

25 November 2019

Consultation on the proposed priorities in the NELP

We are pleased to provide comment to the Ministry of Education as part of its consultation on the National Education Learning Priorities (NELP).

About Te Rito Maioha Early Childhood New Zealand

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

As a membership organisation we represent early childhood education services and the teachers who provide education and care to thousands of infants, toddlers and young children. Our members are drawn from a diverse range of community-based and privately-owned education and care services, home-based services and kindergartens.

Te Rito Maioha is also one of New Zealand's top providers of initial teacher education for ECE teachers and is recognised as a leader in bicultural teacher education. We deliver a suite of qualifications and teacher education and professional development programmes that are of interest to both domestic and international students.

We are committed to high-quality early childhood care and education for every New Zealand child. This has been our purpose for 55 years since our formation in 1963, originally as the New Zealand Association of Childcare Centres and later as Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa | NZ Childcare Association.

General comments

We support the integrated approach across the various education sectors that the government is taking to the direction of the education system. And we agree with the aspiration for every New Zealander to learn and excel.

The proposed priorities send a strong signal to the early learning sector on what is expected in terms of working with tamariki and their whānau to have a positive impact for children. It is good to see a balance between the needs of children, their whānau, as well as the teachers and leaders of early learning services.

We are pleased to see that all of the priorities are well aligned with Te Whāriki and the inclusion of family and whānau in the life of services is consistent with the requirements of the licensing criteria.

We hope that the soon to be released Early Learning Action Plan will contain more details on many of the actions.

Objective 1: Learners at the centre

Priority 1: Early learning services must make sure that every learner/ ākonga feels safe, appreciated and included for who they are, including their identity, language and culture, and learning needs.

We agree with this priority and are pleased to see that it includes not only tamariki from all cultures, but also tamariki who have disabilities and those with additional learning needs.

We agree that learning should be free from racism, discrimination, harassment and bullying, so all learners/ākonga feel a sense of belonging and wellbeing.

We strongly agree with both actions to support places of learning, i.e. improving adult:child ratios in early learning services and reviewing group size, building design and other environmental factors.

Priority 2: Early learning services must include family and whānau as partners central to the learning and achievement of every learner/ ākonga.

We agree that it is important that parents' aspirations for children's learning are respected and acknowledged. We also agree that there needs to be formal and informal opportunities for parents and services to communicate about a child's learning.

Objective 2: Barrier free access

Priority 3: Early learning services must have high expectations for every learner/ ākonga and eliminate practices that limit access across the curriculum.

We agree that tamariki are supported to develop skills, knowledge, attitudes and dispositions that support lifelong learning, and that they are involved in decisions about their learning.

Priority 4: Early learning services must support successful transitions into, within and from places of learning.

We agree that early learning services work with both schools and other services if a child moves services to ensure children make positive transitions. This includes providing support and information to the whānau.

Priority 5: Early learning services must ensure financial and other barriers for learners / ākonga and their whānau do not prevent equitable access to teaching, learning and participation in the life of the early learning service.

We agree with the two actions to address financial barriers to entry to early learning, i.e. maintaining 20 hours free and to implement the Equity Index.

Any requirement for services to structure fees and donations so that circumstances of the whānau are taken into consideration will impact on early learning services as they set their fees independently. Some services that are struggling to break even may find this difficult to meet.

The delivery of the Learning Support Action Plan will help ensure additional learning needs are identified early and responded to quickly.

While we agree that those with disabilities should be able to physically access the service's environment to fully participate, early learning services in multi-story premises or those on uneven sites may struggle to meet this requirement.

Objective 3: Quality teaching and leadership

Priority 6: Early learning services must grow their workforce to strengthen teaching and leadership and to contribute to a stronger profession across the system.

We look forward to the results of the Workforce Strategy teacher supply initiatives to increase the number of qualified teachers in early learning services.

While we agree that governing bodies and leaders take an active role in building the skills of the teaching workforce, the governing bodies of smaller community based early learning services may need support to meet this requirement. Increasing the number of qualified teachers in early learning will improve both outcomes and provide an environment which promotes equitable learning opportunities for all.

We agree that cultural competency of teachers needs to respond to the identity, language and culture of children.

We agree with legally embedding the curriculum framework Te Whāriki and supporting its implementation through ITE and PLD.

Priority 7: Early learning services must incorporate te reo Māori and tikanga Māori in the everyday life of the place of learning.

The action to increase proficiency in te reo Māori across early learning services will help them embed te reo Māori and tikanga Māori in a meaningful, sustained, and genuine way. It is important that services include local histories in their curricula to instil a deeper understanding of both child and whānau identity.

Iwi and hapū will need to be supported and resourced appropriately to enable them to effectively partner with the many ECE services and schools in their respective rohe.

Objective 4: Future of learning and work

Priority 8: Early learning services must ensure they offer learning that equips learners / ākonga with an understanding of New Zealand's cultural identities and our history.

We agree that a service's local curriculum includes an understanding both national and local history, reflecting both Māori and Pākehā world views. We also agree that services need to provide an opportunity for all to learn about the diverse cultures that are part of their society.

We commend the action to support access to Te Kōhanga Reo to all children and whanau who want it.

Objective 5: World class inclusive public education

We are interested in the development of an early learning establishment process so local provision has the right mix of education and language pathways.

We strongly support planned and comprehensive (increased) monitoring of early learning services. However, we see the need for increased infrastructure to ensure Education Review Office (ERO) and the Ministry can use their powers (including spot checks) to visit more services, more regularly. This will ensure ECE delivery is of a consistently high standard and will avoid situations whereby some children experience poor quality teaching for their entire ECE experience –where it is too long in between visits and the quality improvements don't come in time for some tamariki.

Priority 9: Early learning services must develop relationships with their local iwi and hapū and communities to align aspirations and strategic direction setting.

While we agree with this priority, we note that developing relationships with local iwi and hapū may be a challenge for the leadership and governance of some early learning services. Currently services involve the whānau of their tamariki in strategic decisions and review. However, involving their wider community in day-to-day operational decisions would be impractical. As stated above, iwi and hapū will need to be supported and resourced appropriately to enable them to effectively partner with the many ECE services and schools in their respective rohe.

We agree that early learning services need to embrace the diversity of all cultures while recognising the unique place of Māori as Te Tiriti partners. Places of learning reach out to these communities to contribute to local curriculum design and to enable culturally diverse learning opportunities.

Email submission to the Ministry of Education by 25 November 2019: NELP.TES@education.govt.nz

Key contact for Te Rito Maioha Early Childhood New Zealand:

Kathy Wolfe, Chief Executive

kathy.wolfe@ecnz.ac.nz | 04 471 6802

