

7.03BV FEES – KINDERGARTEN

QUALITY AREA 7 | VERSION 1.0



PURPOSE

This policy provides a clear set of guidelines for:

- the setting, payment and collection of fees.
- ensuring the viability of LEVNT EC Services, by setting appropriate fees and charges.
- the equitable and non-discriminatory application of fees across the programs provided by LEVNT EC Services.

POLICY STATEMENT

VALUES

LEVNT EC Services are committed to:

- providing responsible financial management of the service, including establishing fees that will result in a financially viable service, while keeping user fees at the lowest possible level.
- providing a fair and manageable system for dealing with non-payment and/or inability to pay fees/outstanding debts.
- ensuring there are no financial barriers for families wishing to access an early childhood program for their child/children.
- maintaining confidentiality in relation to the financial circumstances of parents/guardians.
- advising users of the service about program funding, including government support and fees to be paid by parents/guardians.
- providing equitable access for families eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy and/or Early Start Kindergarten.

SCOPE

This policy applies to the Approved Provider, persons with management or control, nominated supervisor, persons in day-to-day charge and, parents/guardians attending LEVNT EC Services.

BACKGROUND

The Department of Education and Training (DET) provides funding for each child who is enrolled and attending a funded kindergarten program for two years before school. Income from other sources, primarily fees, is required to meet all the additional costs incurred by the service in the delivery of the children's program. In addition, the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy enables eligible children to attend a funded kindergarten program free of charge two years before school.

DET also funds Early Start Kindergarten for three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from refugee or asylum seeker background and children known to Child Protection, to access kindergarten programs as outlined in The Kindergarten Funding Guide.

Regulation 168(2) (n) of Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011 requires that funded kindergarten services have a comprehensive written fees policy, and the content of this policy must be communicated to families. The policy must include a written statement about the fees to be charged and the payment process. All families must be informed of applicable term and annual fees at the time of enrolment. Services must also advise eligible families of the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy and/or or Early Start Kindergarten arrangements. The fees charged must comply with the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy requirements and/or or Early Start Kindergarten and be responsive to the local community and the viability of the service. The Kindergarten Funding Guide outlines the criteria to be covered in the policy.

DEFINITIONS

The terms defined in this section relate specifically to this policy. For regularly used terms refer to the Definitions file of each LEVNT EC policy folder.

Children/families experiencing vulnerability and/or disadvantage (in relation to this policy): children are vulnerable if the capacity of parents and family to effectively care, protect and provide for their long-term development and wellbeing is limited. Some factors which may contribute to a child experiencing vulnerability include: a child with a disability; living in a family with a low income, or one which is experiencing problems with housing, domestic violence, substance abuse, or mental health; known to child protection; in statutory out-of-home care; Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, having a culturally and linguistically diverse background; having a young or sole parent, or a parent with a disability (adapted from the Kindergarten Funding Guide)

Concession: A Commonwealth Government entitlement providing concessions for low-income earners and other eligible people. This includes 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
- Multiple Births (triplets of more)

Early Start Kindergarten (ESK): Early Start Kindergarten provides eligible children with 15 hours of free or low-cost kindergarten each week led by a qualified Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) registered teacher. ESK is available to children who are at least three years old by 30 April in the year they are enrolled to attend the program and are:

- from a refugee or asylum seeker background, or
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, or
- known to child protection.

These children can also access free year-before-school kindergarten through the ESK Extension Grant regardless of whether they have accessed ESK in the previous year.

Early Start Kindergarten extension grants: provides a free or low cost year-before-school kindergarten program for children:

- o not eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy
- o who participated in Access to Early Learning in the previous year or are from a refugee or asylum seeker background, or Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, or known to child protection. A child is not required to access ESK in the previous year to access the ESK extension grant.

High priority families: as defined in the Kindergarten Guide this includes:

- 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 eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy
 - o A child or parent holds a Commonwealth Health Care Card, Pensioner Concession Card, Veteran's Affairs Card, or multiple birth children (triplets, quadruplets)
- Children with additional needs, defined as children who:
 - o require additional assistance in order to fully participate in the kindergarten program
 - o require a combination of services which are individually planned
 - o have an identified specific disability or developmental delay

Kindergarten Application fee: A payment to cover administrative costs associated with the processing of a child's enrolment application for a place in a program at the service, if applicable. High priority families **should not be charged** any fees or levies, unless it is for outside the funded hours

Excursion/service event charge: An additional charge required to meet the cost of special events or excursions that occur in response to emerging children's program needs. Events that are planned ahead and are included as an expenditure item in the service's budget do not incur this additional charge (refer to Excursions and Service Events Policy).

Fees: A charge for a place within a program at the service.

Kindergarten fee deposit: A charge to secure a place that has been offered in a program at the service. This is deducted from term fees. This deposit should not act as a barrier for enrolment of vulnerable families

Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (KFS): A state government subsidy paid in addition to per capita grants to subsidise the costs of parent fees and enable eligible children to attend a funded kindergarten for 15 hours free of charge (The Kindergarten Funding Guide)

Late collection charge: A charge that may be imposed by the Approved Provider when parents/guardians are late to collect their child/children from the program

After Kinder Care/Extended Hours Care: care that is provided by a kindergarten service to kindergarten children outside of the 15 hours per week program.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Actions which are legislated requirements of the ECEC sector are indicated with **LR**.

	Approved Provider and/or persons with	Nominated supervisor and persons in day-to-day	Early childhood teachers, educators and all other	Parents, guardians and carers	Contractors, volunteers and those on student
Reviewing the current budget to determine fee income requirements	LR	✓			
Developing a fee policy that balances the parent's/guardian's capacity to pay, with providing a high-quality program and maintaining service viability	LR	✓			
Implementing and reviewing this policy in consultation with parents/guardians, the nominated supervisor and staff, and in line with the requirements of DET's The Kindergarten Funding Guide	LR	✓			
Considering any issues regarding fees that may be a barrier to families enrolling at LEVNT EC Services (Kindergarten) and removing those barriers wherever possible	LR	✓			
Reviewing the effectiveness of the procedures for late payment and support offered	LR	✓			
Considering options for payment when affordability is an issue for families	LR	✓			
Providing communication to families explaining their access to one funded kindergarten program per child, per year.	LR	✓			
Clearly communicating this policy and payment options to families in a culturally sensitive way, and in the family's first language where possible	LR	✓			
Ensuring that the <i>Fees Policy</i> is readily accessible at the service (<i>Regulation 171</i>)	LR	✓			
Providing all parents/guardians with fee information	LR	✓			
Providing all parents/guardians with a statement of fees and charges upon enrolment of their child	LR	✓			
Providing all parents/guardians with a Fee Payment Agreement	LR	✓			
Ensuring fees are collected and receipted	LR	✓			
Collecting all relevant information and maintaining relevant documentation regarding those with entitlement to concessions	LR	✓		✓	
Complying with the service's <i>Privacy and Confidentiality Policy</i> regarding financial and other information received, including in relation to the payment/non-payment of fees	LR	✓			
Notifying parents/guardians a minimum of 14 days of any proposed changes to the fees charged or the way in which the fees are collected (<i>Regulation 172(2)</i>), and ideally providing one term's notice.	LR	✓			
Addressing any complaints or concerns that have been raised regarding fees at the service in a timely manner	LR	✓			
Reading the LEVNT EC Service Fee information for families, the Fee Payment Agreement and the Statement of Fees and Charges				✓	
Signing and complying with the Fee Payment Agreement				✓	
Notifying the Approved Provider if experiencing difficulties with the payment of fees				✓	
Providing the required documentation to enable the service to claim the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy and/or Early Start				✓	

	Approved Provider and/or persons with	Nominated supervisor and persons in day-to-day	Early childhood teachers, educators and all other	Parents, guardians and carers	Contractors, volunteers and those on student
Kindergarten, if eligible. NB. A child may only access kindergarten funding at one service per year.					

EVALUATION

In order to assess whether the values and purposes of the policy have been achieved, the Approved Provider will:

- regularly seek feedback from everyone affected by the policy regarding its effectiveness
- monitor the implementation, compliance, complaints and incidents in relation to this policy
- assess whether a satisfactory resolution has been achieved in relation to issues arising from this policy
- keep the policy up to date with current legislation, research, policy and best practice
- revise the policy and procedures as part of a policy review cycle, or as required
- notify all stakeholders affected by this policy at least 14 days before making any significant changes to this policy or its procedures, unless a lesser period is necessary due to risk

AUTHORISATION & REVIEW

This policy was adopted by Lutheran Education VIC, NSW, TAS and ACT Ltd as Approved Provider for this service on [Date].

REVIEW DATE [MONTH]/[YEAR] or earlier as required.

REFERENCES

LEGISLATION & STANDARDS

- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006 (Vic)
- Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)
- Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)
- Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010
- Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011: Regulation 168(2)(n)
- Equal Opportunity Act 1995 (Vic)
- National Quality Standard, including Quality Area 7: Governance and Leadership

The most current amendments to listed legislation can be found at:

- Victorian Legislation – Victorian Law Today: www.legislation.vic.gov.au
- Commonwealth Legislation – Federal Register of Legislation: www.legislation.gov.au

SOURCES

- The Kindergarten Funding Guide (Department of Education and Training):
www.education.vic.gov.au

RELATED POLICIES

- 1.03V Inclusion and Equity
- 2.10V Delivery and Collection of Children
- 2.24V Excursions and Service Events
- 6.01V Enrolment and Orientation
- 7.02V Privacy and Confidentiality
- 7.04V Compliments and Complaints