

An agenda for amazing children: Final report of the ECE Taskforce ^[1]

Author:

Early Childhood Education Taskforce (Harvey, Tanya ; Johnstone, Claire; Mintrom, Michael; Poulton, Richie; Reynolds, Peter; Smith, Anne; Tamati, Aroaro; Tafa, Laurayne & Viviani, Ron

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AVAILABILITY

Full report in pdf ^[2]

ECE Taskforce website (report in sections, video interviews, press releases) ^[3]

About the ECE Taskforce:

The independent ECE Taskforce was established by [New Zealand] Education Minister, Anne Tolley, in October 2010 to review the effectiveness of ECE spending and propose new ideas for innovative, cost effective and evidence-based ways to support children's learning in early childhood and the first years of compulsory schooling.

Excerpts from the final report:

Below, we present an overview of our recommendations. These recommendations can be grouped into key themes, all of which focus on driving up quality and create our agenda for amazing children.

To achieve our vision for the future of the early childhood sector, we recommend:

1. An immediate focus on system quality and the effective use of government spending. This includes:

- * a careful review of spending to ensure it is high value
- * strengthening quality measures for home-based services, education and care for children under two years of age, group sizes, and accountability measures for kōhanga reo
- * reduced tolerance for variability and under-performing services - intensive support followed by decisive action for services receiving supplementary ERO reviews
- * regulating for a minimum of 80% registered staff in teacher-led, centre-based services (up from 50%).

2. A better funding system. This should:

- * drive up quality
- * preserve the idea of universal access, including a subsidy for a core 20 hours, and fund on that basis, but
- * include strongly differentiated payments for priority groups - Māori, Pasifika, children from lower socio-economic backgrounds and children with special education needs
- * be linked to a new licensing system that differentiates between teacher-led, centre-based services and other services
- * move away from cost drivers, and towards incentives, support and rewards
- * remove unnecessary compliance costs for services.

3. Increased productivity by greater support for working parents. That means:

- * incentivising services that meet the needs of working parents
- * combining existing supports from the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of Education into a single, transparent, easy-to-understand system that offers incentives and support for parents to return to paid work
- * requiring earning parents to pay more for early childhood education where they can afford to.

4. Improved accountability. This would be achieved through:

- * standardised performance and outcome reporting on government expenditure on early childhood education
- * mandatory performance reporting by services, linked to their funding
- * better information for parents about the quality of early childhood education services in their area
- * an evaluation of the implementation of the national early childhood education curriculum, Te Whāriki.

5. A well-supported, highly-regarded, professional and innovative sector. It should:

- * insist on high-quality education and invest in professional development, with Government setting the benchmark by creating minimum requirements
- * provide warm and welcoming settings that draw on family strengths, becoming a hub within the community, and in some cases, a site for integrated services
- * work collaboratively in a strong and unified manner that retains our distinctly diverse sector
- * be supported by Government with high-quality advice, and governance and management structures for stand-alone services, including umbrella groups for Māori and Pasifika services
- * be supported by structures that allow innovative practices to flourish and grow leadership from within the sector.

6. New roles and relationships. This means:

- * Government continues to provide primary leadership by setting regulatory requirements, and providing funding
- * professional leadership from the sector, driving a culture of continuous improvement on high-quality services
- * partnerships drawing on the wealth of experience and knowledge within the sector, supported by officials and decision-makers
- * consideration given to the role of employers in supporting the needs of working parents
- * more emphasis on cross-government responses to the needs of families.

7. A strong foundation in research and evidence. The components of this should include:

- * a well-funded research programme, to include advice on care for children under two among other matters
- * evidence-based policies that take account of emerging research
- * identification of effective professional practice
- * systematic evaluation of innovative practices and ways of working.

8. A measured pace: a structured, phased and trialled approach, monitored by regular reporting on progress and outcome. This should include:

- * the development of a government early childhood education expenditure strategy that provides a coherent framework for a programme of work
- * a structured work programme in three phases - immediate quality measures, implementing, supporting mechanisms and improvements put in place
- * trial of the new funding system
- * partnerships between the sector and Government.

The full set of our recommendations to the Government regarding its role in early childhood education appear in each essay in the second section of this report, entitled *Making Change Happen: Eleven Essays in Policy Design* [4].

Related link: News: "Call for an early childhood shake-up" [5]

Region: Australia and New Zealand [6]

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