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Big tick for pre-kindergarten plan but it needs properly paid teachers to succeed

The Perrottet Government's plan to offer an additional year of school pre-kindergarten by 2030 is welcome, but to be effective it must be delivered by highly qualified and appropriately paid early childhood teachers.

The Independent Education Union of Australia NSW/ACT Branch, which represents degree-qualified early childhood teachers, calls for all teachers, regardless of what age group they teach, to be paid equally.

"If you value early childhood education, then you must value the teachers who deliver it," IEUA NSW/ACT Branch Secretary Mark Northam said.

Early childhood teachers in NSW are frequently paid \$20,000 a year less than their colleagues in schools, even though they have the same degrees and the same HECS debts.

Consequently, many graduates opt to work in primary schools rather than the early childhood sector, leading to severe shortages of qualified teachers in preschools and long day care centres.

"A government-funded program that values teachers is the only way to go.

"The IEU has a number of concerns it plans to discuss with the Perrottet government. Before the new plan is to be implemented in NSW, the government must consult with early childhood teachers through their representative unions to ensure this program delivers the best possible outcomes for teachers, parents and children."

Research shows that play-based learning delivered by university-qualified teachers provides strong, ongoing results for young children throughout their lives.

In 2021 the IEU ran a work-value case in the Fair Work Commission. The Full Bench found that "the exercise of professional skills and judgement, the overall work value, involved in early childhood teaching" was the same as that of teachers in schools. If this new program is to succeed, this is the starting point.

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The IEUA NSW/ACT Branch represents over 33,000 teachers, principals and support staff in Catholic and independent schools, early childhood centres and post-secondary colleges.

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