

Early Childhood Education National Industry Advisory Group Hui Minutes

15 April 2025



Minutes –Early Childhood Education National Industry Advisory Group Hui (kanohi ki te kanohi)

Date, Time and Location:	15 04 2025 at 09:00-15:30, 49 Tory Street L 1, Wellington, Te Whanganui-a-Tara
Chair:	Sarah Williams, National Engagement Manager, Toitū te Waiora
Advisory Group Members:	<p>Bonnie Te Ara Henare, Principal Consultant & Managing Director of Aho Education & International Consultancy Ltd. Senior Education Advisor Early Learning, Ministry of Education</p> <p>Graeme Severinsen, Academic Leader Undergraduate and Graduate Programmes (ECE), Te Rito Maioha Early Childhood New Zealand</p> <p>Zane McCarthy, Teacher/ECE sector representative on National Executive, Campus Creche Trust/NZEI Te Riu Roa</p> <p>Fiapaipai Casserley, He Whānau Manaaki Kindergartens</p> <p>Logan Warwick, Registered Kaiako, Kids In The View Early Learning</p> <p>Alice Ingram, Curriculum and Learner Experience Writer, Whānau Āwhina Plunket</p> <p>Kara Daly, Pedagogical Lead, Playcentre Aotearoa</p> <p>Simon Laube, Chief Executive, Early Childhood Council</p> <p>Elizabeth Polley, Senior Academic Staff Member, Open Polytechnic/Te Pūkenga</p> <p>Jesseallen Te Awhe-Raston, Tiamana (Chairman), Te Kōhanga Reo o Ngaio</p>
Secretariat:	Tamar Anstice, National Engagement Project Coordinator, Toitū te Waiora
Attendees:	<p>Sean McKinley, Chief Executive, Toitū te Waiora</p> <p>Mark Ormsby, Poumatua, Toitū te Waiora</p> <p>Amanda Kent, General Manager Strategy and Advice, Toitū te Waiora</p> <p>Lois Moran, Quality Assurance Manager, Toitū te Waiora</p> <p>Hone Manu, Team Administrator, Toitū te Waiora</p>
Apologies:	Cathy Wilson, Kaiwhakahaere Matua, Montessori Aotearoa NZ

Summarised Minutes- Early Childhood Education Update and Discussion

Commentary:

Understanding Frontline Realities

- Members emphasised that decision-making frequently occurs without genuine visibility of daily operations inside centres.
- There was concern that frontline challenges including behavioural needs, staffing instability, and administrative burden. These factors of the work are not being fully accounted for in regulatory settings.
- A strong interest was expressed in building pathways at secondary level (Years 11–13) through Level 2 and 3 qualifications to introduce young people early to careers in ECE and provide supported entry into vocational pathways.
- Participants advocated for mechanisms that allow local insights, including community-level needs, to inform national policy in authentic and ongoing ways.

Workforce Recognition & Development

- Members highlighted that a significant portion of the workforce is unqualified or working toward qualifications — yet bringing immense lived experience, cultural knowledge, and practical capability.
- There is strong support for creating recognition pathways that acknowledge competencies such as cultural fluency, relationship-building, whanaungatanga, and knowledge of tikanga, rather than solely formal credentials.
- Discussion included suggestions that government could consider compensating teachers during training, like internship-style models used overseas, to better support workforce growth.
- Concerns were raised regarding funding formulas that unintentionally penalise centres with highly qualified staff, creating disincentives rather than encouraging professional development.

Regulation & Policy Considerations

- Members expressed uncertainty surrounding the impact of the upcoming ECE Regulation Review, particularly in terms of how it may alter compliance obligations and funding eligibility.
- Several participants expressed concern that shifts in political direction could result in more prescriptive “tick-box” regulation that lacks flexibility and professional trust.
- There was agreement that regulation must differentiate between large corporate providers and small community or kaupapa-based services, as uniform approaches disproportionately strain smaller services.

Summarised Minutes- Early Childhood Education Update and Discussion

- Strong emphasis was placed on ensuring teacher, parent/whānau, and community voices contribute meaningfully to regulatory development rather than being consulted only as a formality.

Curriculum & Cultural Relevance

- Members expressed a desire for a greater role in shaping curriculum direction , particularly in areas relating to cultural identity, belonging, and learning that reflects the lived realities of tamariki.
- The importance of whānau-led approaches was reiterated, stressing that learning begins with relationship, community, and culture , not just curriculum content.
- Observations were raised about resource inequality between centres, with well-funded services able to deliver rich experiences while others struggle with basic resourcing.
- Participants noted that the sector is still working toward true bicultural practice in many areas, and that training and support for Te Ao Māori knowledge must be ongoing, not tokenistic.

Kohanga Reo Specific Challenges

- Members from Kohanga Reo reaffirmed their commitment to cultural kaupapa, noting that many remain in the profession due to passion and service to their communities rather than financial reward.
- Frustration persists at being unable to hire deeply knowledgeable elders or cultural experts who hold invaluable generational knowledge because they do not have ECE qualifications.
- Cultural commitment acts as a retention factor, yet many kaiako are stretched thin due to low pay and high emotional labour.
- Pay parity was identified not merely as a financial issue, but as one of respect, equity, and acknowledgement of the value of Māori-led education.

Funding & Professional Development

- Participants described current funding models as disconnected from the real costs of delivering quality care and education.
- Professional development is often too expensive, overly generic, or not scheduled in ways that align with workforce constraints.
- Members suggested more flexible PD opportunities such as micro-credentials, modular online learning courses, and targeted in-service workshops.

Summarised Minutes- Early Childhood Education Update and Discussion

- The group discussed staggered student placements (e.g., rotating days rather than full-time block placements) to ease pressure on host centres.
- There was increased interest in international workforce pipelines, particularly from Pacific and Asian regions, while also acknowledging risks of exploitation and the need for ethical recruitment.

Support for Students & Learners

- Unpaid placements were highlighted as a major barrier, particularly for adult learners and those with whānau responsibilities.
- Many students are working full-time while completing study, leading to burnout, attrition, and delayed qualification completion.
- Members emphasised that training programmes must account for real-life pressures, offering flexibility around placement formats, attendance requirements, and assessment methods.
- The need for holistic learner support — including financial, emotional, and pastoral care — was strongly emphasised.

Identified Skill Gaps Across the Sector

Language & Cultural Capability:

- Increased demand for Te Reo Māori proficiency and understanding of tikanga, as well as Pacific and multilingual capability.
- Cultural safety was highlighted as essential to relationship-driven pedagogy.

Specialised Learning Needs:

- Behavioural support strategies, inclusion of neurodiverse learners, trauma awareness, and working with additional learning needs are seen as urgent priority areas.

Professional Competencies:

- Skills related to active supervision, positive behaviour guidance, child protection, documentation, and emotional regulation were identified as areas needing more structured development.

Summarised Minutes- Early Childhood Education Update and Discussion

Mental Health Knowledge:

- Teachers are increasingly required to support child and whānau wellbeing, including maternal mental health, yet lack training, resourcing, and referral pathways.

Career Development & Training Pathways:

- Calls for improved mentoring systems, refresher courses for experienced teachers, and onboarding guidance for new graduates.
- Unqualified workers often feel “stuck” with limited supported progression pathways.

Inclusive Practice:

- Services require more capability and confidence in inclusion- culturally, neurodiversity, and socially, with training and guidance desired from both sector and government.

Sector-Wide Challenges

- Ongoing difficulties in recruitment and retention of qualified teachers.
- “Job hopping” attributed to pressures around endorsement sign-offs and contract conditions.
- Financial hardship remains a barrier to completing qualifications for many prospective kaiako.
- Concerns about exploitative practices in the employment of migrant workers, who may lack bargaining power or support networks.
- Shortages of relievers result in high stress and increased burnout across the workforce.
- Rising cost of living disproportionately affects Māori and Pacific trainees, impacting their long-term retention in the sector.

Summarised Minutes- Early Childhood Education Update and Discussion	
	<p>Key Themes & Sector Priorities</p> <p>The overarching sentiment captured from the hui:</p> <p>“We just want to survive.”</p> <p>Members reaffirmed that ECE plays a foundational role in shaping lifelong outcomes, particularly within the first 1,000 days — a period where brain development, attachment, and identity formation are deeply influenced by early learning environments.</p> <p>Sector priorities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improved teacher child ratios to allow quality engagement• Achieving pay parity across ECE settings• Creating safe, healthy, emotionally sustainable workplaces• Establishing formal mentoring for new kaiako• Accessing meaningful, practical, affordable professional development• Ensuring government investment reflects the real value ECE provides society wide.

Actions:

1. Early Childhood Education Update and Discussion	
Reference #	20250415/01
Presenters:	Hera Williams
Commentary:	Hera set an action for the members to talk with their stakeholders about the current trends and challenges identified within the meeting and to come back to the next hui in June 2025 with possible solutions.
Actions:	NIAG members are to talk with their stakeholders about the current trends and challenges identified within the meeting and to come back to the next hui in June 2025 with possible solutions

2. Meeting close	
Reference #	20250415/02
Commentary:	Hera asked the group what their most convenient dates would be to have our three subsequent online hui. The dates were discussed and decided on by the rest of the group.
Decisions:	<p>Reference: 20250415/01</p> <p>Agreed subsequent hui dates and times are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wednesday 11th June 2025 (10 am- 12 pm) - Monday 14th July 2025 (9:30 am - 12:30 pm) - Tuesday 21st October 2025 (9 am- 1 pm) <p>The group also agreed that if another hui was needed, we would agree on a time and date for that to happen.</p>
Actions:	Tamar to send through the dates to all members so that they have the meetings in their diaries. Members will be updated with an agenda and any pre-readings that need to be reviewed two weeks before the hui date so that they are all prepared for discussions.