

Fee Policy

Policy Statement

Uniting Early Learning is 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;
- ensuring parents are informed of applicable fees and providing invoices in a timely manner, with a clear payment schedule;
- providing a fair and manageable system for dealing with non-payment and/or inability to pay fees/outstanding debts;
- advising users of the service about program funding, including government support and fees to be paid by parents;
- working with families experiencing financial barriers to accessing an early childhood program;
- maintaining confidentiality in relation to the financial circumstances of parents;
- providing equitable access for families eligible for Government subsidies such as the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy, Early Start, and Commonwealth Government Childcare Subsidy and Additional Childcare Subsidy.

Executive Summary

Uniting is a not-for-profit community organisation committed to working with the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in our communities. Fees charged by Uniting Early Learning services will go towards the operational costs of program delivery to ensure the service remains viable. Any income generated is used to further the mission of the organisation and will not be for individual gain. Fee levels are set by the Approved Provider each year on the completion of an annual budget to enable services to provide quality education and care and fulfil service and funding agreements. Application of fees across the programs provided by Uniting Early Learning will be equitable and non-discriminatory and be attuned to minimise financial barriers to access services.

The fee schedule, payment and collection arrangements will be documented and explained to families before or during the enrolment process and a schedule of fees or a *Complying written arrangement* (CWA) (refer to *Attachment 14b*) will be provided at this time. To accommodate families’ cultural backgrounds, an interpreter may be required to minimise communication barriers and maximise understanding of the roles and responsibilities of all parties.

Fees will be reviewed on an annual basis with 14 days of any notice of any change to fee schedule provided.

Attachment 14a: Responsibilities relating to the Fee Policy

Attachment 14b: Fee information for families

Attachment 14c: Schedule of Fees – Funded kindergarten programs (Vic only)

Please view the Uniting Agreements below;

[Agreement 14.1 - Fee Payment Agreement- Funded kindergarten program](#)

[Agreement 14.2 - Fee Payment Agreement-Childcare services](#)

[Agreement 14.3 - Fee Payment Agreement-Late fee payment](#)

[Agreement 14.4 - Fee Payment Agreement Additional sessions](#)

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Reference/Sources

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

Uniting Child Safety Policy – Uniting adopts the Uniting Church Australia National Child Safety Policy Framework, 2019 and the principles of this Policy Framework

- Inclusion, Diversity & Equity policy
- Delivery and Collection of Children policy
- Excursions, Regular Outings and Service Events policy
- Privacy policy
- Complaints and Grievances policy - 3
- Enrolment and Orientation policy
- Service Closure policy
- Feedback policy

- *Childcare Service Handbook* Department of Education and Training (Aus)
- *Children's Services Regulations 2020: Regulation*
- *Children's Services amendment Act 2019*
- *Commonwealth and State service and funding agreements*
- *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 Regulations 2011: Regulation 168(2)(n)*
- *Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010*
- *Equal Opportunity Act 1995* (Vic)
- *Kindergarten Funding Guide, Department of Education & Training* (Vic)
- *National Quality Standard, Quality Area 7: Governance and Leadership*
- *Tasmanian Licensing Standards for Centre Based Childcare 2014 Class 5*

Authorisation

This policy was adopted by Uniting Early Learning on 05 October 2021

Review

This policy is to be reviewed by 05 October 2022

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Attachment 14a: Responsibilities relating to the Fee Policy

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, particularly in relation to affordability, flexibility of payment options and procedures for the collection of fees
- monitor the implementation, compliance, complaints, and incidents in relation to this policy
- monitor the number of families/children excluded from the service because of their inability to pay fees
- keep the policy up to date with current legislation, research, policy and best practice
- revise the policy and procedures as part of the service's policy review cycle, or as required
- notify parents/guardians at least 14 days before making any changes to this policy or its procedures (Regulation 172(2)) unless a lesser period is necessary because of a risk

Approved Provider

- comply with the family assistance law (in particular, to reduce fees in accordance with amounts specified by the Department of Education)
- comply with the National Law and National Regulations and/or other applicable childcare laws (for example, state or territory licensing laws)
- comply with Australian Government childcare funding agreements
- comply with the Kindergarten Funding Guide
- ensure the service remains financially viable and can meet its debts and other obligations as they fall due
- advise eligible families of the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy arrangements
- review the current budget to determine fee income requirements
- develop a fee policy that balances the parent's capacity to pay with providing a high-quality program and maintaining service viability
- implement and review this policy in consultation with all relevant parties, and in line with the requirements of service and funding agreements
- ensure that this policy is based on the principles of the *Kindergarten Fee Subsidy, Fee Policy, Childcare Subsidy* and Additional *Childcare Subsidy* Guidelines (see *Glossary*)
- consider any fee-related issues that may be a barrier to families enrolling at the service and work to remove these wherever possible; including considering options for payment when affordability is an issue for families
- review the number of families experiencing financial hardship and the effectiveness of the procedures for late payment and support offered
- clearly communicate this policy and payment options to families in a culturally-sensitive way, and in the family's first language where possible
- notify parents at least 14 days prior of any proposed changes to the fees charged or the way in which the fees are collected

Responsible Person

- ensure that the *Fee Policy* is readily accessible at the service
- provide all parents with access to a copy of the document containing fee information for families
- provide all parents with a schedule of fees and charges upon enrolment of their child
- provide all parents with a fee payment agreement (refer to agreements 14.1, 14.2, 14.3 & 14.4 available on the internet and intranet) or the *Complying Written Arrangement (CWA)*
- collect all relevant information prior to child/ren's commencement and maintain relevant documentation regarding families with entitlements to concessions and subsidies, where applicable

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- comply with the *Privacy policy* regarding financial and other information received, including in relation to the payment/non-payment of fees
- ensure a notice outlining fees charged by the service is displayed prominently in the main entrance
- consider any fee-related issues that may be a barrier to families enrolling at the service and work to remove these wherever possible; including considering options for payment when affordability is an issue for families
- review the number of families experiencing financial hardship and the effectiveness of the procedures for late payment and support offered and advise the Approved Provider
- clearly communicate this policy and payment options to families in a culturally sensitive way, and in the family's first language where possible
- inform the Approved Provider of any complaints or concerns that have been raised regarding fees at the service
- assist the Approved Provider, as required, in sighting supporting documentation for access to the various Government subsidies
- refer families' questions in relation to this policy to the Approved Provider

Educators

- comply with the Centre's Privacy and Confidentiality policy regarding financial and other information received, including in relation to the payment/non-payment of fees
- inform the Approved Provider of any complaints or concerns that have been raised regarding fees at the service
- refer families' questions in relation to this policy to the Approved Provider

Parents

- read the service's:
 - fee information for families (*refer to Attachment 14b*)
 - fee Payment Agreement and the Complying Written Arrangement (CWA) where required. (*refer to agreements (14.1, 14.2, 14.3 or 14.4)* and
 - schedule of Fees and Charges (*refer to Attachment 14c*)
- provide the required documentation to enable the service to claim the various Government subsidies for eligible families (*refer to Attachment 14b – Fee information for families*)
- notify the service if your child will not be attending the program for an extended period. To hold your child's place while not attending the program, parents are required to continue to pay all fees

Purchase of additional Kindergarten Sessions

Subject to availability some services may be able to offer additional fee-paying sessions for children attending the three (3) and four (4) year old kindergarten program. The services occupancy will be determined by the end of term 1, families will be notified of availability at that time. If this is available, parents will be required to consent to the payment agreement, number 14.4

Due to funding agreements between Uniting and The Department of Education it is a requirement that every child be able to participate in two year of kindergarten. For this reason, in the unlikely event that all places at the kindergarten are filled and a child requires a funded year of kindergarten we may need you to forgo the additional fee-paying session. Uniting will return any unused funds to you.

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Attachment 14b: Fee information for families

How fees are set

As part of the budget development process the service takes the following into account when setting fees for programs:

1. the financial viability of the service
2. the level of government funding provided for the program, including any subsidies and concessions
3. the availability of other income sources, such as grants
4. reasonable expenditure in meeting agreed program quality and standards
5. the requirements of State and Commonwealth Government service and funding agreements

Schedule of fees and charges

A schedule of fees and charges or a *Complying Written Arrangement* (CWA) for the program in which the child is enrolled will be provided to parents on enrolment.

Other charges

Other charges levied by the service are included on the *Schedule of fees and Charges*.

Invoices, receipts, and collection of fees will be in accordance with the service's *Fee procedure*.

These may include:

Late collection charge:

It is the responsibility of the parents to ensure their child is collected at the end of the session or prior to the service closing. If the parent does not contact the service to advise of unavoidable delays in collecting their child, a fee may be imposed. If the parent continues to be late in collecting the child, a late fee will be imposed.

The long day care and kindergarten late collection fee is \$10 for every 10 minutes. Parents will be invoiced separately from their fees and Childcare Subsidy will not be applied. The responsible person and family will sign the late collection form, which will be considered and authorised by the person in day-to-day charge of the service.

Fundraising

Fundraising activities are an additional way the service can raise funds for specific purposes. While participation in fundraising is voluntary, the support of every family is encouraged. Fundraising activities are also an opportunity for families and communities to come together.

Subsidies

For kindergarten programs in Victoria, The Department of Education and Training (DET) provides per capita funding as a contribution toward the costs of providing a three and four-year-old kindergarten program. Services meet the balance of costs through charging fees and fundraising activities.

Centrepay

Uniting does have an option to pay by Centrepay.

To organise the setup of Centrepay payments, please contact accountsreceivable@vt.uniting.org or call 03 9051 5100 to speak to our Accounts Receivable team.

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Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (Victorian funded three and four-year-old programs only)

In Victoria, the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy enables eligible children to attend kindergarten at no cost or at minimal cost. Eligibility conditions change from time-to-time; please contact the service for further information.

Families who may be eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (three and four-year-old programs) if the child individually holds, or has a parent or guardian who holds 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
- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children
- Triplets or quadruplets attending a funded kindergarten program in the same year.

Supporting documentation must be sighted by the service on acceptance of a place or on commencement in the program. Families are eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy for the full term in which their concession is valid. It is the parent's responsibility to provide current concession or subsidy details to the service. If a concession card expires and new details are not provided, parents will be expected to pay the termly fee amount and will be invoiced accordingly. Contact the service for further information.

Early Start Kindergarten fee subsidy (Victoria only)

Early start kindergarten is available for eligible children who turn three (3) before the 30th April in the year they are enrolled to attend the funded kindergarten program. The kindergarten program is planned and delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher for up to 15 hours a week free of charge.

Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) is available for;

- Three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- Children known to Child Protection
- Refugee and Asylum seeker children **(if a family have ever held an eligible refugee visa even if it has expired, they qualify for ESK funding).**

Eligible Card Holder for ESK

- A child is eligible for ESK if the child holds or has a parent or guardian who holds one of the following:
- Refugee or Asylum Seeker visa (200-204, 786 or 866)
- Humanitarian Stay visa (subclass 449)
- Temporary Protection visa (subclass 785)
- Bridging visas for any of the above Refugee or Asylum Seeker visas

Childcare Subsidy

Childcare Subsidy assist eligible families with the cost of childcare fees. Childcare Subsidy will be paid directly to your approved childcare provider/s to reduce the fees you pay.

For further information contact the service.

- CCS Helpdesk on: ccshelpdesk@education.gov.au or 1300 667 276

Additional Childcare Subsidy

ACCS (temporary financial hardship) is available now for families experiencing financial hardship and provides short-term support to families experiencing a significantly reduced ability to pay childcare fees, such as if the parent lost income due to being unable to attend work.

Eligible families will receive a subsidy equal to the actual fee charged by the childcare service, up to 120 per cent of the CCS hourly rate cap. In most cases, the full cost of childcare will be covered. It can be accessed for up to 13 weeks and eligible families are entitled to up to 100 hours of subsidised childcare per fortnight. Families will be required to provide supporting evidence of a substantial reduction in their ability to pay childcare fees, such as an email from their employer.

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Further information can be found at the Services Australia website:

<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/additional-child-care-subsidy>

Staff Discount - Kindergarten

If a staff member is enrolling a child for which they have primary care responsibilities, a 10% discount applies for each child. However, if a staff member is enrolling multiple births with three (3) or more children, Kindergarten Fee Subsidy applies.

Staff Discount – Childcare

If a staff member is enrolling a child for which they have primary care responsibilities, a 10% discount applies for each child.

Payment of fees

The service will review payment options and procedures to ensure that they are inclusive and sensitive to families' cultural and financial situations.

Fees will be invoiced to parents directly and must be paid by the date indicated on the invoice. Each invoice will be accompanied by payment instructions.

Parents of children in **long day care** are required to pay fees by **direct debit** on a fortnightly basis. Families who have a 3rd party organisation paying their fees on their behalf will be exempt.

Parents of children attending kindergarten have the payment choice of fortnightly/monthly direct debit payment plans, or one payment per term. Payment plans are to be discussed with Accounts Receivable at the earliest opportunity.

Parents of children attending a **four year old kindergarten program greater than 15 hours a week are required to pay fees fortnightly by direct debit.**

Parents of children attending a **three year old kindergarten program greater than 5 hours per week are required to pay fees fortnightly by direct debit.**

Parents of children attending **Out of School Hours Care /Occasional Care** will be invoiced in arrears. Parents are required to pay fortnightly via direct debit.

Fees will be charged for all bookings, including during centre closure periods, unless otherwise advised by the Approved Provider. Voluntary closures during December and January do not attract a daily fee.

There is a surcharge added when using a credit card for direct debit. Using a bank account incurs no additional fee:

- *1.45% for Visa/Mastercard*
- *3.60% for AMEX*
- *Failed direct debits incur a dishonor fee of \$8.80 per dishonor.*

Direct debits are processed before 5am on your scheduled payment day. Please ensure you have funds available the night before the payment is due to be processed.

Families experiencing difficulty in paying fees are requested to contact accountsreceivable@vt.uniting.org or call 03 90515100.

In relation to a family's financial/personal circumstances, the Privacy policy will always be complied with.

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Unpaid fees

If fees are not paid by the due date, the following steps will be taken:

- an initial reminder will be given to parents and will include information on how to contact our Accounts Receivable team where there are concerns regarding payment.
- two weeks later a second reminder will be given to families, further to that, unless there are extenuating circumstances, a payment plan will be required before the child can attend the service.
- if a decision is made to withdraw the child's place at the service, the parents will be notified in writing. Uniting may also choose to employ the services of a debt collector.
- Uniting reserves the right to vary this process on compassionate grounds.

Refund of fees

If a family becomes eligible for a subsidy or concession, they are required to provide evidence of eligibility to the service for concession to be applied from the following Term.

There will be **no** refund of fees in the following circumstances:

- a child's short-term illness
- public holidays
- family holiday during operational times
- closure of the service for staff training days

Fees may not be refunded if a service closes due to extreme and unavoidable circumstances. This decision will be made by the Approved Provider. (refer *Service Closure* policy).

In addition, there will be no refund where a parent chooses not to send their child to the program for the maximum number of hours for which they are enrolled.

If a child leaves a kindergarten service during a term, a fee for that term will be applied as per below:

- up to and including week 5, a pro-rata fee based on the number of weeks the child attended
- from week 6, the full-term fee is applied

Closure of service for staff training days

To support the positive correlation between educator ongoing professional development and improved learning outcomes for children, Uniting facilitates professional development opportunities for all educators. If staff are required to attend when the usual program is operating, the service will be closed. Services may be closed for a maximum of up to 4 days per year. Days will be identified on a yearly basis depending upon the professional learning needs and requirements of individual service type. Parents will be notified of the dates in advance to enable alternative care arrangements to be made. Fees will be charged as normal on these occasions and no refund will be provided (refer to *Service Closure* policy).

Children turning three during the year of enrolment

For a kindergarten program in Victoria children must turn three year of age by 30 April in the year of attendance. Children can only attend the three (3) year old program once they have turned three years of age. If a child turns three after the program commences, their place will be held. Pro-rata fees will apply once the child commences.

Financial support services

Parents experiencing financial hardship may require access to family support services. Further information can be obtained from your early years' service.

Notification of fee changes during the year

Fees set for the year would only be reviewed in extraordinary circumstances, for example, if attendance rates fall below the budget 'break even' point. Parents will be notified one term in advance of any required fee increase and will be offered the option to request a payment plan.

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Attachment 14c: Schedule of Fee's-Funded kindergarten) (Victoria Only)

Fee schedule 2022 – Funded kindergarten

	Fees (\$)	Families eligible for the Funded Kindergarten Fee Subsidy		
		Fees (\$)	Other charges (\$)	Total (\$)
<i>Term 1</i>				
<i>Term 2</i>				
<i>Term 3</i>				
<i>Term 4</i>				
<i>Total</i>				

Payment of fees

Invoices will be issued during the fourth week of term one and during the second week of term two, three and four. Invoices must be paid by the due date and can be paid by direct debit or BPAY. For any difficulties please contact accounts.receivable@vt.uniting.org accounts receivable on 03 90515100.

Kindergarten Fee Subsidy

Families who are eligible for the 15 hours Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (refer to *Fee information for families*) will not be required to make fee payments

Parents of children attending a **four year old kindergarten program greater than 15 hours a week are required to pay fees fortnightly by direct debit.**

Parents of children attending a **three year old kindergarten program greater than 5 hours per week are required to pay fees fortnightly by direct debit.**

Late collection charge

The kindergarten late collection fee is \$10 for every 10 minutes. Parents will be invoiced separately from their fees.

Uniting staff discount

If you are a Uniting staff member, 10% discount can be applied.

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