

## MEDIA RELEASE

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# Fast-tracked ACU teachers at the helm of kindergarten classrooms

The first graduates of Australian Catholic University's inaugural accelerated early childhood teaching course are ready to lead kindergarten classrooms in time for the 2024 school year.

Ninety-two diploma-qualified Victorian students have finished their Bachelor of Early Childhood Education (Birth to Five Years) (Accelerated) course, completing the four-year equivalent degree in just 18 months.

The new early childhood teachers will be a boost to the profession following a Productivity Commission draft report which identified workforce challenges and called for greater accelerated pathways and flexibility for educators to complete teaching qualifications while working.

ACU National Head of the School of Education Professor Donna King said the university's bespoke course, run in partnership and with full funding from the Victorian Department of Education and Training, was an industry leader designed to meet the demand for more early childhood teachers.

"We are thrilled to be graduating our first cohort from this accelerated course which has allowed students to upskill while working in the sector, and without compromising on quality," she said.

"ACU designed this course to meet the demand for high-quality early childhood teachers and we are proud to see our first graduates ready to educate current and future generations of children."

Course Coordinator Dr Victoria Minson said more than 200 additional Victorian students were due to finish by the end of 2024, with a further 150 students expected to start their studies in March.

Dr Minson said during the 18-month online course, students upskilled from their diplomas in Early Childhood Education and Care through an intensive work schedule including seven weekend symposiums – offered online and face-to-face at ACU's Melbourne and Ballarat campuses – providing opportunities for them to learn, interact, and grow their professional networks.

"The students have excelled at keeping up with their studies while working in the profession. They have also benefitted from the use of virtual reality to participate in innovative and contemporary learning experiences as 21<sup>st</sup> century educators," she said.

"Our use of engaging VR-enhanced immersive learning experiences for our accelerated students has made ACU a leader in innovative practice for early childhood initial teacher education."

While the accelerated course started in partnership with the Victorian Government in 2022, ACU has since expanded the pioneering program to include a cohort of 20 students in New South Wales. A further 100 enrolments are also expected when the course is rolled out to Queensland students from June.

Professor King said ACU was committed to supporting diploma-qualified early childhood educators across the country to have access to the fast-tracked degree.

“We know there is a shortage of early childhood teachers, and we want to ensure our accelerated, but still comprehensive, program is available for those who want to make the leap from diploma to degree,” she said.

Course graduate Lillianne Stephenson Gordon, 25, said being able to upskill to an early childhood teacher without cost and while working in the sector had further boosted her passion for educating children.

“Doing this course in 18 months was intense, but I have improved my knowledge about child development and learning, which makes me feel better equipped as an educator. Everything feels more meaningful,” she said.

**For more information about ACU’s Bachelor of Early Childhood Education (Birth to Five Years) (Accelerated) course click [here](#).**

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