



Analysis of 2008 Surveys of Independent Committee's of Management and Cluster Managers

About the surveys

In 2008 Kindergarten Parents Victoria conducted two member surveys. One represents responses from 179¹ independent kindergarten committees of management². A second was completed with 16³ cluster managers⁴, representing approximately 203 early childhood education sites. The following report represents a comparative analysis of the key issues highlighted in both surveys.

Summary of key findings

- Member kindergartens expressed a high level of importance for KPV to lobby for two years of funded kindergarten. Independent kindergartens indicated this as their highest priority. Cluster managers agreed⁵ that KPV should lobby for two years of funded kindergarten (94%).
- The independent committee survey identified that committee presidents continue to contribute an average of 6 hours per week to the governance and administration of kindergarten services. Combined average hours contributed by parents on kindergarten committees adds up to approximately 24 hours per week. In 2006 the average hours contributed was 28 hours per week. This does not include the significant time that goes into fundraising.
- In approximately 50 per cent of cases independent kindergartens were supported by clerical and book keeping services⁶. However, this support did not impact on perceptions of hours worked by committees.
- The majority of cluster managers fulfil a range of administrative tasks for member committees. These tasks include managing license agreements, funding compliance, enrolments, finance and quality assurance. However, parents still make major contributions to governance (47%). They contribute to centre policies in such areas as fees (31%) and enrolments (31%) in addition to key support in maintaining infrastructure, such as managing maintenance (25%) and preparing grant applications (44%). Many of these committees are also responsible for determining service needs (44%).
- Independent kindergartens are responsible for all administrative tasks associated with running their service. Committees indicated that their most onerous responsibilities

¹ 179 independent committees represented by 77% metropolitan and 23% rural services.

² KPV 2008 *Survey for Independent Committees of Management Report*, Parenting Research Centre, Jan 2009.

³ 16 clusters represented by 31% metropolitan and 63% rural clusters. 6% (1 cluster) is a state wide service.

⁴ KPV 2008 *Survey of Cluster Managers*, Report by Mitchell.L., Policy and Research, KPV, April 2009

⁵ This includes responses agreed (25%) and strongly agreed (69%)

⁶ Data from independent committee of management report includes on-site 46% or off-site 52% clerical and administrative support.

related to consideration of cluster management, DEECD requirements, industrial relations and managing conflict.

- The surveys reveal that kindergartens feel a low level of optimism about their capacity to deliver the new federal government commitment to 15 hours of funded kindergarten per week for all children. The survey results suggest that independent kindergartens (40%) feel slightly more prepared than those in cluster management (19%) arrangements.

Do you think your centre (or in the case of cluster managers, your member sites) is in a strong position to implement 15 hours of funded preschool for 4 year olds in the near future?	Yes	No	Response total
Independent committees	40% (67)	60% (167 app.)	234 (app.)
Cluster managers	19% (3)	81% (13)	16

All services report that they will need the following support to achieve the target of 15 hours of kindergarten per week:

- Increased funding to employ additional staff.
 - Additional qualified early childhood teachers, especially in rural areas.
 - Extra facilities and the extension of existing buildings.
- Almost one fifth (19%) of children enrolled at independent kindergartens who requested Kindergarten Integration Support Services (KISS) did not receive funding in 2009. Services report that this impacts on the extent to which these children can access kindergarten and/or resulted in additional funds being required from other kindergarten income or the child's family. The responses suggest that centres do not think KISS funding is adequate.
 - Many parents in receipt of the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy continue to face out of pocket expenses. Fifty-six per cent of independent committees and 44% of cluster manager survey participants indicated families receiving the fee subsidy will have out of pocket expenses associated with their child's enrolment in kindergarten. This may take the form of enrolment fees, excursion costs, maintenance levies, cost of more than 10 hours etc. This finding is a further indication that services are underfunded and struggle to accommodate the shortfalls in income created by the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy.
 - One of the factors that impact on fees is the number of hours provided in kindergarten programs. Survey responses indicate that both independent and cluster managed services offer programs longer than the 10 hours of kindergarten funded by DEECD. These extra hours are most commonly 12 hour programs but can be up to 19 hours or more. The hours offered over 10 may be fully funded by parents as are programs for three year olds.¹
 - The ongoing viability of rural centres is affected by the number of children enrolled, drought and capacity of these smaller services to obtain funds through other activity. The fees in rural DEECD regions continue to be at the lower end of the fee range in the state (mode: \$100–\$125 per term). The survey of independent committees suggested high numbers of children receiving the fee subsidy are in the Gippsland and Loddon Mallee

Regions⁷. KPV member survey respondents express a high level of support for improved financial assistance for small rural kindergartens.

Conclusion

KPV's member surveys highlight that, kindergartens are under pressure to deliver the policy agenda of government. Governments must further invest in early childhood education in order to support services in fulfilling the promise of the Council of Australian Government (COAG) reform agenda. Parents continue to contribute significant hours to ensure the delivery of kindergarten services and major concerns exist for the financial viability of small rural services and access for children with disabilities. The heavy reliance on parents for funds applies especially to programs for 3 year olds and ensuring vulnerable children can attend 3 year old programs.

In light of increasing demand on the kindergarten sector and major reform agendas, there is a need to increase the level of financial commitment to kindergartens in this state. Services are telling KPV that though many already deliver programs for 4 year olds longer than the 10 hours for which the State Government contributes funding,⁸ they will need a great deal of additional support to deliver the 15 hour programs promised by the Australian Government. This will include funding to expand infrastructure and support in the field for teachers and services to extend programs and strengthen governance and management.

The parent committee members and cluster managers surveyed want a commitment to two years of funded kindergarten. The Australian and Victorian Government must work together to extend the current commitment to universal access to early childhood education for all 4 yr olds to 3 yr olds, as recently recommended by OECD,⁹ and provide the infrastructure and other support in the field to make this happen.

New ways to support the delivery of services are required in a sector so heavily dependent on parents and the non-government sector to deliver, what are now to be recognised as essential services for children and families. President Barack Obama has made investment in early childhood education a key plank of his strategies to turn around the economic downturn in the United States. KPV believes Australian governments should follow suit. We need to first acknowledge that early childhood education is an entitlement of all children. KPV recommends the Australian Government replicate Victorian legislation recently enacted affirming this entitlement.

Investment in early childhood education should also include the Victorian Government conducting a price review for cluster managers, harmonising eligibility and funding of school and preschool disability support programs, improving professional development for teachers and supports for committees of management. This includes the ongoing roll out of KPV Solutions, the pilot projects KPV is delivering in conjunction with the Municipal Association of Victoria and Monash University addressing some of these issues.

Investment in early childhood education is one of the most effective governments can make in terms of outcomes for children in later life and the flow on benefits for the broader community. Intentional play-based education can deliver significant benefits to children's learning and development outcomes. High quality early childhood education promotes good outcomes for all children across the lifespan, with the most dramatic benefits seen in

⁷ Fee subsidy in rural areas was not distinguished separately to metropolitan.

⁸ Of services responding to the independent survey 74 centres reported that they provide a 10 hour four year old kindergarten program. Two reported four year olds programs of less than 10 hours and 61 offered programs longer than 10 hours; range = 11-35 hours.

⁹ OECD (2009) *Economic Policy Reform: Going for Growth*, p.59

children experiencing disadvantage. The benefits are maximised when delivered for at least two years from the age of three by a degree qualified early childhood teacher.

The COAG agenda recognises the benefits of early childhood education in improving outcomes for all children, particularly for vulnerable children. The Australian and Victorian Government investments in early childhood are a great start to delivering the benefits of investment in early childhood education to the community.
