

MEDIA RELEASE

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Govt teacher drive ignores teacher shortages in early childhood

The Early Childhood Council (ECC) wants to know: why this government is ignoring the early childhood sector teacher shortages?

The comments come after the government reportedly doubled its target to 900 for recruiting overseas teachers to fill a shortfall of school teachers next year, and allocated an additional \$10.5 million funding for a package of measures.

The ECC Chief Executive Officer, Peter Reynolds, says the weekend announcement of yet more support for school teacher shortages, ignores completely the early childhood education (ECE) sector teacher shortages.

Mr Reynolds says there is a significant shortage of qualified ECE teachers in the sector currently, and according to information from our membership, many childcare and education centres are carrying teaching vacancies for over 70 days, and some for longer.

Our information suggests up to a quarter of our members have teaching vacancies. If you extrapolate that out across the sector, those shortages of qualified ECE teachers are significant, and won't go away in a hurry.

"We heard at the start of the year that this government thought it was staggering that numbers of people training to be ECE teachers had declined significantly, but they haven't done anything at all to look at addressing shortages in ECE in the short term. ECE matters and should be recognised for the significant contribution it makes to children's education," Mr Reynolds says.

"ECE centres are trying various ways to attract suitably qualified teaching candidates, but are finding there are just not the candidates available or that bureaucracy significantly slows down the ability to hire some teachers quickly.

"The Minister of Education set us a challenge at our ECC conference in May this year – to come up ideas to alleviate the teacher shortage pressure in ECE. So we have done that.

"We gathered information from our membership surveys, asked for member experiences of the teacher shortages and ideas for fixing the teacher shortages in the short term, and then held a series of workshops and webinars discuss the ideas and to refine them.

"From there we put a formal paper submission of ideas and recommendations to government for consideration in August," Mr Reynolds says.

Ideas to alleviate ECE teacher shortages include:

- Requesting the Ministry of Education look at the viability of changing some policies that put tight restrictions on funding based on numbers of qualified teachers at a service. This includes enabling services who are actively recruiting and carrying vacancies to cover this by increasing the ECE discretionary hours from 40 to 160

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hours, and reducing the 80% plus qualified teacher funding band to 70%, but not changing the funding level.

- Asking for the Teaching Council to look at some of its overly strict measures around the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), registration/certification stand down processes, and small changes around certification and practicing certificates, which would for example help with issues small and rural services face in ensuring there is a registered and qualified and certified teacher always there to open and close a centre.
- Seek to have ECE teachers, with immediate effect, put back onto the Skills Shortage List; and look at whether ECE teachers can be exempt from the Visa points policy.

Our member early childhood and education centres told us the teacher shortages are stressful and difficult and some don't know what to do as they can't fill vacancies. ECE is governed by complex rules and regulations and funding is tied to the ratio of qualified and registered and certified teachers a service employs.

We hear often some of the bureaucracy is actually making it harder, both financially in a tight labour market, and also be able to hire suitable teachers.

One of our ECC members told us: "this past year has been the hardest for us in finding teachers... I am now three qualified teachers short and we are paying unqualified and qualified relievers via agencies to fill the gaps, and have done so for 10 months. We are advertising regularly... We are desperate and have no idea what we are meant to do."

The ECC hopes the government will consider the recommendations we have made, particularly where bureaucracy is making things even harder and more stressful for centres and teachers working to deliver education to our youngest citizens, while carrying significant vacancies. We hope government will hear how impacted the ECE sector is, Mr Reynolds says.

The Early Childhood Council is a not-for-profit membership body that represents the interests of around 1,200 community-owned and privately-owned early childhood centres across New Zealand.

As well as ensuring the childcare centre voice is heard by education policy decision makers, the ECC provides our members with professional development opportunities, tools and support.

ENDS

More detail on the ECC suggestions made to alleviate the teacher shortages in ECE:

Requesting the Ministry of Education look at the viability of changing some policies such as:

- Enabling services who are actively recruiting and carrying vacancies to cover the vacancies by increasing the ECE discretionary hours from 40 to 160 hours
- Reducing the 80% plus qualified teacher funding band to 70%, but not changing the funding level
- Consider case-by case support packages to ensure services can remain viable in communities that need them

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- Accepting primary-qualified and third-year student ECE teachers in the regulatory funding ratios
- Allow ECE services to access the Ministry's subsidised recruitment services.

Require the Teaching Council to urgently investigate the viability of:

- Introducing caveated practicing certificates, whereby any (ECE) teacher seeking registration and certification who needs additional training to meet the Council's full requirements be awarded provisional certification subject to the completion of that training within a specified time and provided that the teacher not act in a Person Responsible role for that duration.
- Reviewing the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) policy, particularly as this applies to overseas teachers who have studied in English at secondary school and above; and paying particular attention to Pasifika teachers.
- Removing the eight-week stand-down before registration/certification with immediate effect.

Request Immigration New Zealand consider:

- Adding ECE teachers back onto the Immediate Skills Shortage List (ISSL) effective immediately, rather than await the service's current timetable of March 2019.
- Exclude ECE teachers from the Visa points policy as it applies to Auckland, with immediate effect.

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