



Media Release

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Learning More About The Challenges Of Learning

More than 80 per cent of parents voting in online polls developed by the Australian Scholarships Group (ASG) have revealed that one or more of their children have experienced a learning challenge¹. The poll results indicate issues associated with learning are widespread and children may require a spectrum of assistance throughout their schooling depending on their individual needs and talents.

A new Australian research program will explore learning and early intervention. The Australian Scholarships Group Early Intervention Research Program aims to discover why some children experience challenges with school learning by studying how young children at the preschool level learn. The five-year program, run under the auspices of the University of Melbourne's Faculty of Education and housed at the University's Early Learning Centre, will investigate how young children learn, focusing specifically on literacy, to draw out the issues that impact development.

"ASG has provided seed funding for the ASG Early Intervention Research Program believing the early years of a child's life to be critical to the positive education outcomes of children," ASG's Managing Director, Terry O'Connell said, "early intervention is far more sensible than band-aid solutions later in life when learning patterns have been established."

An OECD Report² released in September this year revealed Australia spends less on early childhood education than any other nation in the industrialised world. Supporters of the report have called on governments at all levels for an increase in funding, and a more unified approach to the sector that research to date, identifies as a period that offers a cornerstone to future learning and development.

"Change is occurring within the early childhood sector, and we applaud those governments involved," said Mr O'Connell. "However, a lot more needs to occur for a consistent approach regarding funding, training, quality, and management of services."

"Each year, more than 80,000³ young people leave school and 50,000³ of these never complete their secondary schooling or equivalent vocational training – this can be seen as a tragic waste of potential," Mr O'Connell said. "We hope that our support of the ASG Early Intervention Research Program will achieve improved outcomes for children, families and the community."

Findings from the ASG Early Intervention Research Program are expected to provide a framework for teachers and parents in how to intervene with children facing learning challenges and help children reach their full education potential.

"As research conducted by Access Economics in 2005³ has found, both the individual and the community benefits," Mr O'Connell said. "For the individual, the research³ found that children who had completed tertiary qualifications were more likely to experience higher wages, better working conditions, and had less chance of being unemployed."

"Similarly, the research³ found the community benefits from greater productivity, participation and skilling of children when they enter the workforce, and this results in the greater affluence of all within the community," Mr O'Connell said.

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ASG's Education Program helps parents plan for the future costs of their children's education within the broader vision of supporting children's education. The organisation seeks meaningful ways to assist parents help their children achieve a complete education as the means to help them to pursue their dreams, fulfil their potential, and prepare them for future success in life.

More information about the Australian Scholarships Group Early Intervention Research Program is available from ASG's website: www.asg.com.au/asgeirp A comprehensive collection of information about the Program is available and updates will be posted regularly. Visit the University of Melbourne's Faculty of Education website at: www.edfac.unimelb.edu.au

Further information about the Australian Scholarships Group Early Intervention Research Program is available from the Program Director, Associate Professor Margaret Brown, Faculty of Education, University of Melbourne, Phone: +61 3 8344 0987 or Email: pmbrown@unimelb.edu.au

1. The Australian Scholarships Group (ASG) ran a straw poll on its website www.asg.com.au and also on its parenting resources website, KidsLife Foundation www.kidslife.com.au asking the question: *Have one or more of your children experienced a learning challenge?* Voters were asked to agree or disagree with the question. The polls received a total of 130 responses with 108 Yes votes – 83 percent in the affirmative.
2. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care, September 2006.
http://www.oecd.org/document/63/0,2340,en_33873108_33873229_37416703_1_1_1_1,00.html#NR
3. Access Economics, *Locking in or losing prosperity: Australia's Choice*, Business Council of Australia, July 2005.
<http://www.accesseconomics.com.au/publicationsreports/>

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- **A comprehensive range of media support material is available at: www.asg.com.au/asgeirp**
- **A range of photos is available to support print articles on request.**
- **Background articles are available for reprint on the issues of learning and literacy.**
- **Parent resource information will be updated regularly.**

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