

Early Childhood Education Taskforce Report

The National Council of Women (NCWNZ) represents a wide spectrum of organisations, many of which take a direct interest in education. The members of NCWNZ wish to express their concern about the recommendations in the Early Childhood Education Task Force consultation document for changes to the funding system, and on quality and innovation.

Part 2: Funding System.

One of their key recommendations is that Early Childhood Education (ECE) services be split into two categories: teacher-led centre based and 'other' - for example, community-led/whānau/parent-led services such as Playcentres - with the funding to be prioritised towards the teacher-led centre category. An aspect of quality ECE is parent involvement, so it is contradictory not to fund 'parent-led' services which include some Kohanga Reo as well as Playcentres. Playcentres have developed and deliver a NZQA approved diploma which supports both quality ECE sessions and parent education. Therefore it is essential that the level of funding to this sector is not reduced.

In New Zealand, NZCER's 2003 national survey (Mitchell & Brooking, 2007) found that the private education and care sector catered for higher proportions of high-income families than the community-based education and care sector. There have been calls in the past for community based ECE to be supported better by the Government - May, H. & Mitchell, L. (2009), *Strengthening community-based early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand: Quality Public Early Childhood Education Project*.

If the level of Government funding to the 'other' community-led services is not supported and maintained it will lead to inequalities in provision of services in poor communities, and commercial providers who expect a financial return on their investment will be reluctant to also invest in these communities.

There is no doubt that access to high quality education and care in the early years can have a critical impact on children's intellectual and social development. NCWNZ has policy urging the Government to invest in supporting early intervention for families with young children that need help and guidance, and this recommendation to cut funding to organisations such as Playcentres that are involved in building community, up-skilling parents and supporting families, is a backward step.

The Task Force also recommended replacing the universal funding system with a system of subsidies with more targeted funding. We believe that this will involve considerably more administration time and resource to categorise each child and their parent(s) than is anticipated by the Task Force. Instead there should be additional equity funding and new incentives to establish services in lower socio-economic areas, especially for those that specifically cater for Māori, Pasifika, or migrant and refugee children to encourage participation.

Part 3: Quality and Innovation.

The Task Force states it wants to promote quality and innovation in the ECE sector and yet in the accompanying discussion ended up supporting more centralising and uniformity. Children learn best in a setting that respects their culture and background. Family

circumstances differ widely and NCWNZ believes that families are best served when there is a diverse range of high quality ECE services with well trained, and experienced educators (teachers or parents), which can be selected to best meet their needs.

NCWNZ respectfully requests that the Government and the Ministry of Education takes heed of the above views of our organisation, consults with interested community groups, parents and the early childhood service sector and reconsiders the recommendations of the ECE Task Force so that NZ's reputation as a leader in early childhood education quality of service and policy is maintained.

Yours sincerely

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