



**Early Childhood
Council**

Delivering New Zealand's world class ECE curriculum sustainably
Opportunities and challenges in Early Childhood Education

**Early Childhood Council briefing for Minister of Education, Hon
Chris Hipkins**

December 2020

Introduction

This briefing paper summarises the biggest opportunities and challenges for Early Childhood Education in 2020.

It's drawn from survey data and feedback from the Early Childhood Council's leadership and membership, representing over 1,300 community and privately-owned licenced centres.

Our members are passionate about providing world class early learning for New Zealand children through the challenges of the pandemic and its economic fallout.

We would welcome a chance to meet and discuss areas where we could work with government and officials to improve outcomes for children on their behalf.

About the Early Childhood Council's membership

The ECC's mission is representing our independent community and privately-owned Early Childhood Education centre membership. We promote quality in ECE and those who provide it.

The ECC is a not-for-profit membership body and New Zealand's largest representative body of licensed early childhood centres.

We're proud to represent our membership of 1,300 providers, comprising 25% community-owned and 75% privately-owned early childhood education centres, who care for and educate over 65,000 New Zealand children, and employ more than 10,000 staff.

That's a big impact on the future of New Zealand, and on teacher employment.

Overview – Delivering New Zealand’s world class ECE curriculum sustainably

New Zealand is well placed to continue delivering quality ECE for our children.

To achieve ongoing improvement and sustainability, the ECC believes in refinement, not revolution.

We can be proud of the world class Te Whāriki curriculum, and there is broad buy-in to the Early Learning Action Plan across our sector.

We fear the main challenges will be economic, as pandemic-induced impact and uncertainty continues to bite.

This paper outlines priority areas we feel will have greatest effect on our sector to deliver quality care and education outcomes, fairly and sustainably.

Sustainable small businesses

Funding fairness

- The current funding system is broken, promotes inequality, is confusing for providers and parents alike, cannot demonstrate clear benefits for the children we care for and lacks transparency
- We believe it’s an outcome of years of quick fixes, and is unfair to many across the sector, including home-based care, Playcentres and community and privately-owned centres
- The gaps in teacher pay, subsidies and conditions between centres and kindergartens are examples of where the current funding system is illogical and failing those who work within it
- There are significant and often competing differences between ECE regulations and funding rules
- Overall, we need to use the funding we have to achieve better outcomes. The existing model fails to focus on the child
- **The ECC is calling on the government to commit to an ECE funding review and fix the broken funding model**

Urgent Response Fund

- We support the intent of the Urgent Response Fund, but have severe reservations around a lack of clarity on application approvals, the inconsistent approach between regions and different criteria for schools and early learning
- We understand that in practice, funds are prioritised for compulsory schooling. This is contrary to the expectations set at the start of the process, and means considerable time spent on applying and on review boards could be in vain
- **Because ECE has different needs, it should be treated differently. We request a separate fund and process be created for ECE, tied to attendance, education and care outcomes, with:**
 - One funding pool, with a nationwide deadline

- National distribution with clear decision making criteria and results made public to ensure transparency

Steadily increasing cost burden on centres, due to minimum and living wage increases, increased sick leave entitlements and additional statutory holidays

- Government policy continues to increase the minimum wage, and move towards the living wage. Everyone deserves fair pay, but in both cases, increases have a clear ripple effect on the expected earnings of staff within ECE, with no corresponding increase in subsidy rates
- Promises to increase the minimum sick leave entitlements and an additional statutory holiday will create the same issues
- Besides government subsidies, our sector of community centres and small business owners has one income option – parent fees. Many see this as an unrealistic option in the current economic climate – often the money simply isn't there, and centres are reluctant to ask for more, for fear parents will withdraw children altogether at the cost of their care and education
- **We believe that when the government increases costs, they have responsibility to provide a complimentary increase in subsidy levels**

Consistency on teacher appraisal requirements

- Teacher appraisals ensure responsible employers and staff are focused on performance, development and proven good governance, ultimately for the benefit of children in their care
- The Teaching Council's decision to remove the teaching appraisal requirement for recertification has created confusion in our sector, and an inconsistent approach between schools and early learning
- Teachers are still required to complete appraisals for recertification, but not required to share the evidence and documentation with the Teaching Council
- The communication on this issue has created confusion and raised questions about different approaches for primary teachers and ECE. These are valid long term issues to explore, but the immediate need for quality and development in teaching teams must be addressed first
- **We would like to see Teacher Appraisals reinstated for all ECE teachers immediately**

Regulation

Delivering the Early Learning Action Plan

- We welcome the stability and certainty promised by the government's commitment to the Early Learning Action Plan, and await more detail on the roll-out timeline and priority order
- We broadly agree with the direction it sets out, respect the work put into creating it, and buy-in from across the sector
- Our concerns include:
 - The plan focuses heavily on teacher-led, centre-based services, not a top level view of the whole sector and system
 - The push for regulation at 100% qualified teachers will make the teacher shortage worse, encourage poaching among providers, limit parents' choice and affect the special nature of some centres' offering. We support maintaining this as an incentive, but not regulating at that level
 - It's hard to see the education outcome benefit of heaping more regulation on an already heavily-monitored sector
- **We would like to see the consultative approach to creating the ELAP continue through its roll out**

ECE Regulations, Licensing Criteria and Funding Rules review

- This project is long overdue, and we are following its progress closely. Early learning will win when the sector can work on a high-trust model alongside officials. We'd like to see movement toward less monitoring, not more, so centres can focus on children's education outcomes, not red tape
 - To address the key issues, best utilise the expertise and experience available and move the sector forward, we advocate for the Ministry to consult with a Review Group on issues important to the sector and not just promoting a Ministry change agenda
 - Ideally, the Group should be drawn from both the Ministry and providers, working through a review of Regulations, Licensing Criteria and Funding Rules together. Having the key players in the room together would create efficiency, trust and get us to where we need to be faster
- **Regulation reform isn't a substitute for funding reform, can't achieve the same outcomes alone and should not be considered as such. The funding system and its drivers are at the heart of many issues in early learning and need to be addressed**

Person Responsible

- We believe the Person Responsible requirement is outdated and no longer necessary, as most licensed teacher-led centres operate an approach that ensures all qualified teachers on their team share the person responsible responsibilities
- **The sensible option is to remove the current regulation and make the responsibility a future feature of a re-vamped licensing criteria**

- The intent of the requirement should still be captured, but implemented in a much more efficient way to lessen the administrative burden on centres. Any changes must be linked closely to positive benefits for children's care and education outcomes

Teaching teams

Pay Parity and Equity

- We have supported the calls for Pay Parity for some time, and a majority of members surveyed support both Pay Parity and Equity
- There are two Pay Equity claims we know of with many of our members now, from NZEI Te Riu Roa and David Haynes. We are critical of the timing considering the current economic pressures and fear it will cause considerable financial stress just to engage in the process, let alone see it through to whatever end
- **A clear indication from the government on its plans for involvement would reassure the sector**

Teacher shortage

- This issue has dogged ECE for a considerable time, and the impact of the COVID-19 economy and closed borders remains to be seen. Anecdotally, there are more teachers on the job market now, which could be due to centres tightening their belt or closures, but no-one has reliable data on the situation today
- The pressure to recruit and retain teachers to meet funding ratios is driving the wrong values and behaviours
- The Business Hiring package is encouraging, as is the Ministry's plan to re-direct funding tagged for recruiting overseas ECE-trained teachers to the domestic market and attract qualified teachers who previously chose to move on to other things, back into our sector.
- **We're keen to explore all options around the teacher shortage on our members' behalf and consult where possible**

Immigration and the Auckland issue

- Current immigration settings make it difficult for centres to recruit and retain teachers. Two key areas that would have a big impact are:
 - Excluding overseas-trained ECE teachers seeking permanent residency, and who are listed on the skills shortage list, from the Auckland points policy
 - Establishing a new minimum salary threshold that effectively excludes ECE teachers
- **There's a big opportunity now to address these issues while the borders are closed so we hit the ground running when they re-open.**

Closer co-operation between the Ministries of Education and Immigration to solve these issues would greatly help this situation

In summary - ECC focus

- Our focus is supporting our membership of community and privately-owned independent early learning providers, and promoting quality in ECE. We're looking forward to working with the Ministry over the next three years on achieving these goals
- We believe the current funding model is broken and sits at the heart of many issues in ECE, and have been vocal in calling for a funding model review to be completed. It remains a priority for us on behalf of our members, and parents of the children they care for, and is becoming more urgent as the recession deepens
- To make our sector sustainable and fair for everyone, we ask for this review to be completed. We are keen to work with the Ministry and other stakeholders to get this done and set ECE in New Zealand on the right course

Next steps

1. The ECC asks that you acknowledge receipt of this paper and the points raised
2. The ECC looks forward to working with the new government on areas of education that impact early childhood education, and would appreciate a chance to meet in person and discuss points raised in this paper further. We look forward to hearing from you

Sincerely Yours



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