



Government of  
South Australia

# Office for Early Childhood Development

**QualifySA in Early Childhood  
Aboriginal Pathways**

Funding Support Program Guidelines

## 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 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.

## QualifySA in Early Childhood

The roll-out of universal preschool for 3-year-olds across South Australia from 2026, will drive a workforce need for more early childhood teachers and educators. To help meet this demand, financial support is being offered to encourage eligible individuals to study or upskill, to attain approved early childhood educator and/or teacher qualifications.

Through the financial support program, the aim is to:

- reduce barriers associated with the cost of study, enabling individuals from diverse backgrounds to pursue careers in early childhood
- increase opportunities for individuals to enter or upskill and thrive in the sector, and by extension, build the early childhood workforce, foster equality, and enhance the quality of care and education provided to young children in South Australia.

## About this program

The Aboriginal Pathways Funding Support Program is open to eligible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals aspiring to become early childhood teachers or educators. This includes those seeking to enhance their skills.

Eligible financial support recipients can use the funding to offset living expenses while they study and work. Expenses may include course fees, study materials, or accommodation costs required to facilitate studies.

Successful applicants will be required to contractually commit to working in a South Australian early childhood service (preschool) after graduation for a minimum of 2 years. Early childhood services include long day care services providing a preschool program, and non-government and government run sessional preschools.

## QualifySA in Early Childhood financial support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

The QualifySA in Early Childhood program offers financial support to South Australian residents who have received a letter of offer or an enrolment confirmation to an eligible early childhood qualification.\* Eligible financial support recipients can use the funding to offset living expenses while they study and work. Expenses may include course fees, study materials, or accommodation costs required to facilitate studies.

The following financial support is available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students under this program:

- up to **\$9000** for recipients studying a diploma
- up to **\$34,000** for recipients studying a bachelor degree
- up to **\$24,000** for recipients studying a master degree\*\*
- up to **\$20,500** for recipients studying a B-5 graduate diploma\*\*\*.

All qualifications must be recognised by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) on **the approved qualifications list**.

All amounts listed are before tax.

Applicants must complete their qualification by **31 December 2032**, except diploma students who must complete their qualification by **31 December 2028**.

Successful applicants will be required to contractually commit to working in a South Australian early childhood service (preschool) after graduation for a minimum of 2 years. Early childhood services include long day care services providing a preschool program, and non-government and government run sessional preschools.

Funding is not available for teachers who intend, or continue to work at a primary or secondary school.

*\*Further eligibility requirements apply as outlined under the Eligibility heading.*

*\*\*Students studying a research master degree are not eligible for this financial support program.*

*\*\*Eligible master degree students must not already have an early childhood career qualification recognised by ACECQA.*

*\*\*\*Graduate diploma students must possess an existing primary or secondary degree that is not recognised by ACECQA as an approved early childhood education and care qualification.*

## Financial support for aspiring diploma-qualified educators

In 2025, financial assistance for individuals wanting to become diploma-qualified educators is only available to those studying the [Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care \(CHC50121\)](#) through TAFE SA, or through an Aboriginal Community Controlled Registered Training Organisation that offers the Diploma in Early Childhood and Care (CHC50121).

Students can apply for QualifySA in Early Childhood financial support to study the diploma **in addition to Fee Free TAFE**, though priority will be given to applicants who are unable to access tuition support through other government initiatives.

For a diploma student, the payment includes up to \$1,000 for their employer, where the student is currently working in the South Australian early childhood sector. This funding can be used for various purposes such as partially covering the cost of backfilling during a participant's placement, supporting professional learning, allowing the participant to undertake studies without work duties, facilitating planning time, or upskilling another individual.

## Eligibility

To be eligible for QualifySA in Early Childhood funding support, an applicant must be a South Australian resident AND:

- a citizen of Australian or New Zealand or hold a [permanent resident](#) of Australia visa AND
- have an offer to study an eligible early childhood qualification recognised by ACECQA.

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

- educators in rural and regional areas
- those in metropolitan services with a significant number of vulnerable or disadvantaged children
- educators who have not yet benefited from financial support or incentives provided by the Office for Early Childhood Development or another funding source.

## Regional and remote students – additional financial support

Students in regional and remote areas who face additional barriers to accessing higher education can apply for the Grow Your Own (GYO) allowance. This GYO financial support program provides **up to \$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 support offered through the QualifySA in Early Childhood financial support program.

To be eligible for GYO funding, students must:

- be recipients of financial support through the QualifySA in Early Childhood financial support program
- reside in and intend to work within a local regional or remote community, specifically in locations classified as very remote, remote, or outer regional in South Australia according to the **Australian Statistical Geography Standard–Remoteness Area classification**.

Eligibility will be determined by the administrator based on your residential address.

## Funding information

- Applicants should have already been accepted into an eligible course, and all funding is contingent on a recipient submitting satisfactory evidence they have completed study requirements and remain enrolled.
- Students will 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.
- For the purposes of the funding application, a part-time student must be studying a minimum 0.5 load. This is half of what is considered to be a full-time load by your institution. To calculate this, you will need to confirm the number of units or points your institution deems as full-time and halve that number.
- If you are studying part-time or full-time and your study period extends beyond the standard duration of time for expected completion due to circumstances such as not passing subjects, withdrawing, or other considerations (such as completing a 1-year course over 2 years), the timing of your scheduled payments will be adjusted.
- Applicants must complete the qualification by 31 December 2032, except diploma students who 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 qualifications. This includes working in long day care services providing a preschool program, and non-government and government run sessional preschools.
- A successful applicant will be required to contractually commit to working in a preschool program as an educator or teacher in the South Australian early childhood sector for a minimum of 2 years after graduation.
- Eligibility for employment retention payments extends to both fixed term and ongoing roles in the South Australian early childhood sector.

## Considerations before applying

- Applicants must assess their financial situation, as they are responsible for additional expenses beyond the awarded amount.
- Funding amounts are pre-tax, and recipients must seek independent advice on potential impacts on taxation and government benefit schemes.

## Applications, assessment, and funding recipient obligations

- Applications for this program are submitted online.
- Eligible participants must provide one of the following supporting documents at the time of application: a confirmation of Aboriginality, a letter of support from an Aboriginal Community member, or a statutory declaration signed and confirmed by an Aboriginal Community member.
- Applications are assessed by an external administrator, in accordance with the eligibility criteria.
- Upon approval, successful candidates sign a legally binding funding agreement outlining rights and responsibilities.
- Funding payments are disbursed based on milestone conditions to be met by the recipient, with potential repayment obligations for non-compliance.
- To access the employer payment, diploma applicants must consult with their employer before applying, and include their employer's details in the application.

To provide feedback, or to raise concerns about the financial support program, please contact the Workforce team directly at [OECD.ECWorkforceSupport@sa.gov.au](mailto:OECD.ECWorkforceSupport@sa.gov.au)

## Employment retention payments and milestone non-compliance

- After completing their approved course, a financial support recipient may qualify for extra retention payments upon starting employment in the South Australian early childhood sector.
- Employment should begin within 6 months of graduation, whether in a fixed-term or ongoing role.
- A recipient is required to maintain continuous employment working in a preschool program that meets specified criteria outlined in the financial support agreement to retain eligibility for payments.
- Financial support recipients must promptly report to the administrator any changes in employment status, conditions, or location to continue receiving retention milestone payments. This includes when circumstances change due to variation in employment contract, or in the case of periods of parental leave.

It is the funding recipient's responsibility to find employment in South Australia to meet the program milestones. The Office for Early Childhood Development does not guarantee employment in the early childhood sector.

If a financial support recipient fails to meet prescribed milestones, they may be required to repay some funding. In exceptional circumstances, the Office for Early Childhood Development may consider waiving repayment obligations, subject to individual evaluation and supporting documentation.

## Guideline revisions

The guidelines, which cover program specifications and eligibility criteria, are subject to potential change. Any modifications will be made available on this website.

## QualifySA in Early Childhood – financial support payment milestones

The tables below show the financial support payment milestones. Recipients will receive these payments 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.

### Aboriginal pathways educator financial support (diploma)

Payment schedule and employment retention	Payment amount
Milestone 1, following enrolment/census	\$3000
Milestone 2, course completion	\$3000
Funding to support employers. May be used for study release time	Up to \$1000
Milestone 1, end of first year in sector following completion of qualification	\$2000
<b>Total value</b>	<b>Up to \$9000</b>

### Aboriginal pathways initial teacher education financial support (bachelor degree)

Payment schedule by year of study and employment retention	3-year degree payment amount	4-year degree payment amount
Year 1	\$5000	\$4000
Year 2	\$5000	\$4000
Year 3	\$7000	\$4000
Year 4	nil	\$5000
Milestone 1 paid 6 months into first year employed in sector after graduation	\$7500	\$7500
Milestone 2 paid halfway through third year in sector after graduation	\$9500	\$9500
<b>Total value</b>	<b>Up to \$34,000</b>	<b>Up to \$34,000</b>

### Aboriginal pathways initial teacher education financial support (master degree)

Payment schedule by year of study and employment retention	Payment amount
Milestone 1, following census date	\$3500
Milestone 2, course completion	\$3500
Employment milestone 1, paid 6 months into first year employed in sector after graduation	\$7500
Employment milestone 2, paid halfway through third year in sector after graduation	\$9500
<b>Total value</b>	<b>Up to \$24,000</b>

### Aboriginal pathways initial teacher education financial support (graduate diploma)

Payment schedule by year of study and employment retention	Payment amount
Milestone 1, following census date	\$1750
Milestone 2, course completion	\$1750
Employment milestone 1, paid 6 months into first year employed in sector after graduation	\$7500
Employment milestone 2, paid halfway through third year in sector after graduation	\$9500
<b>Total value</b>	<b>Up to \$20,500</b>

### Contact

Email: [OECD.ECWorkforceSupport@sa.gov.au](mailto:OECD.ECWorkforceSupport@sa.gov.au)

Phone: 1300 050 509