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## Budget delivers significant funding increases [NZ]

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## EXCERPTS

The government has today announced the most significant funding changes to early childhood education and care services since the 1980's.

The key changes are:

- An inflation adjusted increase of 2.4% for all services from 1 July 2004

- Cost driven funding starting July 2005 linked to teacher qualifications and improved teacher &em; child ratios

- 20 hours of fully funded early childhood education and care for 3 to 4 yr olds in teacher led, community based services from 2007

- Guaranteed minimum funding for smaller rural services.

Speaking on behalf of the early childhood eduction and care sector, Nancy Bell, Chief Executive of Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa/ NZ Childcare Association expressed delight that the government had responded to the sector's call for a funding regime that recognizes the importance of qualified teachers.

The budget announcement, delivered on the eve of the Association's Queenstown conference for more than 200 early childhood practitioners was welcomed as a step towards a unified teaching sector in which early childhood education and care teachers stand alongside their colleagues in the compulsory education sector.

"Our members congratulate this government on its commitment to quality and embrace the assurance of funding increases through to 2007 which allows them to plan quality improvements for their centres and communities," said Nancy Bell.

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