

Wrap up of market sounding session:

Increasing access to early childhood education

2.30 – 5.00pm

4 July 2016

Level 21, 52 Martin Place Sydney

Participants

43 people attended:



Workshop discussion

Each table was assigned a question to discuss and report back to the group. Questions and responses are outlined below.

What data are required to develop proposals? How might we be able to ascertain the outcomes from any investment compared to other services?

Suggested quantitative data for proposals:

- number of children in the target group, including spread of age groups to understand the pipeline of children needing to attend preschool and encourage earlier engagement
- geographic distribution of these children
- distribution of children across subgroups, including Aboriginal children, children with disability, refugee/asylum seeker children, and their degree of engagement. It would be good to link outcome measures to population subgroups
- funding across locations, including total funding and breakdown of federal, state and other funding sources
- lifetime trajectory costs to understand what improvements in Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) scores mean and other touchpoints with the service system.

Qualitative information on barriers to access and attendance may also be helpful, particularly on issues such as awareness, culture, fear, cost and transport.

In terms of measuring outcomes, proposals will need to consider:

- use of control groups, including matching of intervention and control group participants
- use of historical baselines, particularly AEDC scores over time for each subgroup, school attendance and suspension measures
- use of the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC) and the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC)
- other longitudinal measures, including the link between preschool attendance and academic achievement (i.e. NAPLAN results).

What capability and capacity issues should be considered in thin markets? How can they be overcome?

'Thin markets' defined as particular locations where there are low numbers of children requiring early childhood education. Issues include:

- Using technology to facilitate remote delivery of early childhood education
- Mobile services where educators outreach into areas of need
- Distance and transport, particularly in regional and rural areas
- Attracting a qualified workforce.

Will investment lead to competition or collaboration? How can we ensure collective effort to benefit families?

Broadly, investment is likely to lead to both competition and collaboration. Initially, there will be competition to secure funding. Over the longer term, choosing the right measures could drive collaboration if it is seen as necessary for achieving outcomes. In the US, we have seen measures dis-incentivise collaboration in youth employment approaches.

Collaboration should be considered beyond that between individual centres, but also across regions and with other service sectors.

What are the barriers to achieving outcomes for Aboriginal children, children from low SES families, and vulnerable families?

Barriers include:

- cultural issues, which may influence the reluctance to engage with early childhood education
- parents' fear of scrutiny – that children may be removed or family issues exposed (e.g. domestic and family violence)
- lack of understanding of the value of early childhood education
- impact of stress and/or trauma on children, which inhibits their learning ability
- other issues affecting families that inhibit preschool attendance.

What are the challenges in targeting hard to reach families? How could we measure outcomes for this cohort?

Hard to reach families include those:

- from cultural and linguistically diverse communities, including Aboriginal communities
- from low SES backgrounds
- with disability
- who are refugees or recently arrived migrants.

Clearly, outreach is needed to contact families and keep them engaged. Some families may be reluctant to provide details to the government. Proposals will need to identify strategies for different cohorts.

Measurement could include tracking the number of children participating in early childhood education and the proportion of these that are considered 'hard to reach'. Measuring early childhood education quality and the impact of 600 hours is more challenging.

Questions and answers

Developing a reasonable counterfactual will be challenging, given early childhood education is a universal service. There may be ethical issues to consider if proposals put forward a control group that doesn't attend preschool.

The Office of Social Impact Investment has developed some materials that examine these types of measurement issues and how they might be overcome. We recommend that you look at our [Technical guide for outcomes measurement](#) and [Principles for social impact investment proposals to the NSW Government](#).

We prefer using a control group in social impact investments, but acknowledge that it may not always be possible. Other options are set out in the two documents referred to earlier.

The Department of Education holds quite detailed time series data at an LGA level that may also assist measurement.

What are your expectations around the timeframe for success? Services operate on a calendar basis and it is going to be hard to make big changes in 2017 that will show up in the 2018 Census.

There is a significant lag in data collection and outcome measurement in the sector. The annual census of children's participation occurs in August and results are not published until the following March. We would not expect to see practices change significantly in the space of a single calendar year.

Outcome measurement frameworks are negotiated during the joint development phase and we can work through the issues associated with data collection and timing then. In terms of the timing for implementation, it is likely this would not occur until mid to late 2017 at best, or possibly early 2018 depending on how the joint development phase progresses.

Do you intend to use the Centre for Health Record Linkage (CHeReL)?

There are no unit-level records data for early childhood education, so there is no capacity to link data at this stage. If unit-level data were made available through the investment, an appropriate linking authority would be engaged.

I have some concerns about the depth and quality of available data. For instance, AEDC data is inaccurate at a local level. Will this shift focus from outcome to output data?

AEDC data is one example, but other data can also be used. The Department of Education has detailed data not in the public domain. It has not yet been used for other purposes, but we can consider if and how we can use it if there is a need.

We also encourage you to think about proxy measures – process or output indicators – that are closely linked to the outcomes being sought. There may be acceptable alternatives if data for outcomes measures is not available.

The existing social benefit bonds are relatively small scale investments. What is the Government looking for with regard to the size of investments in this area?

The existing social benefit bonds are pilots, which accounts for their size. There is an appetite for larger scale investments, but we are also open to testing an idea on a small scale with a view to ramping up over time.