025), drawing on interviews with 44 teachers, educators and directors across 26 Victorian services, found that pedagogical differentiation was central to the implementation of three-year-old kindergarten, and involved teachers reflecting on both the challenges and opportunities this presented.

The Front Project's (2024b) case study found that as teachers worked directly with the age group and developed confidence, professional resistance declined as the rollout progressed through 2022. Page et al. (2025) found that while mixed-age groupings presented both challenges and opportunities for teaching teams, these were largely navigated in practice through pedagogical differentiation and support.

Prioritising and Sequencing Capacity Building

Capacity building was intentional in Victoria. It started by articulating what capacity was required before building it. Rather than investing broadly in system improvement and hoping the pieces would come together, the reform mapped the gap between current and required capacity and used that gap to shape the sequence of effort. What needed to exist before other things could work? What could be built in parallel? What would only become necessary once earlier stages were in place?

This section outlines how capacity building priorities across key domains could be approached.

Building Where There Is Momentum

The phased rollout strategy was not arbitrary; it was designed to build on existing momentum and infrastructure. Prioritisation decisions were shaped by:

- Where capacity already existed. Growth areas with planning underway for new services were prioritised in early tranches, allowing quicker implementation while other areas built capacity.
- Where infrastructure could be leveraged. Co-location of kindergartens on school sites was actively encouraged, building on the Victorian School Building Authority's existing infrastructure mandate.
- Where service types had spare capacity. Long day care services with existing experience of younger and mixed age groups were engaged as delivery partners in areas where sessional kindergartens were at capacity.
- Where political and sector foundations were established. Existing policy (NQF, four-year-old kindergarten, SRF, ECIBs) provided the architecture for modelling, costing, and designing the three-year-old offer without starting from scratch.

Quality

Quality is not a given, it must be actively built and sustained and it does not automatically follow from access. This distinction matters enormously for sequencing. A jurisdiction can expand access rapidly, building places, enrolling children, meeting participation targets, while quietly allowing quality to lag.

Victoria's experience, and the emerging EDGE evidence, reinforces that quality must be treated as a first-order implementation priority from the outset, not a second phase to be addressed once access is established.

Key priorities for sequencing quality capacity building include:

- Understand the baseline. Before scaling, assess where quality gaps exist across service types, regions, and settings. EDGE data using CLASS and NQS ratings enabled this kind of mapping, providing a more granular picture of process quality than NQS ratings alone can offer.

- Invest in teacher experience and retention. Teacher experience was an important characteristic distinguishing the services with the highest-quality teacher-child interactions. Keeping experienced teachers in the profession is therefore central to quality.
- Remuneration parity, professional development, and protected planning time must be designed into reform from the start, not added later when the workforce is already depleted. Scaling a system on the back of an inexperienced or high-turnover workforce is one of the most reliable ways to expand access while diluting the quality that makes access worthwhile.
- Use funding to enforce and incentivise quality. Victoria's Kindergarten Funding Guide tied rates of funding to the industrial instruments under which staff were employed, creating financial incentives for providers to offer better working conditions. This is a sophisticated use of the funding lever. Not simply paying for places but using payment terms to shape the employment practices that underpin quality delivery.
- Build professional learning networks. Peer learning between sessional and long day care teachers was highly effective. These networks should be established early and supported structurally, not left to emerge organically.

EDGE evidence on mixed age groups. Preliminary CLASS analysis found no significant quality difference between three-year-old, four-year-old, and integrated (mixed age) kindergarten rooms, challenging early concerns about mixed programming. This finding is reinforced by Page et al. (2025) who found that while mixed-age groupings presented both challenges and opportunities for teaching teams, these were largely navigated in practice through pedagogical differentiation and support.

Inclusion

Two years of preschool creates a significant opportunity for early identification and intervention, but only if inclusion is designed into the system from the start. The additional year is not simply more time; it is a significant developmental window. Children who might not have been identified as needing support in a single year of preschool can be identified, referred, and supported across a two-year arc before the structured demands of formal schooling begin.

- Plan for inclusion up front. Contracting and funding agreements should explicitly name inclusion capability as a delivery condition. Naming it in contracts means it must be resourced. Leaving it out means it is negotiable, and in a resource-constrained environment, negotiable things tend to get cut.
- Build teacher capability for early identification. Preschool Field Officers and teachers highlighted the need for professional learning in identifying developmental concerns across a broader age range, navigating referral pathways, and supporting families.
- Use needs-based funding to resource inclusion. Victoria's School Readiness Funding provides additional funding to services based on socioeconomic need, allocated to an evidence-informed inclusion menu including speech, language, literacy, and social-emotional programs.
- Prioritise specialist support infrastructure. Referral pathways rely on access and availability of specialist support. Capacity-building in the specialist workforce must accompany expansion of preschool to ensure identification leads to actual intervention.
- Two years makes a measurable difference. Parent testimony confirmed the value of two years for children with additional needs, particularly for speech delay, with

teachers able to support families through referral pathways over an extended two-year period.

Infrastructure

Infrastructure was the third implementation pillar and remains one of the most complex and long-lead-time challenges. A building in the wrong location, sized for the wrong population, or designed without flexibility for changing service models, is not easily corrected.

Key sequencing considerations include:

- Map capacity before rolling out. Kindergarten Infrastructure and Service Plans (KISPs), developed jointly by DoE and each LGA, were a critical tool for understanding current capacity against projected demand before committing to rollout timelines.
- Leverage existing assets before building new. Co-location with schools, use of long day care capacity, and upgrading of existing facilities were prioritised over new builds, particularly in growth areas where planning was already underway. This approach is often faster, cheaper, and in many cases produces better outcomes for children by situating early learning within existing community infrastructure.
- Infrastructure planning must be collaborative. The evolution of the VSBA's role from a rigid application process to a staged, collaborative one illustrates how infrastructure planning processes should be adaptable to the reality of LGA capacity and timelines.

Testing, Learning, Feedback, and Scaling

The Victoria rollout of three-year-old kindergarten was explicitly designed as an adaptive, iterative process, not a one-time “set and forget”. DoE approached it as a project that would generate evidence and learning that would inform subsequent stages. This section identifies how testing and scaling operated across two dimensions: by component and by geography.

By implementation pillar

Each of the three implementation pillars of workforce, infrastructure, and change management were tested, refined, and scaled as the reform progressed.

Workforce

- Early stages revealed the extent of teacher turnover and its impact on quality and mentoring capacity (Page et al., 2025). This prompted a range of targeted strategies to support teaching teams.
- Local LGAs developed their own workforce solutions (e.g. university partnerships for accelerated diploma-to-degree pathways) that were shared and adapted elsewhere.
- EDGE evidence on teacher experience informed policy focus: once preliminary data showed the outsized impact of experienced teachers, retention strategies could be specifically targeted.

Infrastructure

- The KISP process was tested and refined. Early implementation revealed where the process felt like surveillance rather than collaboration, prompting adjustments to framing and communication.
 - The VSBA's rigid application process evolved to a staged, collaborative model in response to LGA feedback, a clear example of test-and-refine in action.
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- Long day care integration exposed the tension between sessional and centre-based models: unintended reductions in long day care places in rural areas prompted revised planning approaches.

Change Management and Practice

Central enrolment systems, initially unavailable, were developed in response to early LGA burden in managing enrolments. This became an integral part of implementing three-year-old kindergarten.

Communications tailored to Culturally And Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities emerged from sector-identified need and were funded by DoE in response, illustrating the feedback loop from community to policy. This supported early engagement, enrolments, and attendance at programs.

Practice concerns about teaching three-year-olds were countered by accumulating direct experience, with teacher resistance decreasing as the rollout progressed (The Front Project, 2024b).

By geography

The phased geographic rollout was a deliberate strategy to manage pace, learn from early implementation, and avoid system-wide failure. Key lessons from geographic staging include:

- Start with willing and ready communities. The six regional LGAs in the first tranche were selected in part because they had existing infrastructure and provider readiness. This generated early evidence of what was working before broader rollout.
- Regional contexts require different responses. Rural areas faced distinct workforce challenges (geographic isolation, fewer candidates), prompting localised strategies like university partnerships and continuous open recruitment campaigns.
- ECIBs enabled geographic responsiveness. Early Childhood Improvement Branches, embedded across Victoria's regions, provided the local knowledge and relationship infrastructure needed to tailor implementation to community context.
- Equity requires deliberate geographic planning. Some LGAs held back from full rollout until they could deliver equitably across all services, rather than risk vulnerable families in some areas missing out while others received 15 hours.
- Lessons from pilot areas informed wider rollout. Unintended consequences (e.g. the squeeze on long day care in co-located rural settings) were identified in early tranches and used to adjust planning for subsequent areas.
- Triage services, don't treat all equally. DoE classified services by their complexity of change, straightforward versus complex adaptation, and directed ECIB support accordingly, concentrating intensive support where it was most needed.
- Scale fewer hours to all, rather than full hours to few. Rather than delivering 15 hours in limited communities and expanding from there, the government opted to roll out fewer hours universally, ensuring all areas build capacity concurrently and the reform became entrenched before full hours were reached.

Where are we now and where to from here?

Victoria's implementation of three-year-old kindergarten is now well into its delivery phase, six years into its nine-year rollout. The reform has moved from inception and design into something tangible: children, families, educators and communities across the state are experiencing what two years of universal preschool access looks like in practice. What began as a political commitment backed by evidence has become, over the course of nearly a decade, an embedded feature of Victoria's early childhood system.

The EDGE study makes clear that reform does not end when the scaffolding is in place. The questions that matter most emerge once delivery is underway and real-world complexity becomes visible:

- What does quality look like in mixed-age rooms?
- How do you retain experienced teachers in a sector where there are ongoing workforce pressures?
- How do you ensure that a child in a rural community receives the same quality of support as one in metropolitan areas?

Responding to these issues requires sustained attention, ongoing investment, and the institutional willingness to keep learning.

Where the evidence points

The EDGE study is now providing evidence on what drives children's outcomes in preschool settings in Australia: teacher experience matters; children in settings with higher NQS ratings experience measurably better process quality; funded hours in the 10–15 hour range are associated with positive language outcomes; and mixed-age rooms deliver comparable quality to single-age settings.

These findings connect the structural conditions that governments and funders control, such as hours, qualifications, quality ratings, directly to what children experience in the room. This means that policy decisions about funding levels, workforce requirements, and quality frameworks are not just administrative settings. They are the levers through which governments shape children's developmental trajectories. The evidence now exists to make those decisions with greater precision and accountability.

The unfinished work

Despite this progress, the reform has exposed gaps that persist. Workforce retention remains the most pressing unresolved challenge. The sector's ability to attract and train new teachers has improved, but government and providers will need to pay continued attention to the factors that underpin retention: professional remuneration, supportive workplace cultures, and attractive career pathways. EDGE findings show that teachers with more years of experience have the highest impact on children's outcomes. A system that cannot retain those teachers at scale is one that is actively undermining its own quality investment.

Inclusion remains an area of ongoing focus. Progress has been made through School Readiness Funding and the inclusion of explicit requirements in funding agreements. At the same time, some children with additional needs continue to face challenges in accessing support. The two-year preschool window creates a genuine opportunity for early identification and intervention but realising that opportunity depends on the system

surrounding preschool having the capacity to act on what educators identify. Strengthening that specialist support infrastructure is a natural next step as the reform matures.

The national picture

Beyond Victoria, national momentum is building, but slowly and unevenly. South Australia is the only other jurisdiction currently rolling out universal three-year-old preschool, having begun its staged rollout in 2026 with full statewide coverage targeted for 2032. Other states and territories remain at various earlier stages: some provide targeted access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children experiencing vulnerability, but none have yet made a comparable universal commitment.

The distance between political interest and delivery is substantial and the conditions for success are not yet in place across the country. Victoria's documented experience is therefore not just a useful reference point. For many jurisdictions, it is the closest available model for what large-scale delivery of two years of preschool actually requires.

What comes next

For Victoria, the immediate priority is full delivery of 15 hours by 2029 with ongoing scaling of infrastructure and workforce. The risk at this stage of reform is that access becomes the only measure of success without sustained focus on quality for children. What children experience once they are enrolled deserves as much policy attention as whether they are enrolled at all. The EDGE study will continue to generate evidence on this, and its findings should be used proactively to shape funding agreements, workforce strategies, and quality improvement efforts.

For Australia more broadly

The lesson for other jurisdictions is that they do not need to start from scratch. Victoria's experience and the evidence from the EDGE study offers a practical starting point for any government planning a similar journey. The core building blocks are well understood: work closely with local communities to understand their needs, plan infrastructure ahead of demand, invest in the workforce beyond headcount targets to address conditions and retention, and continually invest in quality uplift not just access.

The feedback loops matter too: data, evaluation, the voices of professionals and the community. They are how a reform stays honest about what is and is not working, and how it improves over time. Building those loops in early is one of the most practical things any jurisdiction can do.

None of this requires perfection before starting. Victoria did not have all the answers in 2020. What it had was a clear set of non-negotiables, a willingness to learn as it went, and the institutional patience to stay with complexity. That combination is what made the difference.

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