

Hon Chris Hipkins

Minister of Education



TERMS OF REFERENCE:

Development of a 10 year Strategic Plan for Early Learning

Hon Chris Hipkins – Minister of Education – has asked the Ministry of Education to work with parents, teachers, stakeholders, including kōhanga reo whānau and other kaupapa Māori early learning providers, and the wider community to develop a ten-year strategic plan for early learning (Early Learning Strategic Plan). This will build on Ngā Huarahi Arataki – *Pathways to the Future 2002-2012, a 10 Year Strategic Plan for ECE (Pathways to the Future)*.

These Terms of Reference explain:

- the scope and guiding principles underpinning the development of the Early Learning Strategic Plan
- the development process, including how the Ministry of Education will work with the sector to co-construct a new Strategic Plan
- how people can participate in the development process.

The early learning sector comprises licensed services (kindergartens, nga kōhanga reo, playcentres, home-based ECE services, education and care services, and hospital-based services) and certificated services (playgroups, ngā puna kōhungahunga, and Pacific Island playgroups).

Context

In 2002, the Ministry of Education launched *Pathways to the Future*, which outlined a high-level shared vision for the future of the early learning sector¹. This was supported by subsequent actions, such as a review of funding and regulations in the early learning sector.

Pathways to the Future was effectively discontinued by the previous Government in 2009. There is a strong case for once again having a strategic plan to set out a systematic and stepped approach to continuing to develop and strengthen the early learning sector, to meet the needs of children and their families and whānau.

In doing so, the approach taken in *Pathways to the Future* will need to be updated to take account of changes that have occurred since 2002 within the early learning sector, and New Zealand society, and the growing evidence base which shows the importance of early learning.

There has been a rapid expansion of early learning services, in particular some forms of provision, such as home based education and care. Given this growth, it is timely to consider whether Government should play a more active role in the early learning market to match the supply and demand of early learning provision, and limit any potentially detrimental effects of competition. This

¹ Historically, and in statute, this sector has been referred to as 'early childhood education. However, ngā kōhanga reo identify as being whanau development rather than early childhood education. Therefore the term early learning is now used, to be inclusive of both early childhood education services and ngā kōhanga reo.

includes exploring whether our approach to network planning is ensuring access to high quality learning opportunities for all children.

Early learning provision has played a crucial role in supporting labour market participation, particularly for women. The development of the Early Learning Strategic Plan will also explore how Government and the early learning sector can work together to support parents' employment aspirations in the context of the 21st century work environment.

The early learning curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, expresses the vision that all children grow up in New Zealand as competent and confident learners, strong in their identity, language and culture. It emphasises our bicultural foundation, our multicultural present and the shared future we are creating. It is expected that the bicultural vision of *Te Whāriki* will inform the development of the Early Learning Strategic Plan.

The Government's Education Portfolio work programme

The Government's work programme for the Education Portfolio outlines a vision for a "high quality public education system that provides all New Zealanders with learning opportunities so that they can discover and develop their full potential throughout their lives, engage fully in society, and lead rewarding and fulfilling lives."

This Government believes in an education system that brings out the very best in everyone and that means our educational offerings need to be as diverse as the learners we cater for. We need our people to be resilient, creative, and adaptable, with great communication and interpersonal skills, and prepared to work collaboratively as well as independently. This is consistent with *Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa Early childhood curriculum*, which is underpinned by a vision of children as:

"competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society."

In order to be effective in meeting these aspirations, our education system needs to change to meet the needs of the 21st century.

The Government's work programme recognises the persistent inequities faced by Māori and Pasifika and learners with disabilities or learning support needs.

The work programme also notes that while there has been significant growth in early learning participation, this growth does not mean that all children are participating in similar amounts of early learning nor does it mean that all children have access to high quality learning opportunities.

Purpose

The purpose of the Early Learning Strategic Plan is to provide a shared vision and road map towards an early learning sector that gives all children genuine opportunities for high quality early learning and development that supports their identity, language and culture and enables them to learn and thrive.

As stated in *Pathways to the Future*, "long-lasting improvement is most readily achieved through a deliberate journey." The new Early Learning Strategic Plan should once again take a stepped approach, with the early steps laying the foundations for later action. This will help to ensure that any tensions between different goals are managed and that the building blocks for success are put in place in a considered way.

The Minister is setting up a Strategic Plan Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) to provide the Minister and the Ministry of Education with advice to inform the development of the Early Learning Strategic Plan to give effect to his vision for early learning.

Scope

In developing the Early Learning Strategic Plan, the MAG may consider any matter relating to the early learning sector, such as policies around funding, regulation and support and the curriculum.

The development process will be broad based but should explore the following key themes:

Theme	Focusing questions may include:
Raising quality	<p>How can government and sector work together to raise the quality of early learning provision?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. How can we ensure that every child accesses a rich curriculum and empowering pedagogies? ii. What is the best approach to developing teaching and leadership capability across the sector? iii. What regulatory and funding settings best support quality provision across diverse service types? iv. How do we build an early learning sector that enables continuity as children travel across educational settings, including school or kura? v. How best is quality measured across the early learning sector? How will we know it is improving? vi. How do we develop and support parents and whānau understanding of what high quality services look like in order for them to advocate for their children?
Improving equity	<p>How can government and sector work with parents and whānau to improve educational equity?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. How can government ensure that all children regardless of background or learning needs access high quality early learning? ii. How can we foster connections with broader social sector agencies, iwi and communities to support children’s well-being and ensure that they have the support they need? iii. How can we drive pedagogical innovation and interventions that support equity?
The role of choice	<p>How best can the government and sector support parents and whānau understanding of high quality ECE so that they can make informed choices in their children’s early learning while avoiding unnecessary duplication and quality services being undermined by competition?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. How best can government manage the match between demand and supply of early learning services? ii. How can choice be balanced against the drive for quality and equity? iii. How can our sector best support te reo Māori to thrive?

- iv. How best can the early learning sector respond to the educational, cultural and language aspirations of parents and whānau?
- v. What choices should be available to parents regarding the type, philosophy and location of early learning service they can access?

When framing its recommendations, the MAG is expected to consider both the efficiency and effectiveness of the early learning sector, and take account of the Government’s objectives and its positions in relation to early learning as set out below.

Objective	Implications
<p>Learners at the Centre</p>	<p>The Government is committed to placing learners at the centre of the education system with a much greater focus on personalised learning, the recognition and celebration of diversity, and a focus on learning environments that are culturally and socially responsive.</p> <p>In the context of early learning, this includes actively supporting the establishment of new public early childhood centres in areas of low-provision and supporting and lifting the quality of services that predominantly enrol Māori and Pacific children.</p>
<p>Barrier-Free Access</p>	<p>The Government is committed to breaking down the barriers to participation at all levels, with a particular focus on breaking down financial barriers by returning to the principle of a free public education that is available to all New Zealanders throughout their lives.</p> <p>In the context of early learning, this includes putting the “free” back into the policy of 20 Hours Free early learning for all three and four year olds, and those five-year-olds who aren’t yet in school.</p>
<p>Quality Teaching</p>	<p>The Government is committed to championing quality teaching and the importance of a respected and supported teaching profession at all levels of the system.</p> <p>In the context of early learning, this includes revisiting decisions by the previous government have undermined the shift towards a more qualified workforce.</p> <p>Over time, the Government’s aim is to achieve 100% qualified teachers in all centre-based teacher-led early learning services and to improve group size and teacher: child ratios for infants and toddlers.</p>
<p>Quality Inclusive Public Education</p>	<p>The Government is committed to investing in and backing our world-class, public education system for all students. This involves turning the tide away from a privatised, profit-focused education system.</p> <p>In the context of early learning, this includes working to ensure that community-based early childhood education services have well-maintained facilities and are able to expand to meet growing demand.</p>
<p>21st Century Learning</p>	<p>The Government is committed to focusing on learning that is relevant to the lives that New Zealanders are living today, the technology they will interact with, and the types of skills that will provide them with the opportunities to thrive in all aspects of their lives.</p>

Development process

The development of the Early Learning Strategic Plan will be led by a Strategic Plan Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG). This group is not a representative group of stakeholders. Rather, it includes a diverse range of people, with varying backgrounds and experience, who will challenge conventional thinking.

The MAG will be supported by a Strategic Plan Reference Group. This group will be made up of a wider range of representatives, including sector representatives and early learning academics. Membership of this group will include existing early learning representative groups; the Early Childhood Advisory Committee (ECAC) and the ECE Policy Research Forum.

The MAG, the Reference Group and the Ministry of Education will work together to develop an Early Learning Strategic Plan that provides a shared vision and road map to give effect to the Government's vision for early learning.

Engaging stakeholders

Public consultation will be conducted in September 2018.

There will be broad engagement through face to face hui and online forums. Parents, whānau and the sector will be consulted.

Key processes and outputs

1	Education Summit and online engagement	There is the potential for the Early Learning Strategic Plan to be a topic of discussion at the Education Summits in May 2018.
2	Draft Strategic Plan	In September, the Ministry of Education will release a draft Strategic Plan for consultation. This first draft will be informed by the advice from the Ministerial Advisory Group. The draft Plan will be tested the reference group prior to public consultation.
3	Consultation Reports	In November, the Ministry will produce a consultation report from its consultation processes which summarises what has been heard from New Zealanders about the Strategic Plan. The consultation report will provide insight (including data and statistics) into the consultation and identify key trends and significant responses to inform the final Strategic Plan.
4	Final Strategic Plan	A final Strategic Plan will be drafted by the Ministry of Education, incorporating consultation feedback. The MAG and Reference Group will be consulted on the final Strategic Plan before it is submitted to the Minister in December.

Alignment with other ECE work programme commitments

The MAG and Reference Group will be kept informed of the sequencing and implementation of Government's wider education work programme where this work intersects with the Early Learning Strategic Plan. This includes:

- the review of home-based early childhood education
- work on Ka Hikitia
- work on the Pasifika Education Plan
- the development of the Statement of National Education and Learning Priorities, and
- the Education workforce strategy.