Government of South Australia

QualifySA in Early Childhood

Financial support guidelines for preschool educators

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Office for Early Childhood Development

Contents

From the heart ... 3
Background ... 3
Eligibility ... 4
Aboriginal Pathways ... 4
Placement support payment ... 5
Employer Aboriginal pathways trainee support payment ... 5
Support for regional and remote recipients ... 5
Employer support payment ... 6
Employment retention payment ... 6
Financial support payment milestones ... 7
Conditions for financial support ... 7
Before applying ... 8
How to apply ... 8
Assessment of applications and execution of funding agreements ... 9
Guideline revisions ... 9
Contact ... 10

From the heart

We acknowledge the Aboriginal peoples as the First peoples of South Australia and as custodians of the lands, waters, skies and communities where we live, learn and raise children.

We recognise Aboriginal peoples as having the longest living culture, raising children safe and strong in their identity, community, culture, and connection to country.

We pay our deep respects to Elders past and present, and in their role as the first knowledge sharers for children. We follow in their footsteps.

Aboriginal peoples, working with and for children, are central in shaping our work. Their wisdom, advice, and guidance enrich our practices, creating a more inclusive and culturally safe environment for children and families.

We respect Aboriginal peoples' ways of being, doing and wise practices guiding our continual learning. Together we walk and build stronger, more supportive communities for all children.

Background

The QualifySA in Early Childhood program (QualifySA) provides financial support for South Australian residents undertaking qualifications in early childhood education and care (ECEC) to offset costs related to their study.

The program aims to reduce barriers and enable individuals from diverse backgrounds to pursue rewarding ECEC careers, while at the same time enhancing the quality of care and education provided to children in South Australia.

QualifySA is one of the initiatives under South Australia's Early Childhood Workforce Strategy, which was developed in response to the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care in South Australia. QualifySA is designed to build a pipeline of qualified early childhood educators and teachers to support the South Australian government's roll-out of universal 3-year-old preschool.

A strong, culturally safe early childhood workforce is also essential to improving outcomes for Aboriginal children and families. To support this, QualifySA includes Aboriginal Pathways as an integrated stream, strengthening the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators and teachers, and supporting culturally safe high-quality early learning across South Australia.

QualifySA is administered by BUSY At Work on behalf of the Office for Early Childhood Development (OECD).

Financial support

QualifySA provides financial support of up to:

- $6,000 for eligible recipients undertaking a diploma
- $13,000 for eligible Aboriginal Pathways stream recipients undertaking a Diploma or Certificate III

Recipients in outer regional, remote and very remote areas may be eligible for additional support through Grow Your Own allowance.

The schedule of milestone payments is outlined in the Financial support payment milestones.

The funding provided may be used by recipients to offset living expenses while they study and work. Expenses may include, but are not limited to, course fees, study materials, accommodation costs, living

costs, registration fees, teaching resources or professional development.

Eligibility

To be eligible for financial support under the QualifySA program, an applicant must:

- be a South Australian resident; and
- be a citizen of Australia or New Zealand or hold a permanent resident of Australia visa

Applicants must also:

Be accepted to undertake a Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care (CHC50121/CHC50125) at one of the following:

• TAFE SA
• A not-for-profit Registered Training Organisation with a Funded Activities Agreement with Skills SA, currently
  ○ Limestone Coast Training
  ○ Institute of Training and Further Education (iTFE)

OR
Be a Flying Start Pathways participant studying a Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care (CHC50121/CHC50125) at a Registered Training Organisation with a Funded Activities Agreement with Skills SA (speak with your Key Connector to check your eligibility)
OR
Be a participant of a Flying Start Workforce Grant program, that is studying a Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care (CHC50121/CHC50125) at nominated Registered Training Organisation, (potentially eligible students will be informed by their RTO if they meet this requirement)

Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people have alternative eligibility provisions outlined in Aboriginal Pathways section.

Applicants undertaking a traineeship who meet the above requirements are eligible for the program, where they also have an approved contract of training and proof of enrolment with an eligible provider.

Aboriginal Pathways

Aboriginal Pathways recognises the additional structural and systemic barriers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may face in accessing and completing early childhood qualifications. Through targeted funding and flexible supports, the program directs resources to those experiencing these barriers, improving equitable access and strengthening outcomes that support learners to thrive and succeed in their early childhood education pathways.

Aboriginal Pathway applicants must meet the resident and citizen requirements above and:

Be accepted to undertake a Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care (CHC50121/CHC50125) or a Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care (CHC30121/CHC30125) at one of the following:

- TAFE SA
- Registered Training Organisation with a Funded Activities Agreement with Skills SA

Applicants for Aboriginal Pathways will need to provide one of the following at the time of application:

- a confirmation of Aboriginality; or
- a letter of support from an Aboriginal Community member; or
- a statutory declaration signed and confirmed by an Aboriginal Community member.

These requirements are in place to ensure the integrity of the Aboriginal-specific funding and to support its appropriate distribution to Aboriginal peoples.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recipients may also be eligible for a Placement support payment.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recipients who do not have a current South Australian working with children check or related clearances will also receive an additional supplement of $200 to cover the application costs.

Placement support payment

A Placement support payment for Aboriginal recipients is available.

The payment is designed to reduce financial barriers that may prevent recipients from undertaking or completing placements.

Eligible recipients will receive up to $5,000 to support them to undertake their placements throughout the qualification.

Employer Aboriginal pathways trainee support payment

An additional $6,000 is available under QualifySA for employers in South Australia who employ an Aboriginal financial support recipient, who is undertaking a traineeship in a ECEC Service.

This payment supports increased Aboriginal participation in the ECEE workforce by helping employers offset the costs associated with recruiting, training, and supporting a trainee. It aims to strengthen workforce capacity while improving qualification and employment outcomes for Aboriginal people.

This funding can be used by the employer to support the trainee through:

- Supervision and mentoring
- Training related administrative costs
- Paid study time
- Cultural support initiatives
- Backfill staffing
- Workplace adjustments to support retention

This incentive helps create sustainable employment pathways and strengthens culturally inclusive early learning environments. Eligible employers will be contacted by the program administrator, BUSY At Work about how to receive the funding.

Support for regional and remote recipients

Living in regional and remote areas can create barriers to accessing higher education. Recipients living in outer regional or remote areas of South Australia may be eligible for the additional Grow Your Own (GYO) allowance available under QualifySA.

The GYO allowance provides up to an additional $10,000 over the course of a recipient's studies to help them pursue their education, and to build a career in their local region. This funding is in addition to the base financial support offered through QualifySA.

To be eligible for the GYO allowance, recipients must:

- be eligible for financial support through QualifySA; and
- reside in, and intend to work within, a South Australian location classified as very remote, remote, or outer regional according to the Australian Statistical Geography Standard – Remoteness Area classification.

Eligibility for the GYO allowance will be determined by the administrator based on recipients' residential address. GYO payments will cease if a financial support recipient receiving the GYO allowance relocates to an area that is not classified as very remote, remote or outer regional.

Employer support payment

An additional $1,000 is available under QualifySA for the employer of the financial support recipient, who is currently working in the South Australian ECEC sector (except for Aboriginal pathway trainees, see Employer Aboriginal pathways trainee support payment)

This funding can be used by the employer for various purposes such as partially covering the cost of backfilling during a financial support recipient's placement, supporting professional learning, allowing the recipient to undertake studies without work duties, facilitating planning time, or upskilling another individual.

Eligible employers will be contacted by the program administrator, BUSY At Work about how to receive the funding.

Employment retention payment

QualifySA financial support includes an employment retention payment.

Following course completion, the financial support recipient needs to commence employment in the South Australian early childhood sector.

Employment needs to begin within 6 months of course completion, whether in a fixed term or ongoing role.

Financial support recipients are then required to maintain continuous eligible ECEC employment for two years in order to receive the employment retention payment.

To receive the employment retention payment, recipients must be employed in a teacher or educator role specifically working with 3-year-old children at an eligible education setting. An eligible education setting means one of the following South Australian early childhood education and care service types:

- long day care services providing a preschool program;
- sessional preschool provided by government preschools; or
- sessional preschool provided by non-government preschools.

It is the financial support recipient's responsibility to find eligible employment in South Australia to meet the program milestones. The OECD does not guarantee employment in the early childhood sector.

Financial support payment milestones

The table below shows the financial support payment milestones. Recipients will receive the payments they are eligible for after they provide the evidence needed for each milestone. The evidence needed is described in the financial support agreement and is checked by the administrator.

Payment schedule	**Educators**	**Aboriginal Pathways**		**GYO Allowance**
		Students	Trainees	
	Payment amounts			
Milestone 1 following enrolment/census	$2,500	$3,000*	$3,000*	Up to $5,000
Placement payment following enrolment/census	nil	$5,000	nil	nil
Milestone 2 following course completion	$2,500	$3,000	$3,000	Up to $5,000
Employment retention payment after completing 2 years of eligible ECEC employment	$1,000	$2,000	$2,000	nil
Total value for the recipient	**Up to $6,000**	**Up to $13,000**	**Up to $8,000**	**Up to $10,000**
Employer support payment (to employer not financial support recipient)	*$1,000*	*$1,000*	*nil*	*nil*
Employer Aboriginal pathways trainee support payment (to employer not financial support recipient)	*nil*	*nil*	*$6,000*	*nil*
Total value for the recipient and employer	***Up to $7,000***	***Up to $14,000***	***Up to $14,000***	***Up to $10,000***

*Aboriginal students who do not have a current South Australian working with children check or other related clearances will receive an additional supplement of $200 to cover the application costs.

Conditions for financial support

- Applicants can apply for QualifySA in addition to Fee Free TAFE, though priority may be given to those who are unable to access tuition support through other government initiatives.
- Applicants should have already been accepted into an eligible course, and all funding is contingent on submitting satisfactory evidence they have completed study requirements and remain enrolled.
- For the purposes of the funding application, a part-time applicant must be studying a minimum 0.5 load. This is half of what is considered to be a full-time load by the applicant's institution. To calculate this, applicants will need to confirm the number of units or points their institution deems as full-time and halve that number.
- Applicants must complete their qualification by 31 December 2028.
- Applicants should intend to work in a South Australian early childhood service specifically working with 3-year-old children upon completion of their qualification. Early childhood services include long day care services providing a preschool program, and non-government and government run sessional preschools.
- Applicants should assess their financial situation, as they are responsible for additional expenses beyond the awarded amount.
- Funding amounts are pre-tax and recipients are encouraged to seek independent advice on potential impacts on taxation and government benefit schemes.

- If a financial support recipient's study extends beyond the standard duration of time for expected completion due to circumstances such as studying part-time, not passing subjects, withdrawing, or other considerations, the timing of the scheduled payments will be adjusted.
- Financial support recipients will be required to contractually commit to working in a preschool program in South Australia's early childhood sector after course completion for a minimum of 2 years.
- Financial support recipients receive payments per academic year, adjusted for recognition of prior learning (RPL), other reductions in course duration, or completed subjects/units of study prior to being approved to receive financial support.
- Eligibility for employment retention payments extends to both fixed-term and ongoing roles in the South Australian early childhood sector.
- Financial support recipients must promptly report changes in circumstances to the administrator. This includes, but is not limited to, changes in location, study status, course details, employment status and employment details.
- Adjustments to the timings of milestone payments will be made for financial support recipients that take parental leave while involved in the QualifySA program. Recipients must notify the administrator of periods of parental leave to be taken.
- Financial support is disbursed based on milestone conditions to be met by the recipient. If a financial support recipient fails to meet the prescribed milestones, they will not receive payment. The financial support recipient may also be required to repay some funding. Although, in particular circumstances, the OECD may consider waiving repayment obligations, subject to individual evaluation and supporting documentation.

Before applying

There are steps that need to be taken before an applicant applies for QualifySA.

Step 1: Review eligibility requirements

Potential applicants should review these guidelines closely to find out important information and check that they're eligible to apply. This includes ensuring that the early childhood qualification they've been accepted to study makes them eligible for QualifySA financial support.

Potential applicants should speak to their employer about applying for the employer support payment if they are studying to be a preschool educator and are currently working in the South Australian ECEC sector.

Step 2: Gather evidence to support the application

When applying for QualifySA, applicants will need to provide proof of:

- enrolment or a letter of offer to study from their institution
- address (driver's license or other proof)
- Aboriginality (if they are applying for the Aboriginal Pathways stream of QualifySA)
- Training contract and Training plan (for applicants undertaking a traineeship)
- enrolment in the Flying Start Pathways program (if required).

How to apply

If you're eligible for QualifySA and you've gathered the evidence needed to support your application, you can apply online for QualifySA financial support for preschool educators.

Assessment of applications and execution of funding agreements

Applications for this program are assessed by an external administrator, in accordance with the eligibility criteria. Recommendations on whether applications should be approved are made to the OECD.

If the program receives more applications than it can accommodate, preference will be given to specific cohorts such as:

- applicants living in regional and remote areas
- those working in metropolitan ECEC services with a significant number of vulnerable or disadvantaged children
- applicants who have not yet benefited from financial support or incentives provided by the OECD or another funding source.

Applicants will receive a response from QualifySA's program administrator, BUSY At Work, about the outcome of their application. If the applicant is successful, they will be notified that they have been pre-approved for financial support.

If the successful applicant hasn't done so already, they should enroll in their course with the confidence that their financial support is pre-approved.

BUSY At Work will then invite successful applicants to an online information session to guide people through the program and discuss expectations.

After the census date, successful applicants should send proof of their enrolment to BUSY At Work.

Funding agreements are then entered into between the successful applicant and the OECD. This funding agreement is legally binding and outlines the recipient's rights and responsibilities.

These funding agreements are entered into at two points during the year, following the census periods. These agreements can take time to prepare and be processed. The first payment to the recipient is made following execution of the funding agreement.

Sample QualifySA agreements can be downloaded using the links below.

Sample Financial Support Agreement

Sample Employer agreement

For every year of study, financial support recipients will be required to send evidence of their enrolment after the census period to BUSY At Work to continue to receive milestone payments. Once recipients are qualified and working in the sector, they are required to send employment details to BUSY At Work in order to receive the employment retention payment.

Guideline revisions

The QualifySA program guidelines are subject to potential change. Any modifications will be made available on the QualifySA webpage.

Contact

For questions about the program, please contact the program administrator BUSY At Work.

Email: sascholarships@busyatwork.com.au

Phone: 1300 050 509

To provide feedback on the program, or to raise concerns, please contact the Workforce Policy and Innovation team within the Office for Early Childhood Development directly at OECD.ECWorkforceSupport@sa.gov.au