

The Early Years Assessment and Learning Tool





Ministerial foreword

A new era for early childhood education

The Victorian Government is building a world-class education system – starting with the early years.

We are investing \$9 billion over the next decade in the *Best Start, Best Life* reforms: introducing Free Kinder from 2023, creating 50 new government-owned early learning centres, and moving to 30 hours of Pre-Prep for all children.

In an Australian-first, the Victorian Government is also investing almost \$5 billion to deliver a full 15 hours per week of funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten across the state by 2029.

As part of these significant reforms, I am committed to supporting quality educational practice, particularly when it comes to our youngest Victorians.

We have invested \$22 million over 5 years to support quality practice, including the development of the Early Years Assessment and Learning Tool. The Tool will enable early childhood teachers and their co-educators to make consistent observations and assessments of children's learning, helping with planning and delivering quality, play-based kindergarten programs. This sets up every child for success in learning.

I am passionate about every child being given the opportunity to make progress in their learning, and I understand that high-quality, authentic assessment helps us to work together to achieve this.

Since announcing the Three-Year-Old Kindergarten reform in 2019, we have remained focused on the Tool's development, piloting it in practice because we want to get it right.

I want to thank the more than 300 early childhood teachers and educators who gave their time and expertise to help with the Tool's development and practical trial.

Their experience has informed its phased roll-out, starting in 2023.

Early education has a profound impact on a child's development. Providing teachers and their co-educators with the Early Years Assessment and Learning Tool is another way to support each Victorian child to get the best start in life.

The Hon Ingrid Stitt MP

Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep

About the Early Years Assessment and Learning Tool

Quality, intentional teaching helps children build the skills they need to progress their learning and development in early childhood, as they transition to school – and beyond.

The Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF) identifies assessment for learning and development as essential for planning and promoting learning for individual children.

The key to high-quality assessment is consistency: in approaches and in ensuring children are making that progress against the learning and development outcomes in the VEYLDF.

The evidence-based Early Years Assessment and Learning Tool has been developed to support teachers and their co-educators to be more targeted in their observations and intentional in their teaching practice. This provides a more consistent and systematic approach to assessment for learning and understanding of children's abilities.

The Tool is not an interview or test. It is used by teaching teams to improve understanding of individual children's strengths, interests and abilities and it will empower kindergarten teaching teams to identify suitable next steps in children's learning.

The Tool will draw on observations of children and encourage reflection on understanding the learning taking place.

It will also provide clear and consistent information to develop *Transition Learning and Development Statements*, and strengthen effective information sharing between kindergarten and Prep teachers.

"The Tool provides a lens through which to observe, assess, plan for and purposefully teach young children. It can be used at specific time points in the year which supports kindergarten teachers to develop a full understanding of children's learning progress over time."

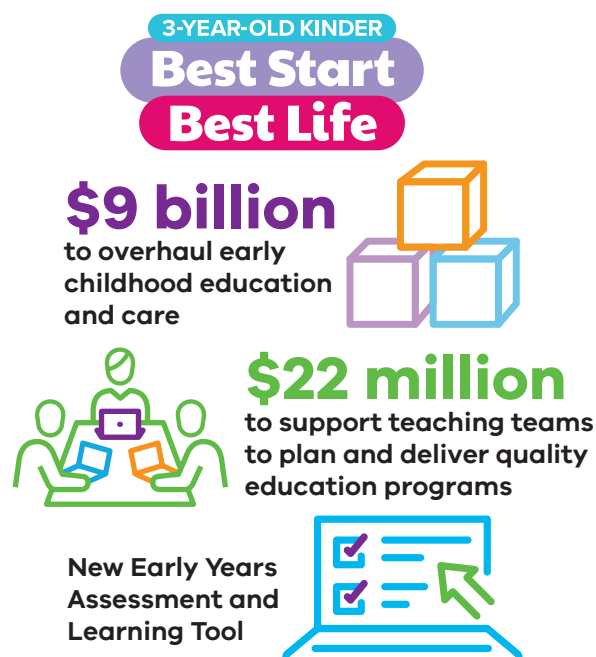
- Associate Professor Jane Page, University of Melbourne Graduate School of Education

The Tool is an effective and efficient way of meeting requirements under the National Law to assess and document the assessment of children's learning. The time taken to complete the Tool will be an investment in improving teaching practice – and help children take the next step in their education journey.

The Tool will:

- ✓ support discussions with families and other early childhood professionals about children's learning and provide information to develop Transition Learning and Development Statements
- ✓ help teaching teams plan more intentionally and encourage more effective use of observational child data
- ✓ focus on young children's strengths, capabilities and interests, track and monitor their learning progressions over time and help celebrate progress in their learning
- ✓ complement existing practices and assist in meeting or exceeding Standard 1.3, Assessment and Planning, under the National Quality Standard which may inform the development and review of Quality Improvement Plans
- ✓ inform data analysis, priority area focus and menu item selection as part of School Readiness Funding plans.

Victorian Government commitment to early childhood education



The rigorous evidence base

The Tool has been many years in the making.

In 2020, the University of Melbourne was engaged to work with the Department of Education and Training to develop and pilot it.

The approach was to develop the Tool from the existing Early ABLES tool already in use in kindergarten programs.

Early ABLES is a strength and observation-based online assessment tool that supports early childhood educators to provide a more individualised learning experience for children with disabilities and/or developmental delay.

The Tool is built on the success and many years of research behind the development of Early ABLES.

Over 50 early learning practice experts have worked closely with assessment psychometricians, researchers and kindergarten teachers to create the new Tool.

It has been tested and proven as a high quality assessment tool for teachers and educators delivering kindergarten programs.

The Tool has been developed using data from more than 5,000 observations of children by more than 300 teachers and educators from over 150 services.

The evidence has shown the Tool works for all children, from all backgrounds, cultures and abilities.

“The quality of the Tool is based on multiple sources of evidence. We have used not just assessment and education expert input but also the evidence of hundreds of teachers making thousands of observations of children, to inform how they learn and progress in the 8 domains of learning and development.”

Dr Toshiko Kamei, Research Fellow, Assessment Research Centre, University of Melbourne Graduate School of Education





The Tool modules use indicators to show a child's capabilities that can be observed by teaching teams in the context of everyday activities in the kindergarten program.

What we learnt from the pilot

A pilot of the Tool in 2021 explored how it works in practice at over 50 kindergarten services, reflecting a range of delivery models.

The pilot confirmed the Tool works well with existing early years practices, including supporting partnerships with families and professionals for the benefit of every child.

It involved services with the range of National Quality Standard Ratings, and found that, with the right supports, all services can embed the Tool in practice.

We learnt that use of the Tool by teachers worked better in environments with:

- high collaboration between teachers and their co-educators, families and other early childhood professionals
- clear processes in place to use the Tool as part of regular practice which was supported by service leadership
- multiple teachers and educators in a service using the Tool.

Teachers involved in the pilot found a key advantage of the Early Years Assessment Tool Learning Report was how it provided them with consistent language to describe children's learning that could be shared with early childhood professionals.

This meant that, regardless of which early childhood service a child attended, the Tool

provided a consistent language to share information – such as with a parent, an allied health professional or in supporting successful transition within a service and as children moved to primary school.

Key findings



◀ of teachers and service leaders said they were somewhat likely or very likely to continue to use the Tool after the pilot

◀ of teachers said repeated use of the Tool reduced the time taken to complete modules.

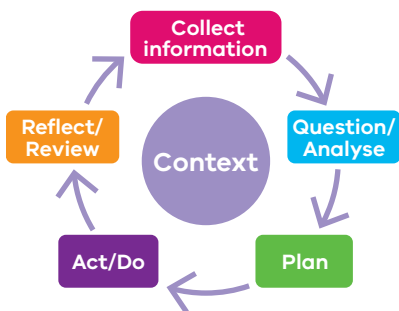
"Whether you're a first-year early childhood educator, or you've been a teacher for 30 years, the Early Years Assessment and Learning Tool is great because it supports what you're doing in assessments and that planning cycle for children."

- Early childhood teacher Emily Fotiou

How the Tool will work

The Early Years Assessment and Learning Tool is designed to track learning growth over time and to support everyday teaching practice through the Early Years Planning Cycle.

The Early Years Planning Cycle



The Tool will give teachers a Learning Report providing a summary of a child's learning and development based on teachers' observations in 8 key areas. These areas align to the 5 learning and development outcomes of the VEYLDF and align to the Victorian Curriculum. The report describes the level within which a child is working and what they are likely to learn next.

It also suggests teaching and learning strategies targeted to where the child is at with their learning, which teachers and their co-educators can use to inform program planning.

The 8 Tool modules are completed online and are the same as those in Early ABLES. Each module takes 5-15 minutes to complete and they can be completed twice a year.

The 8 modules are:

Identity and community - social

Wellbeing - emotion

Learning dispositions

Communication - interactions

Communication

- symbols and text

Learning and communication

- numeracy

Wellbeing - movement

Learning and identity

- thinking skills.

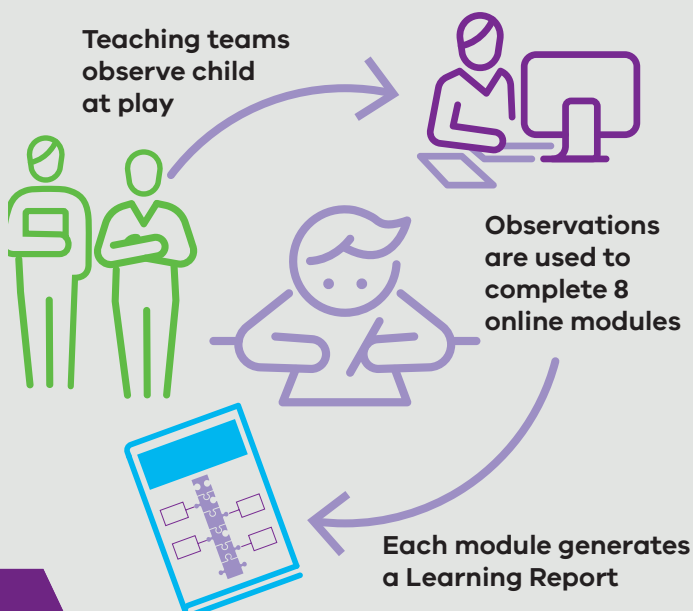
For each module, early childhood teachers respond to a series of questions which draw on the existing knowledge of the child. When completed, the Tool gives teachers a picture of a child's strengths and interests in that module.

Teachers can draw from a range of sources to answer the questions in each module. This might include:

- behaviours or activities the early childhood teacher or co-educator has observed the child doing, saying, making, writing or drawing
- information about the child as a learner, gathered from other formal or informal assessments
- the knowledge and understanding that others have about the child which may include the child's parents/carers, educators and other teachers, allied health staff and other professionals.

When a learning module is completed, a Learning Report is generated.

How the Tool works



- ✓ Summarises the skills and abilities that the child is currently developing and those that the child might be expected to learn next
- ✓ Links to the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework and suggests relevant teaching and learning strategies
- ✓ Helps teaching teams plan intentionally for each child
- ✓ Provides information to populate Transition Learning and Development Statements
- ✓ Gives teaching teams basis for discussions with child's family and other professionals
- ✓ Helps track, monitor and celebrate child's learning progress

The roll-out of the Tool will begin in 2023.



Getting involved

Kindergarten services will be invited to start using the Tool in a phased way from the start of 2023.

Kindergarten services interested in using the Tool will be able to apply through an expression of interest (EOI) process in Term 3 2022.

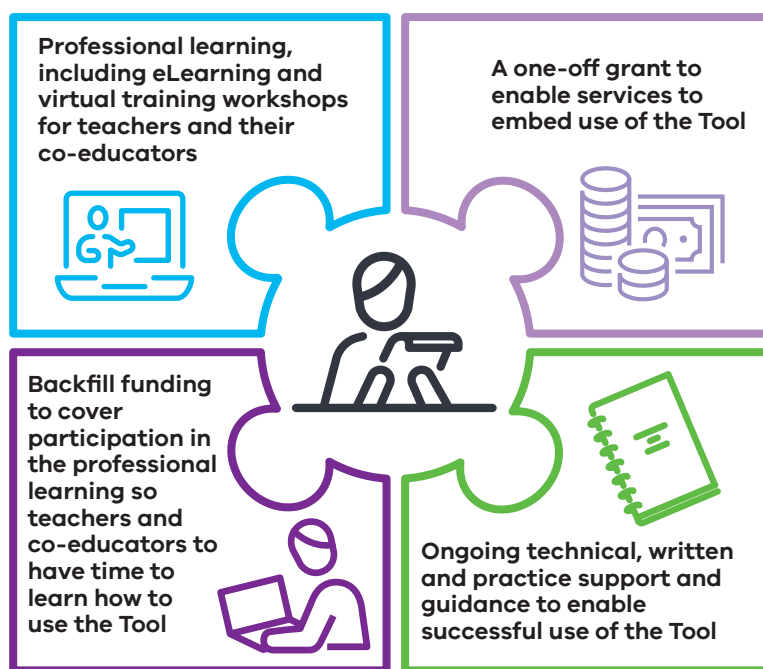
Up to 350 services will be able to start using the Tool in 2023. A further 850 services will be able to start using it in 2024.

A comprehensive package of supports will be available to services using the Tool in 2023.

We tested this package through the pilot to make sure it works. We have listened to feedback from service leaders, teachers and educators from the pilot about what worked and how support could be improved.

Services can find more information about the EOI process and the package of supports services will receive, on the Department's website www.education.vic.gov.au by searching 'Early Years Assessment and Learning Tool'.

Participating services will receive a package of support to help embed the use of the Tool. This will include:



"A report may show a child is still developing their social communications skills. One of the intentional teaching strategies is role playing in social situations, so I would know to set up a 'home corner' activity to support this child improve those skills. Without the Tool, I probably would have missed that learning opportunity."

- Emily Fotiou, Early Childhood Teacher

