# Realising the Potential: Early Childhood Forum

## From Global Perspectives to Local Action

## Session transcript

Our afternoon plenary session is themed From Global Perspectives to Local Action - The Future of Early Childhood in Victoria.

MC, George Megalogenis welcomes us once again, followed by a keynote address by Tove Mogstad Slinde, Senior Advisor in the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, and Chair of the Network on Early Childhood Education and Care, Organisation for Economic Corporations and Development. A plenary address by Secretary of the Department of Education and Training, Gill Callister, will follow before finishing with an armchair discussion between Tove Mogstad Slinde and Gill Callister.

This session will explore ideas such as how Australia compares internationally, insights into the Norwegian early childhood system, and future reform vision and pathway for Victoria’s early childhood sector.

### George Megalogenis

Welcome back to the afternoon plenary. And I always take the conversation in the room as a positive sign that you’re doing well, and you’ve actually enjoyed yourself up until this point, quite a stimulating morning and concurrent session. We are back on the horse now this afternoon.

Now to begin this afternoon, it’s my great pleasure to invite Tove Slinde to the stage. Now Tove is a Senior Advisor in the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, in the Development of Kindergartens and Schools. And since 2012, she’s also been the elected Chair of the Network of Early Childhood Education and Care in the OECD. So we are very, very top shelf in our speakers. And we’ve got 20-odd minutes for a keynote, or close to 30 minutes for the keynote, and then we’re going to have a bit of a conversation after the second speaker. Bringing Tove to the stage, thank you.

### Tove Mogstad Slinde

Thank you all. And thank you Victoria for inviting me here - over here, or down under, or up on the top, depending on your perspective.

I will join previous speakers and extend my respect to the land and the history of this community. I’ve been fortunate enough, through this week, to be able to connect with different people, both in services and in government, and even having the chance to meet with your Minister Mikakos.

You need strong advocates to get systems and policies in place, as indeed Professor Kagan was showing this morning. And I think that you are in a moment of time where these things actually come together.

As you heard I come from Norway. We are 5.3 million inhabitants, including our indigenous people, the Sami, which constitutes around 1.8%, so quite comparable to you.

In fact when I was little I thought that if I drilled just through the globe I would end up in Australia, and I believe I have.

So dear colleagues, and it is indeed colleagues. I’ve been working in the early years sector for many years, both in the kindergarten on the local level, on the regional level, in the government, working with teacher education and other stakeholders, and now internationally these last years. So it’s been really, really a learning journey. And I’m joining you now on your learning journey, and I hope that we can - I’m learning from your local action, adding to my global perspectives, and I hope that it will work also vice versa.

The Early Childhood Education and Care Network of the OECD has, with the Secretariat, produced a number of reports called Starting Strong. In Starting Strong II, which explored the relevant policy areas, proposed 10 actions, and one of them was to ensure equitable access so that all children should have equal opportunities to attend quality, and to place wellbeing early development and learning, at the core of the early childhood education and care work, with respect to the child agency and national learning strategies.

In the common understandings that we have developed together in the network, we formulated this conclusion. When children are recognised as competent, curious, capable of complex thinking and reaching potential, then policies, programs and services that build on children’s strengths and abilities are more likely to be developed.

The strength of international cooperation and care learning is equal to what you are going to experience locally actually, if you meet across services and when you try to interact. It will help you see yourself better in the light of others. Norway has twice had the OECD review team coming over to look at our policies, and that includes having an expert group scrutinising policies and delivering a device or conclusions for reflection which is another way of putting it.

The first policy review, and even the second, gave praise to how Norway values childhood and our view of the child. They commented on the role of outdoor in learning. We are proud of this holistic view on learning, that recognises what research also explicitly makes clear across disciplines, namely that learning starts even before birth, and that it takes place in the (inaudible) with the surroundings, whether that is in the family, in the kindergarten, or early learning services, or in the local society, whether it is indoor or out.

The researchers visiting Norway at that time described our Nordic model and contrasted it with lead learning traditions in other places of the world, where teachers were seen to be filling empty heads with knowledge. The active exploring child that is co-creator of knowledge is visible in our Curriculum Framework. In reports from out public commission, and by researchers and teacher educators, are listening to the praise to the Nordic model, we could end up believing that we are alone in this. This is however not the case.

This is a picture from Japan, an open kindergarten where they are exploring, playing outdoor digging channels. This is a picture from New Zealand, they are also outdoor exploring, learning. And curiosity exploration and learning communities are descriptions that you could make fit all over.

You have had too good weather. The sun has been out all week not - well until today. So I couldn’t sort of find the mud playing children in your kindergartens, but we were fortunate. I was fortunate enough to be in one of your kindergartens on Monday, and I could see the children outdoor, exploring, learning, communities.

I’ll continue my little description, and the reason is because when I came to this kindergarten in Shanghai, it was the OMEP Conference, a world conference. You know OMEP, it’s the oldest international pre-school organisation, and it’s really made an impact on the discussions.

Anyway, we came there and I was thinking aha, this is the Chinese kindergarten. Look, they put them up one by one, that is totally neat and no mess. But coming indoors I found this. So it means that even in China they lose their teeth at the same time as most children do, and that is - and they are preoccupied with it. And for the pedagogs working in the kindergarten they also make it visible, and as you can see it’s highly individualised.

In the toddlers classroom we found this. They make use of recycled material to illustrate how the young children are coming to kindergarten. And they make it a starting point for conversations about transport, obviously about themselves and how they relate to the ones who follow them there, but also about counting as you can see.

So coming back to kindergartens here, these are the climbing trees at Bridgewater. And I was talking with the Head and asking her, okay, have these trees been here all the time? And by the way, there was a child coming over, and she was telling us that this was the climbing tree. So I asked if they had been there all the time. And the Head said no. Unlike the big trees you saw in the last picture, this was planted. And that means you have to have stamina in order to develop what you want. Stay on there and suddenly you will have the climbing trees you need.

Okay. So this is kindergartens in Norway. They are based on the holistic pedagogical philosophy with care, play and learning at the core of the pedagogies. It’s an edu-care model combining education and care. It highlights the intrinsic value of childhood. It’s play-based, child centred and challenging and safe. And I have to mention this because a couple of weeks ago I went into a conference that was discussing the future of education, and they were looking at digitalisation. There was one other topic also emerging, and that is the possibility to play in a challenged area. If we are too preoccupied with safety how will it work when we need to develop 21st century skills to explore and go into the unknown? So this is kindergartens at the ground.

Okay, I’ll have to just to bring you to it very quickly because my time is running out. Okay, we have the ordinary kindergartens. That’s how our kindergartens are. They are centre-based, and 98.5% of children are attending an ordinary kindergarten. And kindergartens are for children from one to five years of age. And they have a statutory right from one year of age. We have family kindergartens also, but they comprise only 1.5% of the children attend them. And we have open kindergartens, what you will call playgroups, supportive playgroups.

Most of our children go full-time, 95.5% of the children do that, and that is actually - they have the possibility to attend over 41 hours a week, but they normally don’t. It’s a divide, public/private, and they are equally - so it means that when we are developing our sector we can look at both. There’s a diversity and pedagogical profile. And we have staff - that is comprised of kindergarten teachers, child and youth care workers (which is diploma), and assistants. Our proportion on manning kindergartens is nine. And it’s been hard work getting there, but actually compared to a lot of countries it’s quite high. And this is for children aged one to five.

Teacher/child ratio is one to seven for children under three years of age, and one to four for children over three years of age. And we have a staff/child ratio of one to three and one to six. Normally a kindergarten teacher will work together with two assistants, and one of the will be hopefully trained at a diploma level, and so that is how they work.

Okay, publicly funded, it’s 86.3% of the public purse, and parental fees only cover now 13.7% of the cost. We also have a system municipal child health service, and it is becoming increasingly so that they acknowledge the role of child health service, not only in preventing disease, but in promoting better lives. So social emotional wellbeing, and broad development, and attending to families that is something that is put into the politics and the policies that we are developing.

Collaboration with ECC, with schools on the broader strategies for early intervention, for targeting dropouts and for preventing violence, all of that brings together the health service, the school nurses, the youth stations, and our institutions of education. Fifteen consultations with specialised nurse from birth to five years of age, it’s a bit more than you, but it’s group and individual in between, and it’s, you know, like you have coming also to the home when needed, and especially at the first time when they are coming back after hospital.

Okay, so key messages for policy reforms, I was asked to do that once, to formulate them. And this is what I came up with, a number of Cs. So it’s conviction, commitment, collaboration, competence or capacity, curiosity, and then there’s the last one about being child-centred. If we are to have the policy reforms we want, this needs to acknowledge the child as being at the centre of the policies developed.

So about conviction, this is about research evidence that is now put out again and again, showing why it is so important to invest in the early years. You’ve seen it probably a number of times. It is about the sensitivity and the development, and Professor Kagan was also so expertly put the pointing out that this goes out throughout the one to five years of age.

So a number of countries are excellent knowledge in that, and we see an increase in the participation rates all over the world. This is the picture for Australia and Norway. And you do better in this slide than you did in the other one. And the reason is you have already started school when you’re five, so you are top of the list because you are 100% at five years of age. You struggle a bit more for the four and three year olds and even for the under threes, but okay, it’s possible actually to do politics in order to lift it.

Okay, so early competencies are linked to a range of important outcomes later in life, and research has absolutely now put this out. It means that it will increase your general wellbeing, life satisfaction, your physical and mental health. It will influence also your citizenship and how you will act actively in the society. And as you can see it is a complexity of the village surrounding the child that is providing this kind of development and learning.

We were looking into what affects learning most, and how it is with the process quality. We think it’s important but do we have the facts to point it out. Yes, a math analysis and literature study was recently published by the OECD and it clearly indicates the importance of staff qualifications. And staff qualifications are actually the one thing that is amendment to policy, so I will come back to that.

Okay, years ago, in 2012, we published a report pointing out the policy levers. And these five policy levers now have been influencing how we are going about systematically exploring what policies we are developing around the world, and they are also influencing how now the EU is setting out their curriculum framework.

So the first one of these levers is to set out clear policy goals and regulating. I am going to tell you a story about how setting out care roles and regulating affects the situation in Norway. Based on both the unfairness on the system. For a long time there has been a lack of places in kindergartens in Norway. Female employment was very high and everybody was trying to get a place in kindergarten, they were competing for it. So the inequality and access was striking.

The inequality and parental fees was also very, very strong as was the equal treatment regarding to funding across the services. This issue, together with the issue of equity, and the research that we saw coming about from Heckman and from Shonkoff telling us that we really need to invest early, came together in what happened in our parliament.

What happened in our parliament was that across the political parties they joined forces. The ones that were for parental choice joined up with the ones that were for social equity, and they made reform happen. They decided that it’s now time to end the unfairness. It’s time to invest so that we will get into a universal situation, a situation where everybody can choose, and where it is a possibility for everyone and for everybody.

From our own Norwegian research that early childhood education and care levelled the playing field, so we needed to do things. So when putting investment into the picture, when putting money and resources into finally reaching that welfare reform of having access for all, this is what happened.

The blue line shows you where it was in 2000, and the red line shows you where it is in 2016. As you can see it’s been a massive change in participation and access to early childhood education and care in Norway, lifting it from around 35% for one to two year olds, to now 82% in 2016, lifting it from around 70% for three year olds to 97% as it is now.

Parental fees are important to access. It means that you have to bring them down in order for it to really be accessible. And this is what they did, we increased your maximum parental fee and we tried to bring it down so much that everybody could access it. But we didn’t succeed. So we need to amend our reform, we need actually to be more targeted, to put in other types of regulation, and that was putting in a maximum of 6% of family income, or/and for the low SES family, in addition putting 20 hours free for three, four and five year olds. And our research is very, very evident. In the areas where we have had this as a pilot, we could see that it is affecting child outcomes later in school.

This universality has also affected attending. It means that we have lifted minority language children in early childhood education and care, going from 25% of one to two year olds in 2005, to now over 62%, or 75% for the three to five year olds in 2005 to now over 92%. So it’s possible, and this is in a short amount of time. I think perhaps the speed dependent on the investment.

Okay, if these changes take place then you need to pay attention to curriculum. So you need to put emphasis on how you develop your content. It needs also to be accessible. It needs also to be inclusive. And that is what also is happening around the world.

In the early childhood education and care network we are now looking into the revision and the redesign of curriculum frameworks in early childhood education and care for the 21st century. So next week we will meet up and discuss. We need to have better understanding of what it is, and what type of elements needs to be in a curriculum framework in order to holistically support a child.

So we know already that it helps ensure even quality. It gives guidance to staff. It informs parents and public. And we know already that children learn best when they are actively engaged and interactions are frequent and meaningful, and curriculum builds on prior learning. What we also need to find is the right balance between the child initiated and the teacher initiated activity, and to have a clear understanding of the broad concept of learning, cognitive, social and wellbeing.

Norway revised its curriculum in 2017, last year. And as you can see, the areas that we need to strengthen was democracy, diversity and inclusion. And you could read the numbers and the increase of the participation rate, it absolutely means that we need to pay attention to being truly inclusive in order to have good pedagogy. We also put emphasis on life skills and health, language and transition, and more attention to the very youngest children.

Policy lever, I told you already, is the one that is most possible to affect through policies. It’s the staff competence and qualifications, and it needs attention. And we are trying also - you are trying to build - we are trying to get out the research that tells us how investing early is important. We also need to pay attention to quality because we know that quality is high investing is necessary - no - the other way around. Unless you pay attention to quality then your investment will fail, that is the right way to put it. It can even be detrimental if you have bad quality. So that is why you need to pay attention to this.

And the most important factor in order to have equality, and I think that goes for every type of service you put out there, it’s the competence and qualifications of the staff. They need to know how to interact with children, with parents, with the surroundings. So it’s even been shown by research, this graph is in that report I referred to earlier that was launched in March by the OECD on the process quality and the effectiveness of it. It shows that staff interactions with children, are associated with emerging literacy and numeracy skills. And this goes across study, across countries, both in Germany, US, all over, it’s really, really broad knowledge that has brought us there.

And what are the lessons learned for the policy makers. Well the lessons learned should be that workforce development and working conditions can improve staff/child interaction, and consequently also affect children’s literacy skills; that both vocation pre-service can help prepare staff to become emotionally, educationally, and developmentally supportive for children; that staff qualifications, well the research, the evidence that staff qualifications matter more for settings for children aged 0 to two. I don’t know whether that is really the right conclusion to draw, but at least it means that you can’t just look at the 0 to two and say it’s babysitting. Staff qualifications matter from the start, as does parental understanding of how a young child develops. And it’s not only the kind of, you know, diploma or paper you get, but it is important that what you provide, when it comes to the competence raising, it needs to be ECC specific. It needs to the content that will support child development, team collaboration and leadership. And I guess I heard that in the parallel session, these are topics that you have been treating.

Okay, policy labour form, it’s engaging with parents and local communities. These are pictures from Canada, but they could have been taken here, because it’s in Toronto, they have a full day kindergarten, and they had a big program in order to improve access and the possibility for children to attend those. But visiting the schools over there I saw the type and schools and settings that I visited here on Monday. It means it comprised both schools, and kindergarten, and maternal and child healthcare, and open kindergartens in one facility. And I think that when you get that right then you get the possibility to create something that is really, really good both for children, but even for the local community.

The gentleman at the end side over on the left side is for you, he’s been coming and following his grandchildren to that school for over 12 years, so it’s one of his youngest that he’s following this time. But for him of course, it’s also the same as being included in the community.

I haven’t talked enough about the municipalities. You have 70 and in Norway we would - perhaps some in Norway would envy that situation. We’ve had a reform and it’s going to bring us down from 428 to 336, but it’s been highly debated. And just regardless of what is the result, what is really important in the discussion of the municipalities is their role. They are responsible for their population, so they need to bring together on the local level, the different services in order to provide for their population. And they are well-placed to actually develop what you need on the ground. When I was reading your reform plan I was actually - I was seeing that, okay, you’ve been consulting with the sector. It means that when you are developing your solution it is in consultancy, developing what is the problem, developing what needs to be done, and then when you are going out to put something into action follow through, follow up, see how it works. So not being specific and not saying the plan that you should do A, B, C, but rather that you need to develop the measures on the local ground, that is perhaps a good strategy in order to find good solutions.

Okay, so I can’t go on and on talking about the local authorities, but it is important and it is where lives are lived, and where you need to pull together the services in order to succeed.

I’d like to sort of nearly end my presentation by presenting our system for quality parental portal. I was sort of choosing between what I wanted to show you, the whole system, which is comprised of three parts. One is research and knowledge, the other is tools for quality dialogue, and in between there is the partners that are going to have that dialogue. On the right-hand side and on the left-hand side this parental portal is actually important.

The parental portal provides information about every early childhood education and care setting with indicators and data. You were telling that data is important in order to develop the kindergartens. Making data evident and visible to parents means that they can engage in the communication with the setting, with the staff that are there, with the owners, and with the local municipalities in developing quality. So part of this, it’s not sort of a kind of a temperature, it’s not what you call a kind of a benchmarking, it’s more a kind of part of a system that wants to enhance the dialogue around quality and bringing the parents in. So this parental portal is getting the parents to engage, and then there’s other tools also that will follow up.

So developing data research and monitoring, they are important for any policy maker. And we need them in order to formulate good policy. Sometimes we get exhausted institutions and practitioners, and even in the international setting you get also the exhausted countries because they have to deliver data.

But we be aware that when you do you actually help lay the foundation for good discussions on policy development on the ground.

So in Norway we are creating a longitudinal study, that’s one of them we have, we have a number now, that is looking into process quality. We are participating in policy reviews, research and we are doing both research and data development on the international area now. The OECD Childhood Starting Strong Survey is going to help us understand better on the ground both internationally and nationally what is happening. And there will be, and this is because I’m the Chair of the OECD ECC Network, I have to inform you that we are also now on the verge of developing a policy review on process quality in early childhood education and care called Quality Beyond Regulations. So it means things are ongoing. And it is ongoing both in the local, national and international level.

In year 2000 looking into our state budget, we had 10 million Norwegian kronas, which is around 1.8 something Australian dollars, for quality development work. Now we have 40 million Australian dollars to do the same. At that point we had only one research project, and it only looked at the structure. How many children were in ECC and who were not. And now we are looking into the quality of process.

Okay, so this is the Quality Beyond Regulation, we will be looking at the curriculums standard and the pedagogy. We’ll be looking at the workforce and what happens there. We will be looking at the topic of engaging families and community. And we hope to a new report coming out in the Starting Strong series on those topics in a couple of years.

So thank you for your attention, and just one final picture, it is contextual, it is different across the world, but actually there are some similarities, so I couldn’t resist having this final picture from Japan. You can see the children in the snow. They are playing with the snow in Norway. In Japan they are making sandballs. So thank you.

### George Megalogenis

Thank you for that. That’s marvellous to get Norwegian perspective. We had a global perspective with a bit of an American bent in the morning, so that just leaves us with the home turf. So Gill Callister, Secretary of the Department of Education and Training, it’s your turn to tell us about the Australian context. Thank you.

### Gill Callister

Thanks George. Afternoon everybody. I would like to start by acknowledging the traditional of the owners of the land on which meet, the people of the Kulin nation, and pay my respects to elders past and present, and all other Aboriginal people who are with us today.

And before I begin I did want to acknowledge someone who is not with us today. Professor Collette Tayler. When we speak of the importance of early childhood education and care, we are standing on the shoulders of Collette. She was a pioneer and a leader and a friend, and she was very brave.

I remember speaking to her last year, she was unwell but she was still working. And when I asked her to come and speak to the Board of the Department about Year for Kids Survey a Study, she agreed, but she said make it soon I don’t think I have long.

So we made it soon and she was brilliant. And unfortunately she was right, she didn’t have long. But I know that she would be absolutely delighted and thrilled that we are continuing her work and that we’re holding this forum today.

So thank you all for being here, much nicer to be in here than outside this afternoon. I wanted to talk about some particular aspects of early childhood. According to the Bible in the beginning was the word, which sounds a bit like an Origin story for a marvel superhero movie doesn’t it? But in terms of human civilisation there is truth in that statement. There’s truth because as historian you all know how Harari puts it, “Homo sapiens conquered the world thanks above all to its unique language.” In other words the creation of the word or language marked the beginning of human ascendancy. It enabled us not just to communicate but to form groups and ultimately civilisations. It gave us the ability to envisage and articulate abstract legal, mathematical, scientific and philosophical concepts. In a sense it made us who we are. Without language there’d be no Pharaohs in pyramids, nor jets in the sky, nor teenagers on the internet.

And that’s why paleoanthropologist, Ian Tattersall, has said that language gave us a competitive advantage because it enabled symbolic thought. Language, Tattersall writes, “is indeed the ultimate symbolic mental function, and it is virtually impossible to conceive of thought as we know it in its absence.” And what does that mean for early childhood learning? Everything.

It means everything because kinder aged children of today face a brave new world of disruption and change. There are predictions that 65% of children entering primary school today will end up working in types of jobs that right now don’t exist, due to a convergence of a whole range of changes, but particularly artificial intelligence and robotics. And, the industrial and urban revolution underway in Asia in general, and China in particular, and the middle class of 3.2 billion that that is creating.

The point that I’m making is that we have a duty to ensure that the young children of today have the resilience and the cognitive capability to cope with the rapid and radical change that they will face tomorrow. And not only that, that we have to realise that tomorrow is right here and right now, there is no time to waste.

Now I realise that innovation is one of those words worn thin by overuse, but innovation is in fact what the workforce of tomorrow needs. And if innovation is what the workforce of tomorrow needs, then language development is what young children of today need, because language development and cognitive ability are inextricably linked.

Early language development is a driver of life-long achievement. If a child has good language skills they’re more likely to go onto further education and employment and earn a higher wage. Children with low language skills are more likely not to finish school, not be employed, and not earn a higher wage. But they are also more likely to be arrested, face court, be imprisoned, that’s how important early childhood development is. Put this way, early childhood development is to innovation what the split atom is to nuclear fusion. And let me take that simile one step further. Early childhood development has the atomic power to move mountains and language development is the key to unleashing that power.

The case and the need for investment in early childhood in general, and language development in particular, is overwhelming. Consider the facts, we know there is a link between language and cognition. We know cognitive abilities like literacy and numeracy are important aspects of future success.

We know that by age three the brain has 1,000 trillion connections, which represents 80% of a child’s brain development. And by age five 90% of a child’s brain development has occurred. We know that by the age of four, a child from a low income family, or a disadvantaged family, will have heard 30 million fewer words than a child from a high income family.

We know that the surest, most cost effective way to improve the future prospects of a child, is to go hard and go early at strong educational intervention. We know from the Australian Early Development Census that one in five children start school vulnerable in at least one of the five domains. And we know that children vulnerable in language and cognition domain are especially at risk. And that when they get to school they are five times less likely to be in the top two bands of NAPLAN. We know the social, emotional and neurological effects of witnessing violence at a young age, significantly impacts on learning. In fact analysis of the Department’s school entrance health questionnaire and NAPLAN results, show that children who have witnessed violence before starting primary school are significantly, statistically less likely to be in the top two bands of NAPLAN performance, and that’s with other factors separated out.

And yet despite all of this pretty powerful evidence, Australia invests half of one percent of its GDP in early childhood development. The children born when Heckman published his work, and produced pretty compelling evidence, are now 19, and we haven’t yet embraced his work fully.

So here are some of the things that I think it’s important that we do. Clearly we shouldn’t be thinking about turning early learning into an extension of primary school. Early learning is about developmental play, but it is also about appropriate pedagogy, and as Tove so eloquently said, this is about the importance of the workforce in this area.

In the E for Kids Study, led as I said by Collette Tayler, which is Australia’s largest longitudinal research project into the quality of early childhood, that project found that early childhood services are quite strong on care and emotional support. They’re quite strong on well organised space. They’re less strong on intentional teaching.

So educators with an explicit focus on supporting children’s language development and cognition, is one of the areas where we need to invest. And one of the best ways to improve the future prospects of children, of course, is to improve their language and cognitive capability. We need to be paying more attention to learning and language well before children commence four year old kindergarten. And this is where our whole early childhood system has the opportunity to play a part, including our wonderful maternal and child health system, and our parenting and playgroups.

Thirdly, I think as a society we need to stop viewing childcare and early learning as separate things. Children don’t understand they’re not meant to learn until they get into a place with a teacher in it. They try and learn anyway.

We see kindergarten as an educational opportunity, but we consistently fail to take advantage of the critical learning opportunities that exist before kinder and in all settings. And we need to understand that care and learning go together.

And we’ve started to see a shift in some of that language, but we need to make it a reality in the various settings that children spend time. And that’s why in Victoria we’re implementing the Early Childhood Reform Plan, and I’m sure that most of you should be aware of it.

It is all about making the systemic investments that are necessary to bridge the widening gap between our most advantaged and our disadvantaged children, covering everything from workforce development, to infrastructure, to additional services. And the last two state budgets have invested $338 million in that system.

And I just want to highlight a couple of the initiatives from the plan, because I think they lead the nation. Starting next year, kindergartens in 25 local government areas, will have access to innovative programs, and a range of additional services through the $58 million School Readiness Program. And by 2021, that will have rolled out to the whole state.

It is essentially needs-based funding for kindergarten. We’ve had needs-based funding in schools for a long time. But the very same children that go into a primary school where there’s additional funding for them, went through kindergarten without that additional funding, so we are making some significant changes there.

In essence, Victoria’s position is simple. We want every child to have high quality, integrated learning and care experiences. We want every child who needs additional help to get that help. And we want to see measurable improvements in language. And particularly, we want to see improvements in the language and cognition domain by the 2021 Australian Early Development Census. And it’s really not too much to ask. We have the basis on which to do this.

But for that to occur I think we need the sector to become a system, and to work in partnership with each other and build relationships into the primary education system. And for that, we need leadership, and we need advocacy, and we need unity.

We owe it to the children in our care to give them the best possible start in life. That is that moral purpose is unarguable. But make no mistake, the future prosperity of our community and our economy, in a very, very dynamic and changing international world, to a great extent turns on what we can do in this frontier in early childhood education.

Thank you.

### George Megalogenis

Sorry, we always lose a minute when we go back and forth across the runway.

We’ve got time before we wind up the plenary session, the afternoon session, for a quick question and answer. I’m tossing up who to go for first. But Tove, I wanted to ask you to paint a picture for us of Norway before the big coming together of the equity and the private choice factions, if we could call them that, in the political system? And whether Norway before the reform reminds you of Australia now?

### Tove Mogstad Slinde

Yes.

### George Megalogenis

And taking from that point, explain to me how it was fixed in Norway and without commenting too much on the specifics of Australian politics, I might then switch to Gill about what lesson we can draw from Norway in the Australian circumstance.

### Tove Mogstad Slinde

So actually it’s been a journey of development ever since the - you could say 1988 they made the first white paper on the kindergartens. And they said, okay, going towards year 2000.

And at that time they thought that if we get to the point where you have 40% participation of children under three years of age, and yeah, well, some more for children over three years of age, you would be there. And there was part-time and ownership diversity, and there was a lack of places consistent. And the municipalities rule were a bit unclear, we’re they responsible for it or not, and how sort of responsible should they be for planning and having things in place.

So over the journey, since the beginning of the nineties, there were measures put in place, and different types of reforms getting there. So actually, I think that making do with what you have and go from there, but go with a kind of an urgency, and pushing, in order to get somewhere. I think that is the way to go. And I think that what happened when we were entering the year 2000, it was becoming evident because there was many enough inside the sector, to have a strong enough voice in order to be heard by politics.

So getting the volume is actually quite effective in terms of having the topic put on the agenda. And we are seeing now, as we have had now a universal kindergarten in place, that again discussions are being changed. So now we have the parents very much engaging in the topic of quality. And it’s put high - it’s in the parliament.

So last week when we passed the regulation on the ratios, and it’s actually putting a regulation on what we think has been there all the time, but should not be sort of compromised, there were big, big debates on whether that was enough in order to ensure quality. And that’s why I think that the volume, and the developments, they bring the type of public conversations that you will have. And they will also pull together the political parties in order to engage in that type of a debate.

### George Megalogenis

Yes. The framing of a debate wasn’t here’s the golden reform package, and we’ll wait for delivery date and then everything is fine. What actually happens is it kept raising the bar.

### Tove Mogstad Slinde

It’s true.

### George Megalogenis

And the evidence on the ground posed new questions and new answers came from them.

### Tove Mogstad Slinde

It’s true.

### George Megalogenis

Gill, can I just get you to reflect on the Australian scene, ‘cause it’s interesting to hear why you think we are still lagging? But also what we might be learning, ‘cause there’s been a sort of an acceleration of activity around the world, and also an acceleration of recognition in Australia. I think that’s fair to say.

### Gill Callister

Yeah. I think there’s an acceleration, and I think the investment and work happening in Victoria is really a big, big step change. I think we’re often held back by the fact that we have two levels of government involved in this. So we don’t always start this from the perspective of what’s happening for children, we start from the perspective of which tier of government invests in which type of service or setting.

So we start with an institutional argument about whether it’s childcare for workforce participation or kindergarten for learning, and we get, you know, I think that has held us back, the idea that the Federal Government’s responsible for one area and the State Government’s responsible for another.

We have made progress particularly around the national quality standards, the nation law on quality, the progress to have services meeting and exceeding the quality standards. But it’s interesting that in Norway you’re having a discussion about quality, because I know that what Collette would have said if she was here, was eventually those quality standards have to meet themselves, we could even do better.

But yeah, I think we’ve made progress. I just think we don’t talk about - we talk childcare or learning, we don’t have them in the same place nearly enough, and we don’t organise around that enough.

### George Megalogenis

Tove, just give us - you were alluding before to some local examples that you’ve witnessed here in the past week, did anything jump off the page for you that was - you loved, can’t wait to take back to the OECD and share with everybody else?

### Tove Mogstad Slinde

I must say I was so happy with the indoor/outdoor learning. I think it was so evident in the centres that I visited, that you really have understood something about having the learning environment, and doing it intentionally. And I met with wonderful practitioners and leaders, that really wanted to do well and to provide for the children in their service.

And also the combination with the mother, maternal child healthcare and the kindergartens. In Norway, we have in the last budget, actually - no, not in the last - no, but in the program for this government that was a platform that was developed together across the parties that now form this government, they have put out one point, which is that they want to put the child health - they want to do a pilot which child health controls, of four year olds in kindergartens taking place there. So it means that the idea that you are creating here, combining the two, are also something that we are looking on back in Norway, so good I’m actually going to take that back and say okay, there are examples out there that are really, really good. Yeah.

### George Megalogenis

So that’s a pleasant surprise Gill that we’re actually ahead of the game on some things? Because we do have to walk out of here inspired.

### Gill Callister

I think the quality of the work in the settings, I visit lots of early childhood centres, and I think the, you know, you can see the curriculum in action, you can see the indoor/outdoor, you can see the intentional work that’s being done. I think the setting, a lot of the settings that we have are truly wonderful.

But it is quite a fragmented sector. You know, we’ve got not-for-profit, we’ve got for-profit, we’ve got council run, we’ve got school and kinder together, we got a very, very mixed way which makes it harder to translate and have a way of translating and helping people build on each other’s practice and have the sense of system.

### George Megalogenis

Tove, how would you break that problem? How would you deal with that problem?

### Tove Mogstad Slinde

Actually I must say that this is one of the most important things. Because fragmented sector, that’s our norm. In the international collaboration, in the OECD they say - they write big reports on education. And they say, okay, it’s about governing a complex sector, a complex educational, yeah, anyway, systems is what they call it, governing complex educational systems.

In this sector it’s even more complex. And that goes across countries, so it’s really true for all. I think that the key mover is actually to agree on the goal. So being - be clear about where one wants to go, then you can bring together the different fragments in going somewhere together. And I think that that is evident in your plan.

And I like the way it is formulated that it opens not only to being created together, but to being again, developed together when you are putting things into action. So that is my sort of take on that.

### George Megalogenis

You can’t see my timer but it’s a whole lot of red zeros. So I think - I am mindful that this conversation could go for another hour, trust me. But we had a bit of a conversation last night, and there’s about another half dozen questions I wish I could ask. But for the time being could you please give your respect to our two speakers. Thank you.