

Terms of Reference – Advisory Group on Early Learning

Remit

There is good evidence to show that high quality early learning can make a valuable contribution to every child's educational achievement. *Te Whāriki*, the New Zealand early childhood curriculum framework, provides a sound foundation to support quality teaching and learning for young children. There is, however, wide variation in how well *Te Whāriki* is implemented by early childhood education (ECE) services and how the foundation it provides is carried on into the early years of schooling.

[The Education Review Office \(ERO\) report on the implementation of *Te Whāriki* \(May 2013\)](#) highlighted the need for ECE services to look at "... their implementation of the curriculum, to review its effectiveness and find ways of working in-depth with *Te Whāriki* to achieve the best outcomes for children at their service". ERO found considerable variation in the understanding of *Te Whāriki* and teacher practices, with most services not using the curriculum framework in depth to reflect on, evaluate or improve practice.

OECD's country report, [*Quality Matters in Early Childhood Education and Care: New Zealand 2012*](#) suggests that New Zealand could capitalise on the strengths of its ECE system by looking at options for improving the implementation of *Te Whāriki*. This could include strengthening parental involvement in curriculum design and implementation.

We know that children's development is enhanced if they experience consistent teaching and learning that is responsive to their needs. There is some evidence that students who have fallen behind their peers in the initial years of schooling tend to stay behind. The Continuity of Early Learning (CoEL) work stream of the Ministerial Cross-Sector Forum on Raising Student Achievement was established to consider ways to ensure that every child is a competent and confident learner by age 8 years, participating in a wide range of experiences across the curriculum frameworks.

In 2013-14 the CoEL work stream commissioned two projects focused on raising the achievement of priority learners¹. These projects highlighted challenges relating to cross-sector (ECE and school) understanding of curriculum frameworks and assessment practices. They identified services' implementation of curriculum frameworks as a key area to focus on as well as connecting teaching practice across early learning services, and school and kura settings for children aged 0-8 years.

Objectives

An Advisory Group on Early Learning (Advisory Group) is being convened to provide advice to the Minister of Education on:

- how to strengthen the implementation of *Te Whāriki*; and
- practical ways to align curriculum planning, implementation and evaluation across early learning services and the early years of school and kura.

¹ *Continuity of Early Learning: Learning progress and outcomes in the early years* – a literature scan (to be released soon); and *ECE leadership for 5 out of 5* – a video and professional development workshop.

The main focus is on:

- identifying the key *Te Whāriki* implementation issues that need to be addressed;
- strengthening relationships and communication about progress and next learning steps with children, families and whānau, particularly at key transition points;
- identifying the support required to improve teaching practice in early learning including the need for teachers and leaders to understand the language, culture, and identity of all learners;
- examining practical ways to align curriculum planning, implementation, and evaluation across ECE, kōhanga reo/puna reo and the early years of school and kura; and
- developing a plan for improving the implementation of *Te Whāriki* and aligning teaching practice across early learning services and the early years of school and kura.

Membership

The membership of the Advisory Group will contain a mix of relevant experience and expertise. The group as a whole should include demonstrated knowledge and understanding of:

- early learning and development across 0-8 years;
- the early learning and schooling sectors in New Zealand, in particular deep knowledge of *Te Whāriki*, *The New Zealand Curriculum* and *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa* (the curriculum frameworks for early learning, school, and Māori medium schooling, respectively);
- the planning, development, implementation, monitoring and review of curriculum frameworks;
- improving teaching practice and practitioner skill sets, including models of change, evaluation of impact, and use of assessment information;
- the design and delivery of system-level interventions;
- teaching and learning resources;
- kaupapa Māori and fluency in te reo Māori (relevant to curriculum implementation in language immersion settings);
- Pasifika cultures and languages and expertise in networking with Pasifika communities;
- children with special education needs; and
- effective and timely relationships and communications with parents, families, and whanau.

Members will be chosen for their individual skills and expertise, not as representatives of their organisations.

Membership will consist of no fewer than six and no more than ten members.

Selection criteria and process

Nominations or applications for membership of the Advisory Group will be considered under these criteria:

- relevant experience and areas of expertise;
- understanding of opportunities and challenges in supporting quality curriculum design and implementation;
- appropriate level of cultural responsiveness and understanding of the importance of identity, language and culture in supporting children's learning;
- knowledge of ECE or kōhanga reo/puna reo and/or school and kura sectors in New Zealand and the environment within which they operate, including the Government's responsibilities under *Tiriti o Waitangi*;

- knowledge of evidence relating to development, learning and effective teaching practice for children aged 0-8 years;
- ability to provide objective, evidence-based system-wide advice beyond their own involvement, experience or representation; and
- being available and able to commit to the whole process.

Role and scope

In scope:

Exploring effective practice in strengthening and aligning the implementation of *Te Whāriki* and the school curriculum frameworks, and developing a plan to support continuity of early learning for children aged 0-8 years by:

- publishing key questions inviting responses from ECE, kōhanga reo/puna reo, school and kura sectors;
- using targeted consultation and available evidence, including New Zealand and international experts, to identify the key curriculum implementation issues that need to be addressed and the effectiveness of current interventions;
- identifying the information, support and resources required to further strengthen curriculum implementation in ECE and kōhanga reo/puna reo and in the early years of school and kura;
- identifying ways to strengthen whānau and families' knowledge and understanding of *Te Whāriki* and how it aligns with the school curriculum frameworks;
- identifying ways to strengthen the connection and retention of children within education pathways, including the connection and retention from kōhanga reo/puna reo to kura;
- examining practical ways to align curriculum planning, implementation and evaluation, and to articulate learning outcomes, across ECE and kōhanga reo/puna reo and in the early years of school and kura;
- identifying any system obstacles to continuity of early learning, for example within the legislative, regulatory and funding regimes for ECE and kōhanga reo/puna reo and in the early years of school and kura; and
- providing advice on a plan with workable solutions, and particular priorities, that are culturally responsive and inclusive of all children, families and whānau, that the Government could take out for public consultation if significant changes are recommended.

The Advisory Group should have due regard to:

- the constrained fiscal environment under which the government operates;
- the opportunities and risks of any proposals;
- alignment with other Ministry of Education priorities, initiatives and programmes;
- the focus on whole learning pathways, transitions and collaborative practice that underpin the Communities of Schools and the Investing in Educational Success initiative;
- the recent reviews of regulations and of professional learning and development; and
- the recommendations of the ECE Taskforce, in particular in Essay 6 '*Enhancing ECE through Te Whāriki*'.

Out of scope:

Rewriting *Te Whāriki*, *The New Zealand Curriculum* or *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa*.

Meetings and process

The Minister will appoint members, including the chair.

The Ministry of Education will convene and provide secretariat support for meetings of the Advisory Group.

Responsibility of members

Members must:

- act in the best interests of all stakeholders, including children and parents;
- endeavour to provide objective, evidence-based advice; and
- dedicate sufficient time to make a meaningful contribution to the progress of the Advisory Group from December to late June 2015. It is expected that there will be six meetings with the introductory meeting occurring in December, early in the second week of February, March, April, May and June. There may also be video conference meetings in between meetings.

Views of members will not be taken as those of their employers, or their organisations.

Conflict of interest

Advisory Group members should perform their tasks honestly, impartially and in good faith. Members should also avoid situations that might compromise their integrity or otherwise lead to conflicts of interest.

If a member becomes aware of a conflict of interest, they will advise the Ministry of Education.

Payment

Eligible members will be entitled to a daily meeting fee to be paid in accordance with Cabinet Office Fees Guidelines [CO (12) 6 refers]. Members will be reimbursed for actual and reasonable travel and accommodation costs.

Reporting

The Advisory Group will report to the Group Manager, ECE in the Ministry of Education, and provide their final report to the Minister of Education.

Term

The Advisory Group's advice should be delivered to the Minister of Education by 30 June 2015.

Confidentiality

Advice provided by the Advisory Group to officials will be treated in confidence.

Members will not disclose information provided to them in confidence by officials.

Members will not make media statements about the work of the Advisory Group unless agreed by the Ministry of Education.

Official Information Act 1982

The Official Information Act 1982 will apply without exception to the activities of the Advisory Group. The Ministry will be responsible for ensuring that members are aware of the provisions of the Act, and the extent to which written material is discoverable under it.