



Capability Statement

Early childhood

The University of Wollongong (UOW) incorporates community outreach, education and research initiatives to help children living in vulnerable circumstances to realise their potential.

UOW has strong foundations in early childhood education and care, and is committed to becoming a world leader in the early years through our investment in the Early Start initiative.

Early Start is the place where curiosity rules. It is where research, education, and community come together for the benefit of children - no matter their background, circumstance or challenges. The Early Start facility was funded with \$31 million from the Federal Government's Education Investment Fund, \$7 million in philanthropic funding through the Abbott Foundation, and the balance from UOW.

Early Start's mission is to influence policy and practice through interdisciplinary research, provide education that strengthens the way people care for and work with children, and engage with families and communities to support the environments in which children flourish.

Early Start is an organisation that delivers research, education, program development, stakeholder engagement and service delivery across the entire continuum of child development.

Core elements closely woven at Early Start capitalise on its concentration of expertise and help drive innovation. These are:

- Research: world-leading researchers investigating real life challenges (also through community consultation), that will have a transformational impact on the lives of children and those who work and care for them. Advocating for evidence-based policies and programs that address community needs.
- Engagement Centres: a partnership with 39 early childhood care and education centres in regional and remote communities. Collaborating with services in regional and remote areas (virtually and physically) to increase capacity, enrich quality and support services to strengthen outcomes for children.

- Discovery Space: an interactive play space that stimulates curiosity, nurtures creativity, builds confidence and provides opportunities for social connection, communication, learning and independent discovery.

RESEARCH WITH IMPACT

Researchers and students at Early Start are engaged in transdisciplinary evidence-based research across the spectrum of children's educational, developmental, physical, cognitive, social and emotional development.

Early Start research provides the primary vehicle through which academics, practitioners, professionals and research students are advancing early learning, development, health and wellbeing of children and their families.

Unlike traditional research that may take many years to have an impact, research from Early Start - in close partnership with its Early Start Engagement Centres - ensures that outcomes are adopted into practice and policy far more rapidly.

Since being established in 2015, Early Start researchers have been awarded over \$12.5 million in research income, and have produced more than 500 publications, which have been cited more than 30,000 times. They have supervised a total of 48 HDR completions in this time.

Early Start has close community partnerships which include Family Services Illawarra, Grand Pacific Health, and ASPECT.

DISCOVERY SPACE

Early Start's children's museum - one of Australia's dedicated children's museums and the first of its kind in the world based on a university campus - stimulates curiosity, nurtures creativity, builds confidence and provides opportunities for social connection, learning and discovery.

Open to the public six days a week, the Discovery Space is filled with interactive, evolving, playful experiences designed to spark the imagination and ignite a love of learning. It is a place where children and adults can explore together - discovering, learning and unleashing potential.

The Discovery Space has had more than 500,000 visitors since opening in 2015. Welcoming early education centres, primary schools, high schools and more, the Early Start Discovery Space has provided curriculum-linked excursions to 20,000 children since 2015.

Early Start has strong partnerships with NGOs and other service providers to further support families with experiences they would otherwise struggle to access. These include programs like *Let's Play, Let's Eat*, a collaboration with Family Services Illawarra which seeks to catalyse change in food choices made by families living in vulnerable circumstances.

ENGAGEMENT CENTRES

Early Start is committed to working with families in regional and remote communities, and partners with 39 early childhood education and care centres across New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory to inspire innovation in the early years and to translate research into practice. This partnership helps to bridge the traditional divide between research and practice using both an onsite and a technologically-enhanced engagement model.

These centres are accessed by more than 3,000 children and their families every year. Early Start facilitates the delivery of high-quality professional development for educators, the translation of research outcomes into practice, and day-to-day enhancement of child development and learning through virtual visitation programs and activities.

LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING

Early Start trains teachers who work within the whole continuum of education from birth to Year 12.

It has an ongoing commitment to evidence-based professional development through innovative in-service delivery models (face-to-face, online and mentoring).

Real-world teaching experience, strong international research links and innovative programs have helped to earn UOW a proud reputation for producing high quality graduates. UOW partners with leading providers of early childhood education and care, early intervention, charitable organisations, schools and clinical programs, as well as with government departments.

The use of the latest technology and international research links are further enhanced by students being able to work alongside academics, educators and children involved in Early Start.

Early Start's transdisciplinary approach includes academics from a broad spectrum of subjects, including education, social work, psychology, medicine, public health, ICT and engineering.

RESEARCH TRANSLATION

Early Start researchers have made significant contributions to policy and practice at a local, national and international level.

In 2019, the Early Start team led the development and launch of the Australian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Young People.

The guidelines help parents and educators support children and young people to build daily routines for better health, covering sleep, nutrition and screen time.

These guidelines complement the Australian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Early Years released in 2017.

IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY ON CHILDREN

UOW researchers will contribute to world-first research to understand the impact of digital technology on Australian children.

And Australian Research Council (ARC) Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child was announced in September 2019. The Centre will be based at Queensland University of Technology and Professor Sue Bennett, head of UOW's School of Education, will be the new Centre's Deputy Director.

This new centre will undertake a family cohort study, run children's technology laboratories and lead research programs to improve our knowledge of the effects of digital technology on children. The results of this research will benefit parents and inform improvements to children's health and education policy.

The Centre brings together expertise from six Australian universities, including UOW, along with 33 academic and industry partner organisations from Australia, Europe, Asia and America.

Early Start's point of difference is that it is an organisation that delivers research, education, program development, stakeholder engagement and service delivery across the entire continuum of child development.

UOW WELCOMES THE OPPORTUNITY TO WORK WITH GOVERNMENT AND INDUSTRY PARTNERS TO DELIVER EXCEPTIONAL OUTCOMES

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