

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 Child Care Subsidy and Additional Child Care 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/Licensee 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 28 days of any notice of any change to fee schedule provided.

DOCUMENT TITLE & NUMBER	FEE POLICY			
Content Owner	Uniting Early Learning – Executive Officer			Page 1 of 16
Document Author	EL Practice Manager	Document Version	V 4.0	Policy No. 014
Date Published	22 October 2019	Revision Due Date	30 April 2020	

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Current Environmental Context

The Education and Care Services National Regulations requires services to have a policy in place in relation to the payment of fees and provision of a schedule of fees charged by the service (Regulation 168 (2) (n)).

The Department of Education and Training (DET) provides per capita funding as a contribution towards the costs of the four-year-old kindergarten program. 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 (refer to Glossary) enables eligible children to attend the four-year-old kindergarten program at minimal cost.

The Victorian government is rolling out a subsidised kindergarten for all three-year-olds. Kindergarten programs will be run in sessional kindergartens and long day care centres. They will be available in certain areas from 2020, and across the state from 2022.

DET also funds eligible three year old children who meet the criteria for vulnerable disadvantaged children where an earlier enrolment in quality education and care improves their learning and development outcomes. Kindergarten Funding Guide. (refer to Glossary).

Services must also advise eligible families of the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy arrangements. The fees charged must comply with the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy – Fees Policy (refer to Glossary) and be responsive to the local community and the viability of the service. Kindergarten Funding Guide. (outlines the criteria to be covered in the policy).

- Child Care Subsidy (CCS – refer to Glossary) approved child care services have many obligations, including those under the family assistance law. The operator has a legal responsibility to:
- 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 child care laws (for example, state or territory licensing laws)
- account for Australian Government funds
- ensure that the operator and their key personnel are suitable persons to operate a child care service
- comply with Australian Government child care funding agreements
- ensure the service remains financially viable and can meet its debts and other obligations as they fall due
- Legal obligations are set out in Australian Government and state/territory child care legislation, rules and funding agreements. Adherence to these conditions ensures that the service is operating in accordance with legislation and in a financially responsible manner

DOCUMENT TITLE & NUMBER		FEE POLICY		
Content Owner	Uniting Early Learning – Executive Officer			Page 2 of 16
Document Author	EL Practice Manager	Document Version	V 4.0	Policy No. 014
Date Published	22 October, 2019	Revision Due Date	30 April, 2020	

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Attachment 14a: Responsibilities relating to the Fee Policy

Attachment 14b: Fee information for families

Attachment 14c: Schedule of Fees – Four-year-old (funded) kindergarten program (Vic only)

Attachment 14d: Schedule of Fees – Three-year-old (funded) kindergarten program (Vic only)

Attachment 14e: Schedule of Fees – Three-year-old Early Start kindergarten program (Vic only)

Attachment 14f: Schedule of Fees – Early Childhood Services;

(Long Day Care, Outside School Hours Care, Family Day Care, Occasional Care & Vacation Care)

These forms are available on the Uniting Intranet ([Click here](#))

Form 14.1 Fee Payment Agreement – Four-year-old (funded) kindergarten program

Form 14.2 Fee Payment Agreement – Three-year-old program (Non funded)

Form 14.3 Fee Payment Agreement – Early Childhood Services

Form 14.4 Fee Payment Agreement - Late Fee payment form

Form 14.5 Fee Payment Agreement – Three-year-old (funded) kindergarten program

DOCUMENT TITLE & NUMBER		FEE POLICY		
Content Owner	Uniting Early Learning – Executive Officer			Page 3 of 16
Document Author	EL Practice Manager	Document Version	V 4.0	Policy No. 014
Date Published	22 October, 2019	Revision Due Date	30 April, 2020	

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Reference/Sources

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

Keeping Children Safe Policy of the Uniting Church in Australia Synod of Victoria and Tasmania,
Approved May 2017

- *Access and Equity* policy
- *Delivery and Collection of Children* policy
- *Excursions, Regular Outings and Service Events* policy
- *Privacy and Confidentiality* policy
- *Complaints and Grievances* policy - 3
- *Enrolment and Orientation* policy
- *Inclusion and Diversity* policy
- *Service Closure* policy
- *Child Care Service Handbook* Department of Education and Training (Aus)
- *Children's Services Regulations 2009: Regulation 40(f), 41(b), 42*
- *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)*
- *Kindergarten Funding Guide, Department of Education & Training* (Vic)
- *National Quality Standard, Quality Area 7: Leadership and Service Management*
- *Tasmanian Licensing Standards for Centre Based Child Care 2014 Class 5*

Authorisation

This policy was adopted by Uniting Early Learning on: 22 October, 2019

Review

This policy is to be reviewed by 30 April, 2020

DOCUMENT TITLE & NUMBER		FEE POLICY		
Content Owner	Uniting Early Learning – Executive Officer			Page 4 of 16
Document Author	EL Practice Manager	Document Version	V 4.0	Policy No. 014
Date Published	22 October, 2019	Revision Due Date	30 April, 2020	

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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 28 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/Licensee

- 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, Child Care Subsidy* and *Additional Child Care 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 28 days prior of any proposed changes to the fees charged or the way in which the fees are collected

DOCUMENT TITLE & NUMBER	FEE POLICY			
Content Owner	Uniting Early Learning – Executive Officer			Page 5 of 16
Document Author	EL Practice Manager	Document Version	V 4.0	Policy No. 014
Date Published	22 October, 2019	Revision Due Date	30 April, 2020	

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
(Refer to samples Attachments 14c, 14d, 14e or 14f)
- Provide all parents with a fee payment agreement (refer to form 14.1, 14.2, 14.3 & 14.4 available on the internet and intranet) or the *Complying Written Arrangement (CWA)*
- Collect all relevant information and maintain relevant documentation regarding families with entitlements to concessions and subsidies, where applicable
- Comply with the *Privacy and Confidentiality* 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/Licensee
- 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/Licensee of any complaints or concerns that have been raised regarding fees at the service
- Assist the Approved Provider/Licensee, 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/Licensee

DOCUMENT TITLE & NUMBER	FEE POLICY			
Content Owner	Uniting Early Learning – Executive Officer			Page 6 of 16
Document Author	EL Practice Manager	Document Version	V 4.0	Policy No. 014
Date Published	22 October, 2019	Revision Due Date	30 April, 2020	

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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/Licensee 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/Licensee

Parents

- Read the service's:
 - Fee information for families (*refer to Attachment 14b*)
 - Fee Payment Agreement or the Complying Written Arrangement (CWA) (*refer to forms (14.1, 14.2 14.3 or 14.4)* and
 - Schedule of Fees and Charges (*refer to Attachments 14c,14d, 14e & 14f*)
 - Sign and comply with the Fee Payment Agreement or or the Complying Written Arrangement (CWA)
- Notify the Approved Provider/Licensee if experiencing difficulties with the payment of fee
- 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

DOCUMENT TITLE & NUMBER		FEE POLICY		
Content Owner	Uniting Early Learning – Executive Officer			Page 7 of 16
Document Author	EL Practice Manager	Document Version	V 4.0	Policy No. 014
Date Published	22 October, 2019	Revision Due Date	30 April, 2020	

Printed hard copies of this document are considered uncontrolled.

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Attachment 14b: Fee information for families

Why fees are necessary

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.

The Victorian government is rolling out a subsidised kindergarten for all three-year-olds. Kindergarten programs will be run in sessional kindergartens and long day care centres. They will be available in certain areas from 2020, and across the state from 2022.

DET provides a Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (see below) that enables children from eligible families to attend a three and four-year-old kindergarten program free of charge, or at a minimal cost.

DET also provides funding to assist eligible three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children known to Child Protection, to access kindergarten programs.

Child Care Subsidy and *Additional Child Care Subsidy* assist eligible families with the cost of child care fees. Child Care Subsidy will be paid directly to your approved child care 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](tel:1300667276)

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*.

DOCUMENT TITLE & NUMBER	FEE POLICY			
Content Owner	Uniting Early Learning – Executive Officer			Page 8 of 16
Document Author	EL Practice Manager	Document Version	V 4.0	Policy No. 014
Date Published	22 October, 2019	Revision Due Date	30 April, 2020	

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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 or part thereof. Parents will be invoiced separately from their fees and Child Care 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

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

In Victoria, the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy enables eligible children to attend kindergarten free of charge 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 only) 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 visa (subclass 200)
- In-country Special Humanitarian visa (subclass 201)
- Global Special Humanitarian visa (subclass 202)
- Temporary Humanitarian Concern visa (subclass 786)
- Protection visa (subclass 866)
- Emergency Rescue visa (subclass 203)
- Woman at risk visa (subclass 204)
- Bridging visas A-E
- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children
- Triplets or quadruplets attending a funded kindergarten program in the same year.

DOCUMENT TITLE & NUMBER		FEE POLICY		
Content Owner	Uniting Early Learning – Executive Officer			Page 9 of 16
Document Author	EL Practice Manager	Document Version	V 4.0	Policy No. 014
Date Published	22 October, 2019	Revision Due Date	30 April, 2020	

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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)

Three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children known to Child Protection are eligible to attend a funded early childhood program that is planned and delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher free of charge. The service receives funding for children who meet the eligibility criteria. Contact the service for further information.

Child Care Subsidy

Child Care Subsidy and *Additional Child Care Subsidy* assist eligible families with the cost of child care fees. Child Care Subsidy will be paid directly to your approved child care provider/s to reduce the fees you pay.

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.

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.

Families experiencing difficulty in paying kindergarten fees are requested to contact Uniting Accounts Receivable on 9051 5098.

To arrange a suitable alternative payment plan for Family Day Care families, please contact your local administrative team. For long day care families, please contact the responsible person at the service.

In relation to a family's financial/personal circumstances, the Privacy and Confidentiality policy will be complied with at all times.

Fee paying parents in child care with regular bookings will be charged 2 weeks in advance. This will be deducted from the final invoice.

DOCUMENT TITLE & NUMBER		FEE POLICY		
Content Owner	Uniting Early Learning – Executive Officer			Page 10 of 16
Document Author	EL Practice Manager	Document Version	V 4.0	Policy No. 014
Date Published	22 October, 2019	Revision Due Date	30 April, 2020	

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 a range of support options available for the family
- Where payment is still not received, parents will be invited to attend a meeting (where appropriate) to discuss the range of support options available and establish a payment plan and reduction in days of attendance until the debt has been paid
- Failure to attend the meeting and continued non-payment may result in a letter notifying parents that the child's place at the service may be withdrawn unless payment is made or a payment plan is entered into within a specified period of time. This letter will also include information on a range of support options available for the family
- The service will continue to offer support and will reserve the right to employ the services of a debt collector
- If a decision is made to withdraw the child's place at the service, the parents will be provided with 14 days' notice in writing

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 one or more days when a qualified educator is absent, and a qualified reliever is not available
- closure of the service for staff training days
- closure of the service due to extreme and unavoidable circumstances (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 prorata fee based on the number of weeks the child attended
- from week 6, the full-term fee is applied

DOCUMENT TITLE & NUMBER		FEE POLICY		
Content Owner	Uniting Early Learning – Executive Officer			Page 11 of 16
Document Author	EL Practice Manager	Document Version	V 4.0	Policy No. 014
Date Published	22 October, 2019	Revision Due Date	30 April, 2020	

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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 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. In funded three (3) year old kindergarten programs, if a child turns three after the program commences, their place will be held. In a (unfunded) three (3) year old program, if a child turns three after the program commences, their place will be held for them subject to full payment of fees. They must still turn three before 30 April to be eligible for a kindergarten place.

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.

DOCUMENT TITLE & NUMBER		FEE POLICY		
Content Owner	Uniting Early Learning – Executive Officer			Page 12 of 16
Document Author	EL Practice Manager	Document Version	V 4.0	Policy No. 014
Date Published	22 October, 2019	Revision Due Date	30 April, 2020	

Printed hard copies of this document are considered uncontrolled.

Please refer to the Uniting Intranet/Document Management System for the latest version.

Attachment 14c: Schedule of Fee's-(Four year old funded kindergarten)

(Victoria Only)

Fee schedule 2020 - Four-year-old (funded) kindergarten

Hours: 150 hours per term

	Fees (\$)	Families eligible for the 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 second week of each term and must be paid by the due date.

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.

Late collection charge

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

DOCUMENT TITLE & NUMBER	FEE POLICY			
Content Owner	Uniting Early Learning – Executive Officer			Page 13 of 16
Document Author	EL Practice Manager	Document Version	V 4.0	Policy No. 014
Date Published	22 October, 2019	Revision Due Date	30 April, 2020	

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Attachment 14d: Schedule of Fee's - (Three year old funded kindergarten)

(Victoria Only)

Fee schedule 2020 - Three-year-old (funded) kindergarten

Hours:	hours per term	Families eligible for the 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 second week of each term and must be paid by the due date.

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.

Children turning three during the year

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. In funded three (3) year old kindergarten programs, if a child turns three after the program commences, their place will be held.

Late collection charge

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

DOCUMENT TITLE & NUMBER	FEE POLICY			
Content Owner	Uniting Early Learning – Executive Officer			Page 14 of 16
Document Author	EL Practice Manager	Document Version	V 4.0	Policy No. 014
Date Published	22 October, 2019	Revision Due Date	30 April, 2020	

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Attachment 14e: Schedule of Fee's - Three year old program

Fee schedule 2020 - Three-year-old program

	<i>Fees (\$)</i>
<i>Term 1</i>	\$
<i>Term 2</i>	\$
<i>Term 3</i>	\$
<i>Term 4</i>	\$
<i>Total</i>	\$

Children turning three during the year

Families have two options for accessing and paying for a place in the three (3) year old program:

1. Make full payment at the beginning of term one, which will guarantee a place in the three (3) year old program.
2. Payment is paid pro rata, based on the date that the child commences in the program. In this instance, there is no guarantee of a place in the program. Children can commence orientation into the program two weeks prior to the child turning 3 years of age. A parent must be in attendance and take all responsibility for the child. Children can only commence in the program once they have turned three (3).

Late collection charge

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

DOCUMENT TITLE & NUMBER	FEE POLICY			
Content Owner	Uniting Early Learning – Executive Officer			Page 15 of 16
Document Author	EL Practice Manager	Document Version	V 4.0	Policy No. 014
Date Published	22 October, 2019	Revision Due Date	30 April, 2020	

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Attachment 14f: Schedule of Fee's - Long Day Care, Outside school hours care, Occasional Care, Family Day Care, Vacation Care

Session and Fee details 2020

On-going

Day	Session Start	Session End	Usual Fee	Unit
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				

Casual

Day	Usual Fee	Unit

Payment of fees

Invoices will be issued and must be paid by the due date.

Late collection charge

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

DOCUMENT TITLE & NUMBER	FEE POLICY			
Content Owner	Uniting Early Learning – Executive Officer			Page 16 of 16
Document Author	EL Practice Manager	Document Version	V 4.0	Policy No. 014
Date Published	22 October, 2019	Revision Due Date	30 April, 2020	