

## Consultation on the Education and Training (Early Childhood Education Reform) Amendment Bill

We are pleased to provide comment to the Education and Workforce Committee on the Education and Training (Early Childhood Education Reform) Amendment Bill (the Bill).

### About Te Rito Maioha Early Childhood New Zealand

Te Rito Maioha is an Incorporated Society of members committed to high quality early education for every child. Established in 1963, we are an influential leader in shaping today's early childhood sector through advocacy, policy, and delivering tertiary education qualifications and professional development programmes for current and future early childhood and primary education teachers.

Our bicultural kaupapa, te reo Māori me ōna tikanga, is embedded throughout everything we do and teach. We are committed to ensuring the success of our Pacific nation students across the motu by growing authentic relationships that embrace students' whānau and communities across our programmes.

Through our membership we advocate for early childhood education services and the kaiako who provide education to thousands of infants, toddlers, tamariki and young people. Our members are drawn from a diverse range of community-based, privately-owned, kindergarten and homebased early childhood education services and teachers.

Te Rito Maioha is a registered Private Training Establishment (PTE) with the highest rating for a tertiary provider in Aotearoa New Zealand. We are accredited and approved by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) to deliver a range of early childhood and primary school undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate qualifications (levels 5-9), including specialist kaiako education, both nationally and internationally.

The organisation has delivered teacher education since 1980 and is governed by a Council made up of elected and appointed members, led by a National President and supported by a National Kaumātua. Our national office is in Wellington and our teaching staff are employed at 11 regional education centres | takiwā ako throughout Aotearoa New Zealand.

We are committed to achieving high-quality teaching and learning by:

- increasing teachers' | kaiako knowledge of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and Aotearoa New Zealand's dual cultural heritage;
- providing access to blended delivery through online and face-to-face, with practical real-life exposure and experiences through undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate tertiary education programmes leading to recognised and approved qualifications;
- promoting quality teaching and leadership through ongoing professional learning and development programmes;
- providing advocacy and a range of unique resources and services to our early childhood education members;
- collaborating with New Zealand and international partnerships to strengthen research and teacher education.

## The Bill responds to Regulatory Review of Early Childhood Education recommendations

### ***We are concerned about the lack of consultation to develop the Bill***

We are grateful for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Bill. However, we are concerned that the Ministry of Education has not worked with the ECE sector to inform the development of the Bill.

The Regulatory Impact Statement itself acknowledges the Bill fails to meet Cabinet's quality assurance criteria, in part due to the lack of stakeholder consultation. While the ECE Regulatory Review involved robust engagement, it is critical that the sector is also involved in testing how those recommendations are translated into legislation. Without this, the Bill risks pre-empting the review's findings and failing to address the issues it identified. We want any changes to be effective and well implemented.

The sector welcomed the review and remains committed to an improved regulatory framework that protects and enhances ECE quality — but meaningful consultation is essential to achieve this.

### ***Introducing a new Director of Regulation***

The ECE Regulatory Review concluded with 15 recommendations, including a need to define the roles and responsibilities of all regulatory agencies involved<sup>1</sup>.

The Associate Minister of Education recently announced that the ECE regulatory functions will move to the Education Review Office (ERO). The review highlighted frustrations across the sector about lack of clarity, inconsistent enforcement of regulation and duplication across ERO and the Ministry, so it makes sense to have one agency lead monitoring ECE regulation.

The Bill introduces a new role, the Director of Regulation, an employee of the Ministry of Education who will be responsible for issuing ECE licenses and enforcing compliance with legislative requirements. It is not clear why the Director sits at the Ministry of Education, with ERO leading ECE monitoring. How will the Director work alongside ERO? This only raises more concern about the lack of clear roles and responsibilities and highlights the lack of consultation with the sector.

## Feedback on specific sections of the Bill

### ***Section 14 – the purpose of Early Childhood Education in the Act***

Section 14(a) of the Bill redefines the purpose of ECE:

*The purpose of this Part is to regulate an early childhood education system to —*

*(a) set and implement minimum standards to provide for quality early childhood education that allows children to establish strong foundations for learning, well-being, and life outcomes;*

We question what is meant by 'minimum standards'? The Ministry of Education's plan for ECE sets out the sector's aspiration for high quality ECE, uplifting the mana and status of the teaching profession to deliver quality education and care to our youngest citizens. ECE legislation and regulation must aspire to more than minimum standards – we owe that to the 200,000 plus tamariki attending an ECE service each day.

Section 14(b) of the Bill includes parents in the workforce:

*(b) support the choice of parents and caregivers to participate in the labour market.*

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<sup>1</sup> Regulatory Review of Early Childhood Education (2024), Recommendation 2: *Clearly outline the roles and responsibilities of all regulatory agencies involved, ensuring efficient collaboration and accountability, and update legislation if required.*

Referencing parents and caregivers' participation in the workforce is not a logical fit in our Education and Training Act 2020. We agree this is a positive benefit of children participating in quality ECE – giving parents and caregivers more time to participate in the workforce, which also helps wider economic development – but this not a core purpose of ECE.

Recent ECE decisions appear to place greater emphasis on supporting ECE businesses and workforce participation by parents, rather than giving priority to children's education and wellbeing. This is deeply concerning. Our Education and Training Act 2020 should enable and support an ECE sector to deliver quality education and care.

Section 14 of the Bill narrows the focus and undermines the aspirations of ECE. The original Section 14 text more accurately reflects the sector's purpose:

*The purpose of this Part is to regulate an early childhood education system where all children are able to participate and receive a strong foundation for learning, positive well-being, and life outcomes by—*

*(a) setting standards to support quality provision and learning; and*

*(b) supporting the health, safety, and well-being of children; and*

*(c) enabling parental choice by providing for licensing and funding of different types of provision.*

### ***Honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi and supporting Māori-Crown relationships***

We are proud to contribute to an education system that honours Te Tiriti o Waitangi and supports Māori-Crown relationships (S4(d) of the Education and Training Act 2020).

To align with Section 32 of the Act, which sets out the purpose of primary and secondary schooling, we recommend adding a reference to Te Tiriti o Waitangi for ECE in Section 14.

*S32: The purpose of this Part is to establish a schooling system that supports all learners/ākonga to gain the skills and knowledge they need to be lifelong learners/ākonga and fully participate in the labour market, society, and their communities by—*

*.... (h) honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi and supporting Māori-Crown relationships that make a difference to learning; and*

*(i) reflecting and integrating te reo Māori, tikanga Māori, mātauranga Māori, and te ao Māori in the schooling system.*

### ***Section 14A – introduces new objectives***

Section 14 A introduces objectives that unpack the purpose in more detail. These are clear, sensible and broadly align with the goals of the sector.

We advocate for children to be at the centre of any decision-making and that their rights, interests and wellbeing are prioritised when amending the Education and Training Act 2020.

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Make submission to the Education and Workforce Committee by 1 September 2025.

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