

July 2020

Te Rito Maioha Early Childhood New Zealand (ECNZ) pre-election briefing 2020

Executive Summary

Te Rito Maioha Early Childhood New Zealand (ECNZ) advocates the following for the Early Childhood Education (ECE) sector.

The overall goal should be to improve the supply and quality of the ECE workforce ultimately benefiting tamariki and their whānau. To that end there should be:

- Recognition of all ECE teachers as equals alongside kindergarten, primary and secondary teachers, with the provision of pay parity and other working conditions immediately.
- Preservation of the recently announced reintroduction of funding for centres with 100% qualified teachers.
- Restoration of government funding to ECE services that accounts for inflation since 2010.
- Planned investment for community based ECE services for pay and working conditions, operating costs, equipment and buildings
- Reduction of the ratio of centre-based teachers to tamariki under two to 1:4 (on the way to 1:3) – babies need highly responsive education and care for their development.
- Recognition of ECE in the Education and Workforce Strategy as part of the education system in Aotearoa New Zealand.
- Investment in professional learning and development for ECE leaders and teachers.
- Legislative changes to ensure commitments in the Early Learning Action Plan are expedited sooner rather than later.

We support the focus in the Early Learning Action Plan on establishing a planned and coherent education eco-system that is supported, accountable and will ensure ECE services are sustainable over time.

Introduction

Te Rito Maioha Early Childhood New Zealand (ECNZ) is committed to high quality, teacher-led ECE, which is crucial in giving tamariki the best start to their life-long learning journey. We are Aotearoa New Zealand's leading provider of knowledge, fresh thinking and best practice for early childhood education and initial teacher education.

There have been great strides over recent years in how ECE is delivered in Aotearoa New Zealand, with many ECE centres doing excellent work in the education and care they provide. However, the sector is now under tremendous pressure, potentially putting tamariki at risk of receiving a substandard education.

Research and practice have shown that Early childhood education (ECE) is one of the single biggest influences on a child's life-long educational achievement.

ECE also supports better employment, income, criminal justice and health outcomes, and a more productive and cohesive society. Investment in ECE is more cost effective than investment at any other stage of education.

American economist Professor Jim Heckman has shown that investing in ECE is a cost-effective strategy for promoting economic growth. He has shown that for every \$1 spent in ECE, there is a return of \$9 in the learning life.¹

For over ten years there has been little to no increases in the per child funding rate from 2008 levels. Successive governments have forced ECE service providers to cut costs by either employing untrained, lower-paid staff, or cutting back on learning and curriculum resources for tamariki.

It is encouraging that the current government published an Early Learning Action Plan and the commitments therein to improve the privations this sector has endured for far too long.

However, there is a very real concern that standards of ECE will decline if governments do not place a significant emphasis on the early years of learning for our tamariki now. There are also grave concerns that qualified ECE teachers will disappear over time due to lack of recognition for their skills and competence, as reflected in inequities around pay and other working conditions. Qualified ECE teachers complete the same initial teacher education qualifications as their peers in primary education yet are paid substantially less. It is with these points in mind that Te Rito Maioha Early Childhood New Zealand (ECNZ) has prepared this briefing for consideration.

Current ECE sector situation

Quality teaching and leadership

The past drive to increase participation in ECE resulted in increased enrolments but without the investment needed to ensure a quality learning experience, through qualified teachers and lower ratios for tamariki under two.

ECNZ welcomed the announcement in the 2020 budget of the reinstatement of the funding band for 100% qualified teachers. While ECE providers employ as many qualified teachers as they are able this change will encourage them to aspire to 100%, although the reality is only 50% of staff in ECE are required by law to be qualified, this needs to be changed now.

Currently, while there are teacher shortages, the ability or even the desire of services to reach 100% is very slim as there is no plan or significant move to rectify pay parity for ECE teachers with the Kindergarten and Primary sectors and no support for the teaching workforce in continuous professional development.

¹ <https://heckmanequation.org/>

A qualified workforce can deliver excellent, rich, and varied learning experiences that nurture and support the emotional wellbeing of our tamariki along with establishing foundational traits for learning, such as curiosity, persistence, creativity, and co-operation.

There are grave concerns in the early learning sector that due to successive governments placing very little importance on ECE, Aotearoa New Zealand’s international reputation for having a world class ECE curriculum, Te Whāriki, and quality ECE, is now diminishing rapidly.

We propose that pay parity and other working conditions be addressed immediately to ensure the profession is attractive to encourage teachers into ECE. The government must recognise the importance of ECE in terms of lifelong-learning success by significantly improving investment in the provision of ECE services – staff, operating costs, and property.

Financial

ECE providers are finding it harder to make ends meet. Many community providers have over the years been using reserves to continue providing services to their tamariki and whānau, but these have now been depleted and services are operating at break-even or are already in deficit.

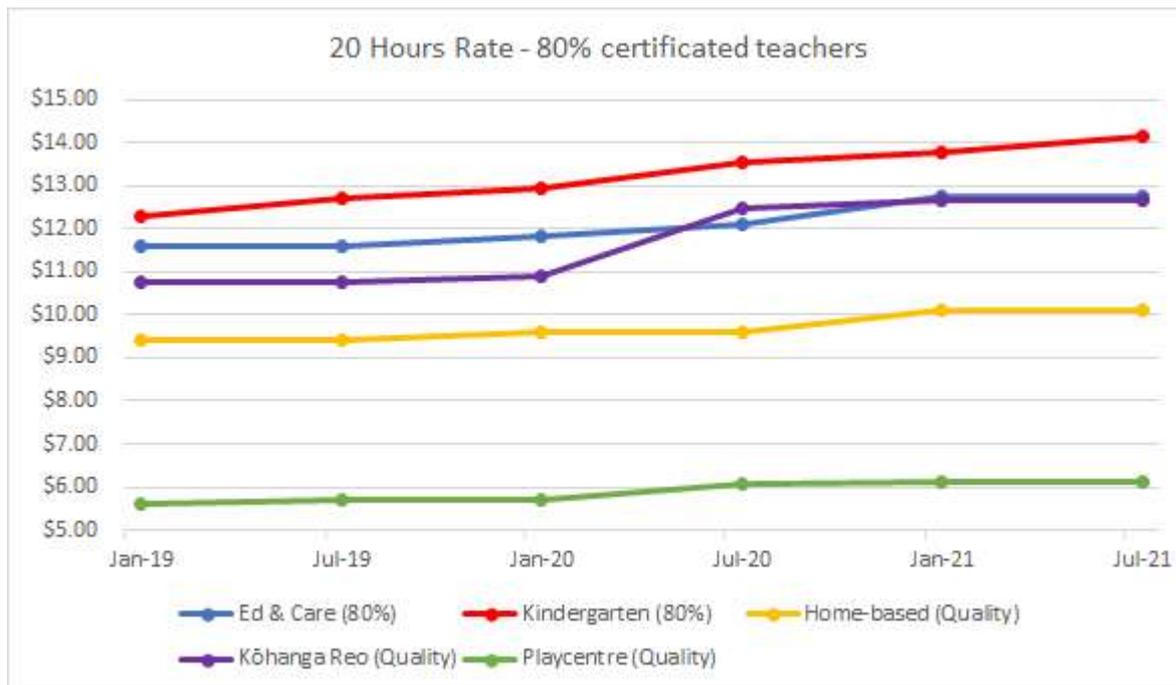
The failure of funding to keep up with inflation, increased compliance costs imposed through legislation changes (such as the Children’s Act and the Food Act), rising insurance, and most recently the increase to teacher registration fees imposed by the Teaching Council, is demonstrated in the following table. These factors are making it very difficult for ECE services, teachers and tamariki to thrive in ECE.

YEAR	Under 2	2 and over	20 Hours ECE	% Increase	CPI Same Period	Years
1/02/2011	11.80	6.53	11.12			
1/07/2011	11.93	6.60	11.25	1.12%	3.20%	0.5
1/07/2012	11.93	6.60	11.25	0.00%	1.60%	1
1/07/2013	12.01	6.64	11.33	0.67%	0.90%	1
1/07/2014	12.12	6.70	11.43	0.90%	1.50%	1
1/07/2015	12.12	6.70	11.43	0.00%	0.30%	1
1/07/2016	12.12	6.70	11.43	0.00%	0.40%	1
1/07/2017	12.12	6.70	11.43	0.00%	2.20%	1
1/07/2018	12.12	6.70	11.43	0.00%	1.10%	1
1/01/2019	12.31	6.81	11.61	1.59%	1.50%	1
1/01/2020	12.53	6.93	11.82	1.80%	1.90%	1
1/01/2021	13.02	7.20	12.28	1.60%		1
				7.68%	14.60%	-7%

It is encouraging that the current government has provided small incremental increases since 2019 but because the sector has been so underfunded for such a long time the sector’s funding still lags

significantly behind CPI inflation. Prices have risen over the last ten years by near 15%, but the sector's funding over that period has been only near 8% leaving a gap of 7%.

Furthermore, within the ECE funding, levels are uneven, so that in effect there is discrimination inherent in the ECE a child receives depending on what entity provides it. The graph below illustrates this.



An indicative snapshot of Early Childhood Education Collective Agreement members shows that 52% of ECE providers were in deficit in 2018 and from the current available 2019 data these deficit numbers are increasing. Many providers are using up reserves to ensure they do not shift rising costs to whānau. They are also employing unqualified staff, deferring professional development, professional memberships, equipment maintenance, and the purchase of new learning resources.

However, while many community-based, not-for-profit centres are struggling to survive with rising costs, there has been a sharp rise in numbers of private, for-profit ECE centres opening, many of which boast massive profits for their shareholders, with government funding an explicit revenue source.

In the school sector, expansion is planned and controlled by the Ministry of Education in response to demand and where use of funding is restricted to the schools' operations. However, there is no mechanism to contain or monitor how ECE service providers use government funding - that is, how funding flows to the child, teacher pay and professional development.

It could be argued that current policy will see natural attrition rid the sector of poor-quality delivery services. Unfortunately, however, most of the services that should be retained because they are providing tamariki and whānau with high quality early learning are besieged by lack of funding.

We propose that Government ensures that funding intended for teacher pay is categorised for that purpose per child so that funding flows to the right places (teachers and children) to deliver high quality early learning. We support world-class inclusive integrated early childhood education that is fully unified across the education eco-system in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Research supporting our ECE priorities

The educational benefits of high-quality ECE were evidenced by New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) research: *Contributions of early childhood education to age-14 Performance: Evidence from the longitudinal Competent Children, Competent Learners study.*

The main findings of this research were:

- Tamariki who started ECE between the ages of 1 and 2 had higher scores than those starting after age 3, and those who had less than 24 months' ECE experience had lower scores than others for attitudinal competencies (for example, communication, perseverance, self-management).
- Twelve-year olds who participated in high quality early childhood education did better in reading and maths than those whose early education was of a lower standard
- Five aspects of ECE quality had the most marked long-term effect. These were:
 - Teachers/educators responsive to children
 - Teachers/educators guide children in activities
 - Teachers/educators ask children open-ended questions
 - Teachers/educators join children in their play
 - Children can select activities from a variety of learning areas.

Tamariki who had experienced high quality in these aspects had higher scores for cognitive and attitudinal competencies than others. Most of these aspects were related to the interaction between ECE staff and tamariki, which depends on staff knowledge as well as their approach.

According to the report the consistency of findings points to the importance of providing high-quality staff: child interaction in order to improve student performance and ensure that fewer tamariki start school with low levels of performance. This is particularly important for services for tamariki from low-income homes.

The Abecedarian Project² shows that high quality ECE improves early cognitive functioning and learning, intellectual ability, academic achievement, and early school achievement.

The Education Review Office (2010) outlines that there are nine key aspects of early childhood practice that contribute to quality learning opportunities for infants, toddlers and young tamariki. They are leadership, philosophy, vision, relationships, and interactions, teaching and learning, assessment and planning, professional learning, qualifications and support, and self-review and management.

² The Carolina Abecedarian Project is a longitudinal study into the long-term effects of high-quality early care and education.

Our immediate priorities for ECE

We would like to see:

- Recognition of all ECE teachers as equals alongside kindergarten, primary and secondary teachers, with the provision of pay parity and other working conditions immediately.
- Preservation of the recently announced reintroduction of funding for centres with 100% qualified teachers.
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Our short to medium-term priorities for ECE

While we support the current government's Workforce Development Strategy, it needs to focus on the skills and attributes of high-quality early childhood educators. It needs to improve the supply and quality of the ECE workforce and currently this is not explicit in this strategy.

A skilled workforce is essential to delivering high-quality ECE services and to achieving the best outcomes for tamariki and their whānau. There is increased recognition that the education and care of tamariki is complex work. It requires enhanced qualifications and ongoing professional development. Programmes delivered by qualified teachers|kaiako are also particularly effective in improving outcomes for tamariki living in vulnerable circumstances.

The vision needs to build and support the ECE profession, including equity with primary school teachers. After completing a degree in initial teacher education graduates should be able to choose ECE or primary (after specialised study in each sector) without being disadvantaged in pay equity and ongoing professional development.

Investment in professional learning and development for ECE leaders and teachers will increase the quality of early learning for all tamariki, make teaching in ECE more attractive and help alleviate the current teacher shortages.

We acknowledge and fully support the improvements that are being made to initial teacher education programmes and as a tertiary provider we place high expectations on our graduates to enter the profession with the skills and competence to be highly qualified teachers.

We support the focus in the Early Learning Action Plan on establishing a planned and coherent education eco-system that is supported, accountable and will ensure ECE services are sustainable over time.

We propose that the government ensure that ECE is prominent within the Shaping a Stronger Education System and the Education Workforce Strategy.

Our priorities for the tertiary education sector

Restoring the 100% target for qualified teachers in teacher led ECE centres would lead to demand for more qualified ECE teachers. To satisfy this demand, initial teacher education (ITE) needs to be made less financially onerous for prospective ECE teachers.

Given this, we supported recent changes to tertiary study including offering one year 'fees free' study which has lowered costs to students for part of the required period of study. However, we do have a concern about outcomes. While there will be increased enrolment with the free first year, the key will be to ensure that learners are retained and complete their course / qualification. If this is not the case, overall Education Performance Indicators will be negatively affected as learners exit after their free year of study with no completion or qualification outcomes.

The impact of Workforce Development Councils (WDC) on ECE teacher training is yet to be known. Qualifications at certificate and diploma levels (i.e. level 3, 4 and 5) are also important in working towards a career in ECE.

We are pleased to be involved as part of the WDC Design Reference Group to ensure focus on ECE is not diluted or discarded for those wishing to achieve a qualification before deciding to pathway into initial teacher education including ensuring the sector has faith in a WDC to uphold quality and requirements for the ECE sector.

We support:

- Increasing student living cost support allowances;
- Incentivising ITE students with bonding schemes, which pay study costs in return for a committed period of work in ECE;
- Supporting equity of access to ITE for Māori and Pasifika students.

The draft Tertiary Education Strategy (TES) goes some way to address some of these priorities. We will be looking to the finalised TES to ensure that outcomes for students in ECE are well supported.

More about Te Rito Maioha Early Childhood New Zealand

Te Rito Maioha Early Childhood New Zealand (ECNZ) is a national membership organisation that promotes high-quality ECE through initial teacher education, professional development, advocacy, and membership services.

We are committed to high-quality early childhood education and care for all tamariki in Aotearoa New Zealand. That has been our purpose for more than 50 years since our formation in 1963, originally as Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa/New Zealand Childcare Association.

We represent ECE services and the teachers who provide education and care to thousands of infants, toddlers and tamariki. Our members are drawn from a diverse range of community-based and privately-owned education and care services, home-based services, and kindergartens.

We are one of Aotearoa New Zealand's top providers of pre and post initial teacher education for ECE teachers and are recognised as a leader in bicultural educator and teacher education. We are accredited and approved by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) to deliver undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications in early childhood teacher education and leadership.

We have held a perfect Category 1 rating (ratings range from 1 to 4) from NZQA for over ten years.

We are a fully blended delivery provider (mostly online with block courses, noho marae and practicums) and have 11 education centres throughout Aotearoa New Zealand, in both regional and main centres. Our students either work or volunteer in ECE services whilst they are studying making them highly employable after they graduate due to ongoing practical experience while they are learning.

If at any point you have any questions about ECE or us, please do not hesitate to contact ECNZ Chief Executive, Kathy Wolfe on 021 448 626 or kathy.wolfe@ecnz.ac.nz.

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