



**Qualified Teachers in Early Childhood Education:
Laying the Foundations for Lifelong Learning and Success**



Qualified Teachers in Early Childhood Education: Laying the foundations for lifelong learning and success

The first 1,000 days of a child's | tamaiti life are foundational for their future growth and learning. Early childhood education (ECE) has become part of the fabric of life, with an international trend of increased enrolments, especially for those under three years old. ECE plays a crucial role in shaping a child's learning and developmental trajectory, demonstrated by a growing body of research across various disciplines, in particular paediatrics, education, and neuroscience (OECD, 2015).

As ECE enrolments have grown, more attention is given to the quality and educational content (OECD, 2015). Aotearoa New Zealand's ECE sector is unique due to our long-standing commitment to high-quality teaching within our bicultural framework. Qualified ECE teachers | kaiako, who hold a degree or graduate diploma, are competent in child development and pedagogy from birth, equipping them to meet the diverse needs of young children | tamariki. As a bicultural nation, we integrate te reo and tikanga Māori into educational practices and initial teacher education. This approach ensures that ECE kaiako are culturally competent, inclusive, and responsive.

All ECE kaiako need to be qualified, as all tamariki (in centre-based education and care services) have the right to be supported in their learning by qualified kaiako, rather than some tamariki some of the time.

The importance of the first thousand days in ECE

It is well documented that what happens for tamariki in their first 1,000 days and prior to starting school shapes what happens throughout their lives. Much attention and support are given to the first 1,000 days, from government, community, social, health, and education agencies. Tamariki participating in ECE are at a critical stage of development, where foundational skills for future functioning and success are established. Providing quality ECE in Aotearoa New Zealand, supporting our tamariki in this critical period of their development, is crucial.

Tamariki in ECE are independent of their parents, caregivers and whānau. We have a moral obligation to ensure they receive the very best education and care possible in order to thrive. That's what we want for tamariki in school, and it is a false economy to only focus our attention and efforts on compulsory schooling when there are increased benefits of starting in ECE.

A range of disciplines, including education, economics, and paediatrics, conclude *'the first years last a lifetime'*

Child development research, neuroscience, and human capital theory all indicate that early childhood experiences have lasting effects. As brain development is progressive, every experience builds upon earlier learnings. Participation in quality ECE plays a crucial role in fostering aspects of healthy human development in tamariki formative years, building those cognitive and non-cognitive skills that set them up for ongoing success (OECD, 2015; Winslow et al., 2024).

Mitchell et al (2008) cite numerous robust qualitative studies that are both longitudinal and ethnographic, exploring the outcomes of ECE participation. These studies closely track tamaiti learning pathways and gather perspectives from whānau, kaiako, and tamariki themselves. The overall findings are positive across various domains, including cognitive, social and emotional development, language and communication skills, physical development, school readiness, parenting, and long-term educational outcomes.

Educational and social development are deeply interconnected and complementary. As tamariki engage in learning activities at ECE, they not only gain cognitive skills but also develop essential social competencies and emotional regulation. ECE environments that integrate educational and social experiences offer a holistic setting where tamariki expand their knowledge while improving their ability to collaborate, share, and empathise with others. This blend of learning and social interaction fosters well-rounded development, laying a strong foundation for future academic success and healthy interpersonal relationships.

Early learning impacts and enables lifelong learning

Developmental studies indicate that tamariki learn more and at an earlier age than previously recognised (Kuhl, 2011a). This underscores the need for high standards in ECE centres, especially for babies and toddlers who undergo rapid development during these early years. It is essential that ECE centres for this age group maintain the highest quality to effectively support their accelerated growth and learning (Mitchell et al., 2008).

Spending more time in quality ECE settings is also linked to better outcomes, so enrolling tamariki in ECE programmes earlier (under age 3 years), so they participate for longer periods, can offer more benefits. This is particularly evident with cognitive or academic development (Mitchell et al., 2008; OECD, 2015).

The benefits of ECE are well documented and wide-reaching

Participation in ECE has positive short and long-term benefits for tamariki, their parents and whānau, and society (Dalli & White, 2015; Barnett, 2003; Mitchell et al., 2008).

Tamariki immediately benefit from ECE by forming strong, nurturing attachments with responsive adults and engaging with peers through play and social interactions. These experiences support their overall development and enrich their quality of life.

The immediate benefits for whānau include access to community and support services, valuable insights into child development and education, and increased time to participate in the workforce (Early Childhood Education Taskforce, 2011).

The true value of ECE extends far beyond mere childcare or preparation for formal schooling. The advantages of ECE for individuals and society are highlighted in the examples below (Early Childhood Education Taskforce, 2011).

Social and Emotional Development: The foundations of life-long learning and development are established in these early years. In a quality ECE setting, tamariki develop basic life and social skills, such as co-operation with peers and adults, autonomy, meaning making, creativity, problem solving and persistence (Early Childhood Education Taskforce, 2011). Through these experiences, tamariki learn to interact effectively with others, regulate their emotions, and build resilience. A secure and nurturing environment supports their emotional development, enhances social skills and conflict resolution abilities (Dalli & White, 2015; OECD, 2011; Winslow et al., 2024).

Physical Development: From birth, tamariki are developing their motor skills, from crawling to walking, and engaging in sports or play activities. In an ECE setting, this physical development is closely linked to social skills, as tamariki learn and understand social norms. Tamariki learn best when they are active and engaged (OECD, 2011).

Cognitive Development: Tamariki learn from birth (Early Childhood Education Taskforce, 2011). Quality ECE stimulates intellectual growth through structured activities that promote problem-solving, language skills, and early literacy and numeracy.

Using early language development and learning as an example of cognitive development, research shows that young tamariki use “statistical learning” to pick up the language spoken around them. They learn by recognising patterns and regularities in the language they hear. Tamariki need social interactions with others to effectively use these pattern-learning strategies. A quality ECE setting with qualified kaiako maximises learning opportunities and outcomes for cognitive and language development (OECD, 2011).

Preparation for School: ECE plays a significant role in enhancing cognitive, social, and behavioural outcomes, increasing tamariki ability to learn (Sylva et al., 2004). Tamariki who attend quality ECE are generally better prepared for school, showing improved early literacy and numeracy skills, and greater ability to follow routines and instructions.

Research indicates a strong correlation between high quality ECE and positive cognitive, social and behavioural outcomes for tamariki entering school. Tamariki who participated in quality ECE exhibit greater independence and reduced anti-social or anxious behaviour by the time they entered primary school (Sylva et al., 2004).

As Nobel Laureate and economist James Heckman said, “skill begets skill; learning begets learning” (Heckman & Masterov, 2004). Investing in ECE provides a foundation for tamariki to build stable knowledge and skill frameworks (Early Childhood Education Taskforce, 2011).

Long-term Educational Outcomes: Quality ECE develops life-long learners. Research shows that tamariki who attend ECE tend to perform better academically throughout their schooling years, have higher graduation rates, and even increased earnings as adults. Longer term, there are strong links between an individuals' level of educational attainment and their health status (Topitzes et al., 2009).

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the OECD's long-running study into reading, maths and science achievement by 15-year-olds, found in 2009 that, in all 34 OECD countries studied – including Aotearoa New Zealand – those 15-year-olds who had participated in quality ECE outperformed those who had not (Early Childhood Education Taskforce, 2011).

Parental Support and Education: Participating in an ECE benefits parents, and in turn tamariki, in a number of ways, including:

- Supporting peer-to-peer modelling of good parenting that can lead to improved parenting and can reduce child abuse.
- Connecting vulnerable families to social services, linking them into health, housing and income support services as appropriate.
- Developing their social and community networks.
- More time to participate in paid employment (Mitchell et al., 2008; OECD, 2011).

These benefits are seen to empower parents.

The benefits of ECE are greater for priority learners

ECE kaiako encounter increasingly complex social environments and a multitude of whānau backgrounds and experiences. Tamariki who have most to gain from high quality ECE are those frequently referred to as priority learners (Māori and Pacific learners, disabled learners, and those with learning support needs) and tamariki from lower socio-economic backgrounds. These tamariki are most at risk of subsequent failure within the school system and other social problems (Early Childhood Education Taskforce, 2011; OECD, 2011; Barnett, 2003). Both local and international studies have found the cognitive gains in mathematics and literacy for tamariki from low-income or disadvantaged homes who participated in quality ECE could be greater than for most other tamariki. ECE supports language development, in some cases accelerating literacy by up to a year, and that quality ECE leads to better academic achievement at age 16 for children from low socio-economic communities. ECE is seen as a way to give tamariki a head start (Mitchell et al., 2008; OECD, 2011; Taggart, 2015).

Different groups of tamariki have different needs. Specialised support in ECE settings, especially for language and pre-reading skills, can particularly benefit tamariki from disadvantaged backgrounds and those for whom English was an additional language. The gains are even greater when mixing with tamariki from different social backgrounds (Sylva, et al., 2004).



Evidence consistently shows the value of investing in a child's early years to lay the foundations for lifelong health and wellbeing

Education, starting with ECE, is fundamental in developing the skills that build human capital. Human capital is linked to economic benefits such as increased productivity and GDP, which in turn improve living standards and enhance international economic standing.

“Advantages accumulate; so do disadvantages” (Heckman & Masterov, 2004). If ignored, disadvantages can become significant and persistent issues. While inequalities are a reality, smart and targeted investment in quality ECE can help level the playing field. Effective interventions in a child's early years deliver the best payoffs for society and for the individual. The benefits of ECE accumulate over time, as building human capital is a continuous process.

Early engagement and early investment pay off

Neurobiological research shows that the early years are a time of active brain development, which sets the stage for future learning and growth (Dalli & White, 2015). Investment in ECE during these early years can be more impactful than later spending on education or social programmes (Cunha & Heckman, 2007; OECD, 2012). Essentially, early investments shape the future, while later investments often focus on addressing gaps from missed earlier opportunities (Heckman, 2011).

The Dunedin Study¹ found that nearly 80% of adult economic burden can be attributed to just 20% of the Study members.

This “high cost” group accounted for 81% of criminal convictions, 66% of welfare benefits, 78% of prescription fills, and 40% of obesity amongst Study members.

Researchers say that members of this group can be identified with high accuracy when still young children. At age three, the Dunedin Study members undertook a neurological evaluation that covered intelligence, language, motor skills, and social behaviour. Reviewing those results, they determined that poor scores on these exams was a good predictor of who would later in the “high cost” group as an adult.

Children who had poorer brain health at age three had poorer mental health across adolescence and adulthood and by mid-adulthood exhibited faster biological aging and poorer cardiovascular health.

Caspi et al., 2016; Dunedin Study Evidence Summary Submission to the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care, 2022.

ECE is a high yield social investment

Government is interested and invested in ECE outcomes, given its many societal and economic benefits. There is of course an element of accountability and seeking value for money, and studies consider the economic returns from ECE for tamariki, parents, society, and government (Mitchell et al., 2008). ECE has proven to be a high-yield social investment. While participation in ECE is not compulsory in Aotearoa New Zealand, successive governments have recognised the benefits of ECE for all tamariki and have made significant and well justified investments (Early Childhood Education Taskforce, 2011).

Economic evaluations consistently show that the benefits of public investment in ECE outweigh the costs. Investing in ECE leads to positive economic outcomes such as increased maternal employment, higher lifetime earnings, reduced need for special education services, lower crime rates, and decreased reliance on social services. These improvements have a broader and longer-term economic impact. Governments are increasingly recognising the ripple effects of investing in ECE, benefiting both family | whānau and the wider economy. By enabling parents to enter the workforce, ECE can help break cycles of poverty and disadvantage, enhancing whānau well-being, and contributing to the nation's economic health (Heckman, 2011; OECD, 2011).

¹ The Dunedin Study is an internationally renowned research programme that has followed the progress of 1,000 children born in Dunedin, New Zealand in 1972-73, from birth to midlife.

The importance of a fully qualified workforce

Realising the potential benefits of ECE are dependent on that ECE being “quality”

Simply increasing access to services without attention to its quality will not lead to positive outcomes for tamariki or long-term benefits for society. In fact, research indicates that poor quality can have lasting negative effects on child development, rather than providing the desired positive impacts (OECD, 2012). So, what are the attributes of a high quality ECE sector and how can we ensure Aotearoa New Zealand’s ECE sector delivers positive outcomes?

Unpacking ‘quality’ ECE

An ECE setting with quality teaching and learning optimises the positive outcomes for tamariki. The three policy variables commonly referenced as the ‘iron triangle’ of quality are group size, kaiako: tamariki ratios, and staff qualifications (Dalli & White, 2015). How do these variables interact? Smaller group sizes and low kaiako: tamariki ratios mean more interactions, more attention for individual tamaiti; and having qualified kaiako mean those interactions are of a higher quality.

Quality ECE commonly feature (Barnett, 2003; Britto et al., 2011; ERO, 2024; Kuhl, 2011a; Mitchell et al., 2008; OECD, 2011; Sylva et al., 2004):

- Low kaiako: tamariki ratios and small group sizes. This increases individual attention for each tamaiti, maximising kaiako: tamaiti interactions.
- ECE settings that have staff with higher qualifications have higher quality scores and their tamariki make more progress.
- ECE settings with strong (qualified) leadership and qualified, long-serving staff (three years plus) provide a secure environment and more consistent outcomes for tamariki.
- Quality-focused and educational-focused ECE settings have qualified kaiako working alongside and supporting less qualified staff.

- Warm interactions and relationships, where kaiako are genuinely interested in what each tamaiti is doing
- Tamariki make better all-round progress in settings that view educational and social development as complementary and equal in importance.
- Effective pedagogy includes interactions traditionally associated with the term “teaching”, the provision of instructive learning environments and ‘sustained shared thinking’ to challenge and extend tamariki learning.
- A mixture of kaiako-initiated group work and learning through free-choice play.
- Kaiako with a good understanding of how young

tamariki learn and sound curriculum knowledge.

- Strong whānau involvement, especially in terms of shared educational aims with parents. This provides continuity of experience for tamariki across environments, whether they are with whānau or in ECE.
- Formative feedback provided to tamariki during activities and provide regular reporting and discussion with parents about their tamaiti progress.
- Behaviour policies in which kaiako support tamariki in rationalising and talking through their conflicts.
- Differentiated learning opportunities that meet the needs of particular individuals and groups of tamariki.

Qualified kaiako lift the quality of ECE and ensure better outcomes for tamariki

There is an undeniable positive relationship between the qualifications of ECE kaiako and ratings of quality. Tamariki made more progress in ECE centres where staff had higher qualifications, particularly if the manager was highly qualified. Having qualified kaiako working with tamariki in ECE centres (for a substantial proportion of time, and most importantly as the curriculum leader) had the greatest impact on quality and was linked specifically with better outcomes in pre-reading and social development at age five (Barnett, 2003; Sylva et al., 2004).

ECE kaiako are professionals

Qualified ECE, primary, and secondary kaiako in Aotearoa New Zealand require²:

- an initial teacher education qualification (a minimum of a three-year bachelor's degree or graduate-entry teaching diploma for ECE teaching); and
- professional registration with the Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand; and
- a current practising certificate.

New kaiako are supported in the profession through an induction and mentoring programme for their first two years until they are fully certified.

Registered, certified, qualified kaiako in Aotearoa New Zealand are subject to a professional Code and Standards, which means they can be held to account. Maintaining these professional standards give parents, whanau, communities, and Government confidence that our kaiako are fit to teach. It is in everyone's interests to ensure kaiako in front of our tamariki are bound by these professional standards.

A teacher is a teacher is a teacher

While the professional requirements are the same for ECE, primary, and secondary kaiako, ECE is often overlooked and not held in the same esteem, publicly, or by some decision makers. There is a reason the Ministry of Education is responsible for ECE, why ECE kaiako must meet the same qualification and registration requirements as primary and secondary kaiako and are bound by the same professional Code and Standards. This is because ECE kaiako are professionals. It has been long established that qualified kaiako are critical to deliver quality ECE. We must uphold quality standards across all levels of the teaching profession and maintain the integrity of our education system and to deliver the best outcomes for our tamariki.

ECE is complex, but qualified kaiako ensure tamariki have quality learning

ECE encompasses the period from birth, a time of complex and significant growth, development, and learning. ECE kaiako need to understand and support tamariki at each stage. ECE initial teacher education prepares kaiako to support tamariki through their formative years, ensuring they receive age-appropriate care and education at each stage of their early development.

Pedagogical research highlights that early learning is a hands-on process with an emphasis on emotional, physical, and intellectual aspects (Dalli & White, 2015). There are increased demands on ECE centres around tamaiti learning outcomes including oracy, literacy, mathematics and other curriculum areas, assessment, and enhancing teaching practice. Kaiako who lead and support that learning must know what they're doing. We expect the same at all other levels of the education sector.

Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa Early childhood curriculum, our national ECE curriculum, acknowledges and addresses the complexities by providing age-appropriate curriculum for three broad, but overlapping groups: infants (birth to 18 months), toddlers (one to three years), and young tamariki (two-and-a-half years to school entry age). This structured approach ensures that educational practices are tailored to the unique needs of each age group, effectively supporting holistic development. Te Whāriki has a holistic approach with outcomes focusing on tamaiti wellbeing, belonging, communication, contribution, and exploration.

As a bicultural nation, we integrate te reo and tikanga Māori into initial teacher education and educational practices. This approach ensures that ECE kaiako are culturally competent and able to provide inclusive and responsive care but adds to the complexity of ECE and importance of having competent, qualified kaiako.

Intentional teaching

A qualified workforce is better equipped to create a high-quality pedagogic environment, which means better gains for tamariki (Barnett, 2003; Mitchell et al., 2008; OECD, 2011). Qualified ECE kaiako create age-appropriate learning environments that promote educational and developmental opportunities through intentional teaching. Qualified kaiako understand and assess tamaiti progress and can scaffold their learning.

² <https://teachingcouncil.nz/getting-certificated/getting-started/what-is-registration-and-certification/>



It is not just their qualifications, but the knowledge, skills, attitude and strategies kaiako are able to draw on, gained through their initial teacher education and practice, to enhance pedagogical quality and promote learning (Dalli & White, 2015). They also have an understanding and experience of infant, toddler and young tamariki learning and development, pedagogical theories and practice, cultural and social contexts, the ability to understand tamariki perspectives, age-appropriate communication and teaching strategies, leadership and problem-solving skills (OECD, 2011; Mitchell et al., 2008). Qualified kaiako develop lesson plans to introduce age-appropriate material and concepts and deliver targeted pedagogy.

Recent research (ERO, 2024) looked into the critical role of ECE kaiako in supporting tamaiti oral language development. To do this well, kaiako need a deep understanding and confidence in their use of the teaching strategies that make a difference and to put them into practice. ERO's evaluation report identified professional knowledge as a key driver of kaiako using evidence-based practices. They found that qualified ECE kaiako are almost twice as confident in their knowledge about how oral language develops than their non-qualified colleagues.

Early et al. (2006) identified a link between a teachers' education (years of education, highest degree, and bachelor's degree versus no bachelor's degree) to gains on standardised measures of mathematics skills for tamariki in ECE. Tamariki gained additional points where teachers had a bachelor's degree compared with less than a bachelor's degree.

It is important that all kaiako in an ECE setting are qualified, as they are collectively delivering on the curriculum and assessing tamariki all the time.

Kaiako: tamariki relationships are at the heart of quality ECE

Pedagogy for tamariki under two years old differs significantly from that for older tamariki. It involves greater levels of physical care, intimacy, and emotional nurturing. ECE kaiako observe infants' unique communication skills—whether verbal, non-verbal, or physical—as well as their individual needs and routines. Understanding these aspects allows kaiako to engage more effectively with each child and respond to their needs. Kaiako report that building authentic relationships and trust with tamariki takes time, but is necessary (Recchia et al., 2018; Winslow et al., 2024).

Through positive relationships, qualified kaiako are able to create meaningful interactions with tamariki. Building relationships and strong emotional attachments with tamariki in their care is an essential pedagogical tool for kaiako. Kaiako who know tamariki in their care understand their interests and abilities and can apply the goals of Te Whāriki (OECD, 2011; Recchia et al., 2018).

Close relationships between kaiako and tamariki create a secure and nurturing environment, which is linked to reduced problematic behaviour and increased sociability (Mitchell et al., 2008). These strong bonds help tamariki develop a positive self-image, encourage respect and cooperation with others, and enhance their overall learning experience. When tamariki feel valued, they are more likely to thrive physically, get along well with their peers, and experience a profound sense of belonging, which contributes to their overall well-being and effective learning (Recchia et al., 2018; Sylva et al., 2004).

“...we also need to provide them with meaningful experiences and opportunities, so they can develop in all different domains and create a positive sense of their world” (Recchia et al., 2018).

Qualified kaiako have more positive, sensitive and responsive interactions with tamariki, with richer language and cognitive experiences. Their interactions are less authoritarian, punitive and detached. This leads to better social, emotional, linguistic, and cognitive development for tamariki (Barnett, 2003).

Ratios and class sizes

Aotearoa New Zealand's standards for kaiako: tamariki ratios are relatively poor compared with other developed nations. Inadequate ratios put tamariki at risk, including their physical safety and emotional neglect.

Younger tamariki have high needs, requiring more dedicated attention to stay safe and to support their early development. This is why the current ECE ratios for under twos has fewer tamariki per kaiako than for older tamariki (OECD, 2012).





Tamariki under three (the first 1,000 days) are in a critical and sensitive period of learning and development and they require attuned, well-qualified, self-regulating adults to guide and support them in their intense emotions and behaviours. Tamariki under three years old are infants, yet our current funding model sets an arbitrary cut off age of two which leaves the two to three-year-old bracket as the lowest funded group. Despite having similar needs to those tamariki under two-year-old (nappy changing, developing language and social skills), these tamariki do not receive comparable support in terms of funding or kaiako ratios.

Research shows ECE settings with kaiako: tamaiti ratios of 1:8 have been associated with a much higher proportion of insecure infants (Mitchel, 2008). It is universally accepted that the quality of the ECE environment increases with every additional adult in the room (OECD, 2012).

Kaiako: tamaiti ratios go hand-in-hand with group sizes. Appropriate group sizes make for safer and healthier learning environments. Large groups can hinder relationship-building, increase noise levels, and create stress for sensitive and vulnerable tamariki, leading to more interpersonal conflict.

Qualified kaiako enhance their interactions with tamariki through intentional teaching, and lower kaiako: tamaiti ratios increase the number of interactions (Mitchell et al., 2008). Group sizes, kaiako: tamaiti ratios, and staff qualifications - that 'iron triangle' of quality - are critical and cannot be compromised if we aim to provide quality ECE.

Qualified kaiako can engage with and deliver on Te Whāriki

Our national curriculum helps ensure quality ECE provision across the sector, supporting kaiako to cover critical learning or development areas, providing pedagogical strategies to enhance tamaiti learning and well-being. A clear curriculum also grows parents' understanding of their child's development (OECD, 2011).

Almost all OECD countries have a curriculum or learning standards from age three through to compulsory schooling (OECD, 2011). We are world leaders, as Te Whāriki was one of the first national ECE curriculums that explicitly includes infants and toddlers, recognising the importance of those critical early years (White, 2019). Other countries look to us because of this, and we want to continue to be known as leaders in ECE, and to continue to lift the standard for our own tamariki.

Te Whāriki has had a positive influence on our ECE sector, bringing unity and focus. It is an integrated curriculum that positions tamariki as confident and competent learners from birth. Qualified kaiako bring this curriculum to life through intentional teaching and meaningful interactions within the ECE setting. Te Whāriki is applied by engaging in ongoing, responsive interactions with both kaiako and peers, supporting tamaiti learning and development (Dalli & White, 2015).

Te Whāriki has strong links to the New Zealand Curriculum (2007) and Te Mātauranga o Aotearoa (2008)³, as education progresses from the first 1,000 days, supporting tamaiti learning and development into compulsory schooling. Quality ECE creates strong foundations and develops life-long learners.

100% qualified ECE workforce

History shows that where policy is enacted and incentives are in place, change happens. A successful example of policy and incentives working was funding to employ a higher proportion of qualified kaiako between 2004-2010. This funding met the cost of those kaiako and acted as an incentive for ECE centres to employ more kaiako. While this required increased expenditure, it achieved the desired result, with a steep rise in the number of kaiako (Early Childhood Education Taskforce, 2011).

The ECE sector has had a target of a 100% qualified workforce for over 30 years, and we should not lose sight of this goal. Our tamariki deserve the best, to be supported in their learning by qualified kaiako. We want to lift the quality and esteem of our ECE workforce and the integrity of our education system, not continue to shift the goalposts.

In conclusion...

There's a lot riding on high quality ECE in these critical years to deliver for our tamariki, their whānau, and for society. Ensuring the best for our tamariki in their early years is not merely a matter of expanding access but of upholding and enhancing the quality of ECE in Aotearoa New Zealand. The evidence is clear. The first 1,000 days of a tamaiti life are crucial, and quality ECE is a key factor in fostering their long-term developmental and educational success.



Qualified kaiako are instrumental in delivering the nuanced and responsive education that our tamariki need to thrive. All tamariki deserve a quality education, starting with ECE. Taking a holistic approach not only benefits individual tamariki, in preparing them for success, but also contributes to the broader social and economic well-being of our society. As we look to the future, continued commitment to and investment in high-quality ECE with fully qualified kaiako is central to shaping a more equitable and prosperous Aotearoa New Zealand for generations to come.



Te Rito Maioha's Five Point Plan

- **Improve child-teacher ratios** – currently among the worst in the OECD – so that tamariki can thrive, learn and be safe with quality education and attention from kaiako.
- We will continue to advocate for low ratios for tamariki who do not have a voice or a vote but deserve the highest level of care and attention. Lower ratios benefit tamariki by enabling kaiako to focus on tamariki; they better support kaiako: tamariki relationships; they increase the quality of interactions between adults and tamariki; and they reduce the stress on tamariki.
- If Ngā Huaraki Arataki – ECE strategic plan 2002 – 2012 target of 100% qualified workforce was not retracted in 2008, we would be now have had the benefit of a fully qualified teaching ECE workforce for over a decade.
- **Kaiako shortages** are an ongoing challenge. Government can address this by creating and implementing a meaningful strategic workforce plan to attract, retain and develop a professional, culturally responsive ECE teaching workforce from within Aotearoa New Zealand and continuing to invest in initial teacher education as a priority across all education sectors.
- Targeting a 100% qualified ECE teaching workforce will lift the bar for the sector, recognise ECE kaiako as professionals, and help attract talent.
- **Fund ECE services sufficiently** to deliver quality education to tamariki and pay kaiako what they are worth, fairly, and equitably without charging high fees to parents.
- Urgently replace the outdated, dysfunctional **ECE funding model** to meet the real needs of today's working whānau, tamariki and ECE services.
- Simplify regulations to support quality education delivery without over-burdening ECE services with repetitive, labour-intensive paperwork from multiple government agencies. We are engaging with and informing the **Ministry for Regulation's review of the ECE sector**.

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