

# Our children, our choice: priorities for policy

Child Poverty Action Group Policy Paper Series  
Part Two: Early Childhood Care & Education (ECCE)

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# About Child Poverty Action Group

Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) is an independent charity working to eliminate child poverty in New Zealand through research, education and advocacy. CPAG believes that New Zealand's high rate of child poverty is not the result of economic necessity, but is due to policy neglect and a flawed ideological emphasis on economic incentives. Through research, CPAG highlights the position of tens of thousands of New Zealand children, and promotes public policies that address the underlying causes of the poverty they live in.

If you would like to support CPAG's work, please visit our website: [www.cpag.org.nz](http://www.cpag.org.nz)

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Each topic-based part of the series is authored by experts in the field. The series would not be possible without their contributions and we thank them on behalf of Child Poverty Action Group.

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# Our children, our choice: priorities for policy

## Introduction to Part two:

### Early childhood care and education, and child poverty

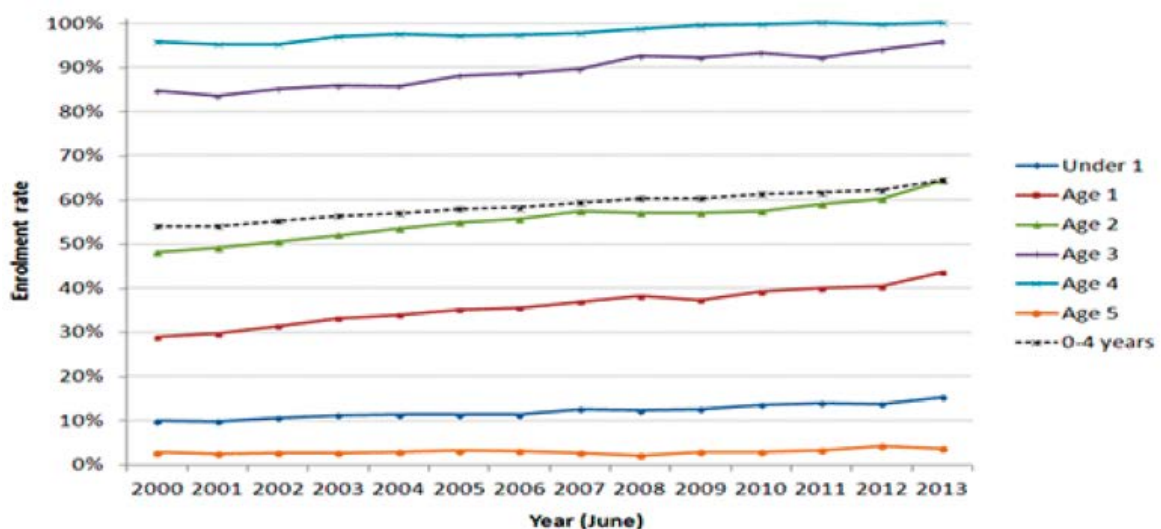
Children's rights were invited late to the table of human rights' discussions. Since the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC) in 1989, there has been growing recognition of the rights of even very young children. Aotearoa New Zealand has pledged certain rights to our children, founded in recognition of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (1840), the laws of the land, and international treaties. As well as UNCROC, we are signatories to the United Nations International Convention of the Rights of Indigenous People (2007).

In addition to the most basic protected rights explicitly stated in national and international treaties and laws, there are moral imperatives to protect the most vulnerable. We live with our children in communities as much as we live in political states and interconnected economies.

These children's rights include, but are not confined to: care and protection, food, shelter, and education. Implicit in these rights is quality of life: children have the right to access such qualities and conditions as: loving and respectful care; protection from mental, emotional and physical maltreatment; nutritious food to support health and growth; access to warm, dry shelter; and access to appropriate education. In 2014, we are failing in our pledges to honour the rights of our children.

The nature and quality of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECCE) provision becomes more critical as children are expected to spend ever more time in care. In 2000, children under 5 years spent an average of 13.5 hours in ECCE, and by 2013 that had increased to an average of 21.7 hours.<sup>1,2</sup> Of particular concern is the rise in the number of children under 1 year spending increasing amounts of time in childcare, up from an average of 15 hours in 2000 to 20 hours a week in 2014.<sup>3</sup> The number of children under age 2 attending ECCE has also been increasing steadily, as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1. Enrolment rates in licensed ECE services, by year of age, 2000-2013<sup>4</sup>**



A further concern is the inequitable delivery of culturally appropriate ECCE services to Māori and Pacific Islands families. The Education Review Office (ERO) noted in 2013:

*the lack of responsiveness to Māori and Pacific children in many of the services. Only two fifths of services had thought about how their curriculum might support Māori children to achieve success as Māori, and about one fifth of services had considered this for Pacific children.*<sup>5</sup>

Over recent decades, successive Governments have encouraged New Zealand's already high rates of participation in ECCE,<sup>6</sup> telling parents their children will be advantaged. Sarah Farquhar, head of the independent ECCE research and information group, Child Forum, argues that parents are not told about the potential risks of ECCE. As noted by ERO, not all provision is culturally appropriate, and there are problems such as "children getting sick, stressed or anxious, missing out on warm, stable relationships or becoming the victim of violence from other children".<sup>7</sup>

Critical of the lack of access to high quality ECCE services in poorer areas, Child Poverty Action Group's (CPAG's) Mike O'Brien says: "the Government's rush to boost participation in Early Childhood Education is taking short cuts which at-risk children will pay for in the long term."<sup>8</sup> CPAG is also concerned at the rapid increase in parents enrolling their children in home-based care or playgroup services that have minimal contact with qualified teachers. That concern is made more urgent by increasing levels of direct and indirect compulsion for children under 5 to attend ECCE,<sup>9 10</sup> and the increasing numbers of children under the age of 1 year in care.<sup>11</sup>

Recent policy changes have failed to increase the requirement for ECCE centres to be fully staffed by qualified, registered teachers. The Ministry of Education regulations require only 50% of caregivers to be qualified, registered teachers,<sup>12</sup> although many teacher-led centres have higher coverage. We express deep concern at the lack of quality and care in much of the current provision of ECCE especially when welfare reforms force parents on benefits to enrol their children into ECCE from the age of three (or themselves to attend an approved parenting programme) or face sanctions including losing half their benefit.<sup>13</sup>

The Government's policy promotes institutional provision of early child care and education.<sup>14</sup> Success is measured by the number of hours that children, including those under the age of 1 year, attend a licensed form of ECCE. Potentially, these children could spend a high proportion (on average, 20+ hours a week) of their alert and learning hours in the care of a Government-approved ECCE centre. CPAG argues that given concerns about quality, success cannot be judged on this basis.

In Part Two of the CPAG series: *Our children, our choice*, our focus is on ECCE. We look carefully at the quality of education and care provided under current policy. We investigate the cultural- and age-appropriateness of provision that is required to meet standards as expressed in current policies.

Children's healthy mental, emotional and physical development will benefit their current and future families and communities. We urge adoption of the following recommendations under cross-party agreements, so they will be applied, monitored, and evaluated in a reflective and ongoing long-term process. Then we would be more likely to ensure for all our children the rights we have already pledged to deliver.



Our children, our choice: priorities for policy. Part two:

## Early childhood care and education, and child poverty

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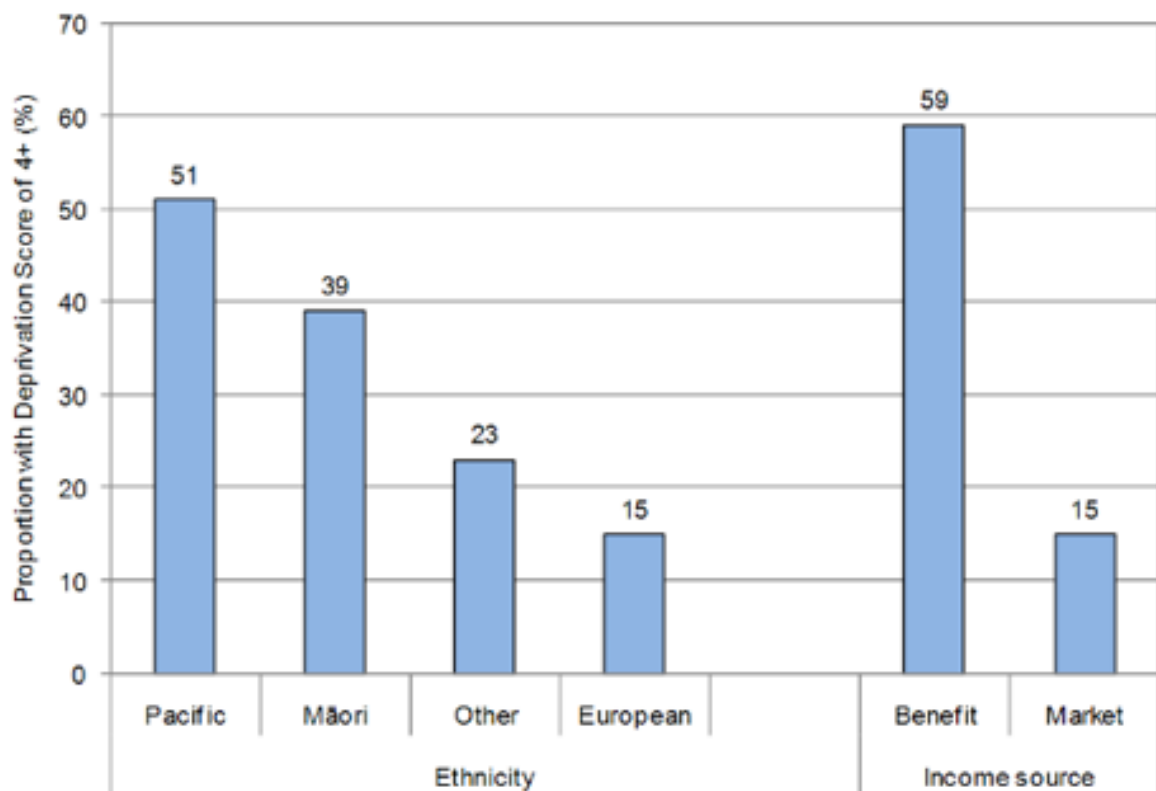


# Part two: Early childhood care and education, and child poverty

## Overview

Recent information from the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) reveals that the nature and extent of child poverty in Aotearoa New Zealand is worse than previously acknowledged.<sup>15 16</sup> The figure of 265,000 children below the 60% of median income after housing costs poverty line was revised to 285,000 after a mistake that counted the accommodation supplement twice was detected in early 2014. Not only are there 20,000 more children in poverty than we had been led to believe, but most of those 285,000 children are much further below the poverty line and have a greater depth of poverty than was understood. We now know that 205,000 children are actually below the very lowest poverty line of 50% of median household income. Independent measures of hardship such as those shown in Figure 2 reveal alarmingly high levels of hardship among children in Māori and Pacific groups and in families on benefits.

**Figure 2. Proportion of Children Aged 0–17 Years Experiencing Material Hardship by Ethnicity and Family Income Source, NZ Living Standards Survey 2008<sup>17</sup>**



The new evidence shows that 60% of all poor children are in families reliant on benefit income.<sup>18</sup> Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) has long argued for Government to ensure adequate income support for all families with young children, in order to reduce child poverty.<sup>19</sup>

As described by Shonkoff, Boyce & McEwan, the toxic stress experienced by young children living in conditions of extreme poverty “disrupts brain architecture [and] affects other organ systems ... thereby increasing the risk of stress-related disease and cognitive impairment well into the adult years”.<sup>20</sup>

CPAG has highlighted the importance of the ECCE sector in relation to child poverty, and drawn attention to the copious research identifying the benefits of high quality ECCE, especially for children from families who live in impoverished conditions.<sup>21</sup>

In 2012, for example, the Children's Commissioner's Expert Advisory Group on Solutions to Child Poverty recommended that the Government should "ensure that there are accessible, high-quality and free early childhood care and education (ECCE) places available for low-income families".<sup>22</sup> In 2013, the Government's Māori Affairs Select Committee stated that "all tamariki Māori are entitled to have the best possible start to their education, and high-quality, accessible early childhood education is an important part of such a start".<sup>23</sup>

There are wide-ranging, long-term benefits to children, families and the wider community/society from high quality ECCE:

*High-quality early childhood programs designed to produce positive effects on educational achievement and later workforce participation offer an important, unrecognized infrastructure for addressing the stress-related roots of social class disparities in health. Cost-benefit assessments of effective early childhood intervention for low-income children have documented significant financial returns to society through greater economic productivity, decreased welfare dependence, and lower rates of incarceration.<sup>24</sup>*

The Government's policy on the institutional provision of early child care and education implies that success can be measured by the number of children, including those under the age of 1 year, attending some licensed form of ECCE.<sup>25</sup> Licensed providers of ECCE, often limited liability and for-profit companies, have the largest share of ECCE enrolments with 62% (around 124,000) of all enrolments in 2013, Kindergartens have 17% (or 35,000), home-based services 9% (or 18,820), Playcentres 7% (or 13,568) and Nga Kōhanga Reo services 5% (or 9,179).<sup>26</sup>

The Government claims that children will be 'advantaged' by attending ECCE,<sup>27</sup> and endorses the policy with state subsidies. The Ministry of Education's 2013 figures show that Public expenditure on ECCE increased significantly between 2002 and 2012, rising (in 2012 dollars) by 190%, from \$538 million in 2002 to \$1,562 million in 2012. Public expenditure on ECCE per full-time equivalent child (FTE) increased from \$5,700 per FTE in 2002 to \$9,600 in 2012.<sup>28</sup>

Many children are spending most of their awake, alert, and learning hours in ECCE away from their 'principal carer': mother, father, grand-mother or -father, aunty, uncle, sibling or other family members. There is research evidence that there can be no simple or certain guarantee that this care is always in the best interests of the child. As the Centre for Attachment states:

*Because we live in a society that lacks sufficient paid parental leave policies, undervalues the work of parenting and lacks financial supports for parents who stay at home with their children, it can be very difficult to decide what is right, when to return to work, how many hours to work, and what your child really needs. Thankfully, several decades of research now exist in the field of early childhood care and its impact on babies, toddlers and young children. This data has shown that while there are many benefits of early childhood care and education, placing a child in non-maternal care can have a lasting negative impact on that child's life unless there is sensitive consideration of timing, quality and goodness of fit for the child.... The myriad studies on early childhood care*



*report that the more time a child spends in childcare, and the younger the child enters a care setting, the more at risk that child is for experiencing negative effects. Greater time in care is associated with more disobedience, more defiance, more aggressive behaviour and more destructive behaviour. These problems are ongoing and include difficulty in the transition to the school environment. Spending more than 30 hours a week in care is correlated with such problems.*<sup>29</sup>

Correlation is not causation. There is a great deal of discussion among politicians, educators and parents about the issue of increased participation in ECCE, particularly by children under 2 years.<sup>30</sup> Consideration of this issue must include how to ensure that parents are not under pressure to choose any particular arrangement for infant care. "Politicians may lead the way by giving parents more freedom of choice in who cares for their infant".<sup>31</sup>

There are many centre-based, parent-led ECCE services, (although these are diminishing in number and enrolments). They include Playcentres, Ngā Kōhanga Reo, and licensed playgroups. In many cases, such services can and do cater well for families who want to be engaged with their children during the hours of ECCE (especially for infants and toddlers, in the case of playgroups) and do not want or need extended hours of out-of-family ECCE provision. The issues of quality and safety are much more critical in situations where parents place their children in the care of others for extended and ongoing periods. Therefore, this article focuses on ECCE provision in teacher-led centre-based services and in services based in the homes of non-family carers, rather than on parent-led services.

The 2012 Early Childhood Education Sector Advisory Group Report, *Sector-wide quality*, defined quality ECCE as:

*evidenced where all children experience learning and teaching interactions which lead to those learning outcomes valued by whānau. The ERO has found that it is the combination of many aspects of practice that underpins the quality of education and care provided, rather than one factor on its own. These relate to both structures and processes and include governance and management, professional leadership, philosophy, vision, relationships and interactions, teaching and learning, assessment and planning, professional qualifications and support, and self review.*<sup>32</sup>

A key requirement for high quality ECCE in centre-based, teacher-led early childhood services is that the teachers be qualified,<sup>33</sup> with that qualification recognised for teacher registration purposes.

*There is consensus in the literature that staff need to be well educated and professional, with qualifications directly relevant to early childhood education, in order to deliver better outcomes and services that focus on the social, emotional, cognitive and physical development and learning of children attending formal early childhood services.*<sup>34</sup>

Ensuring that such services are fully staffed with qualified and registered ECCE teachers not only meets the structural requirement of having qualified teachers, but is also more likely to deliver on the process aspects of quality, by increasing the likelihood of children being engaged in responsive, attuned, culturally relevant interactions in the context of stimulating programming.<sup>35</sup> Other structural factors include ratios of teachers to children, small group sizes, and quality environments.<sup>36</sup>

ECCE caters for children in very diverse circumstances. Families vary widely in composition. They may include ties that are biological, adopted, blended and reconstituted (where the parents have left

a first union and started another), or extended, including grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins and beyond, in Māori 'whānau', and Pasifika 'fono'. Many Pākehā, Asian and refugee groups also feature multi-generational family units sharing a home.<sup>37</sup>

In the 2013 Census, one-parent families made up 17.8% of all families, couples with children made up 41.3% and 40.9% were couples without children<sup>38</sup> (see Table 1). Of families with children, 30% are sole parent families. Families with children increasingly include grandparents raising grandchildren. In 2009, research by the Grandparent Raising Grandchildren Trust estimated that there were more than 10,000 children in kin/whānau care, including infants and toddlers.<sup>39</sup>

**Table 1. Family type by census year<sup>40</sup>**

	2001		2006		2013	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Couple with child(ren)	407,793	42.1	447,894	42.0	469,290	41.3
Couple without child(ren)	376,905	39.0	425,973	39.9	465,306	40.9
One parent with child(ren)	182,919	18.9	193,635	18.1	201,804	17.8
Total	967,614	100	1,067,502	100	1,136,397	100

Families are also becoming increasingly diverse ethnically and culturally. The 2013 Census showed that 25% of our population were born overseas, compared with 22.9% in 2006 and 19.5% in 2001, and of the ten most common overseas birthplaces, about 50% are non-English speaking countries.<sup>41</sup> Pakeha are the largest ethnic group at 74.0% of the population followed by Māori, at 14.9%. Auckland is the most ethnically diverse region, with the proportion of Asian peoples (23.1%) being twice that for the general population, and more people (14.6%) identifying as Pacific peoples than elsewhere in the country.<sup>42</sup> Increasing diversity amongst the children in their care generates extra challenges for providers of ECCE services.

Throughout the following discussion we make recommendations to address the quality of provision in our ethnically diverse society, particularly provision for under-two-year-olds, and for Māori speaking and multilingual children. We also address the barriers to participation, especially for low income families. We discuss the increased reliance on the for-profit sector for provision of ECCE services; as well as issues for children in home-based care and children of beneficiaries. We position our concerns and recommendations alongside the Government's obligations to protect children's rights, which include the right to access to high quality, culturally and linguistically appropriate early childhood care and education. To ensure the rights we have already pledged to deliver for all our children, we urge adoption of these recommendations under cross-party agreements, so they will be applied, monitored, and evaluated in a reflective and ongoing long-term process.

# High quality, culturally responsive care in a super-diverse society

The demands on educators in Aotearoa, and particularly in Auckland, have been increased by what the Royal Society of New Zealand has termed a situation of 'super-diversity'.<sup>43</sup> New Zealand still lacks a national languages policy that would mandate expectations for our education system with regard to languages other than English. While responsive early childhood care and education is best achieved when the educator speaks the home language of the child(ren) in her/his care, this is not always possible in 'super-diverse' environments.

Responsive ECCE is even less likely to occur when children are being cared for and educated by unqualified caregivers who may lack the necessary range of knowledge, skills, and dispositions required to provide the learning environment stipulated under Te Whāriki, the internationally highly regarded New Zealand early childhood curriculum. A recent Education Review Office (ERO) national report highlighted the greater effectiveness of centre-based, teacher-led services with high levels of qualified teachers, such as the state kindergarten sector.<sup>44</sup>

The background to the issues of use of qualified teachers is set out in Meade et al's *Early Childhood Teachers' Work in Education and Care Centres*.<sup>45</sup> Briefly, in 2002 the government developed a 10 year strategy, *Pathways to the Future*, to increase the proportion of qualified teachers in ECCE centres to match those in kindergartens. Until early 2011, New Zealand had a higher funding category for teaching teams with 100% qualified teachers. Most ECCE centres had between 50% and 95% qualified, with 50% set as the minimum requirement. Under the plan 100% of regulated staff in every teacher-led service were required to be registered by 2012, matched by higher levels of subsidy to centres to cover the higher salary costs. There was some slippage in moving to this goal and in 2010 the National-led Government abandoned the 100% target. In 2011 the Government removed the special category for higher funding for centres with 100% qualified teachers. Those centres now receive only the lower level of subsidy for centres with 80% or more qualified teachers, and that level of subsidy has since been reduced.

The Government's Early Childhood Education Sector Advisory Group reported that in 2011 ECCE services in poorer areas were over-represented in the numbers of services which received ERO reviews indicating poor quality provision, meaning that children in these low socio-economic circumstances are more likely to receive poor quality ECCE experiences.<sup>46</sup>

Poor quality ECCE is potentially very damaging to infants and young children, meaning that children from disadvantaged circumstances stand to gain the most from high quality experiences. Services with lower proportions of qualified and registered teachers are more likely to have a high percentage of Māori and Pasifika children, and to be situated in high social deprivation areas. The impact is therefore greater on the most disadvantaged children. The lowest quality ECCE centres are likely to be found in areas where there is the least ECCE provision or choice.<sup>47</sup>

## RECOMMENDATION 1

**Require all staff in centre-based, teacher-led services who are counted in the teacher: child ratio to be qualified, registered teachers.**

# Valuing children's language, culture and identity

Despite the fact that Māori families consistently stipulate that they value highly ECCE provision that reflects their language and cultural values,<sup>48</sup> only 23% of settings in a recent ERO national review of ECCE services were assessed as valuing the language, culture and identity of Māori children.<sup>49</sup>

*A recent report from ERO suggests that a large number of services do not deliver education that is responsive to Māori identity, language, and culture. Two-thirds of Māori learners that participate in ECE participate in mainstream ECE services; this suggests that some 27,000 Māori learners may be experiencing variable quality of ECE. On the same basis, it is possible that many of the 8,200 Pasifika learners not enrolled in Pasifika immersion or bilingual services may be experiencing ECE that is not responsive to their identity, language, and culture, although there is less direct evidence for this.<sup>50</sup>*

A similar lack of linguistic and cultural synergy may also be a key factor in the lower participation for those for whom the dominant New Zealand English language and culture are additional to their home languages and cultures. There is a need for teacher education providers to ensure the adequacy of teacher preparation in this regard.

A 2013 ERO national report found that only 14% of ECCE services demonstrated “very responsive practices that focused on achieving success for Māori children”.<sup>51</sup> In the Government’s Māori Affairs Select Committee Report,<sup>52 53</sup> Recommendation 16 states: *Ensuring access for all whānau to well-designed pre-birth programmes, ante-natal care and education, and early childhood development programmes.*<sup>54</sup> In its response, the Government accepted this recommendation, and referred to its ECCE participation programme, but did not acknowledge barriers such as poverty and the lack of high quality, culturally appropriate services in many localities and communities.<sup>55</sup>

Similar concerns exist regarding the provision of quality for Pasifika communities in relation to home language retention. These have been highlighted by parents and grandparents and community elders.<sup>56</sup> Further, the Government’s Select Committee Inquiry into Pacific Languages in Early Childhood Education gathered compelling evidence for the value and benefits of stronger support for home languages for Pasifika children and many submitters expressed their concerns about quality of services and the effective support for Pasifika cultures and languages.<sup>57</sup>

The New Zealand Teachers Council (NZTC) currently has the role of setting requirements, approval and processes for the monitoring and review of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes and the *Graduating Teacher Standards: Aotearoa New Zealand (2007)*.<sup>58</sup> The NZTC is to be replaced by the Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand (EDUCANZ), and the scope of this body “will be broadened to invest in leadership as well as quality teaching across the early childhood education and schooling sectors”,<sup>59</sup> under a brief in the 2013 Budget to “lift the entry standards and quality of initial teacher education, including Māori medium programmes, the quality of practicum support for trainee teachers and coaching and mentoring for beginning teachers”.<sup>60</sup>

## RECOMMENDATION 2

**The Ministry of Education and ERO work together to ensure provision of high quality, culturally and linguistically responsive ECCE services, with particular emphasis on quality for infants and toddlers; EDUCANZ must ensure that students graduating from Initial Teacher Education programmes have the knowledge, competence and dispositions to implement and sustain high quality provision for all children.**

A recent submission by the New Zealand Kindergartens Association included recommendations that Government ensure that resources be made available to ECCE services to meet good practice indicators for bilingual/immersion programmes in early childhood education and throughout the education sector; the implementation of data gathering and goal setting in order to increase numbers of qualified ECCE teachers who are fluent in a Pacific language; and strengthening of content regarding teaching and learning for bilingual children and language acquisition for all teachers through pre-service teacher education and on-going professional learning provision.<sup>61</sup>

## RECOMMENDATION 3

**Policies be generated and resources made available to oversee the enhancement of te reo Māori and Pacific Islands communities' languages and cultures within the ECCE sector.**

Reliance on market-driven provision of ECCE services also fails to meet the needs of refugee families, who aspire to “access the services that will enable them to reach their goals for productive participation in life in New Zealand”.<sup>62</sup> Government funding of professional orientation and placement for teacher aides from refugee and Pacific Islands communities who speak the children's respective home-languages would assist this process.

The notion of ECCE services serving as community hubs, as raised by the Ministry's ECE Taskforce,<sup>63</sup> has the potential to meet the needs of refugee as well as other communities providing it is culturally responsive:

*Integrated multi-service early childhood education and care provision that encompasses children's education and offers integrated support for families has the potential to offer wider possibilities for learning and for enhancing the agency of children and families than do stand-alone education services.<sup>64</sup>*

## RECOMMENDATION 4

**Culturally attentive ECCE services be resourced to serve as community hubs, providing integrated responses to local needs.**

The Government's response to the Māori Affairs Select Committee Report<sup>65 66</sup> accepts Recommendation 26 which affirms that teacher education programmes play a key role in developing teacher capacity to deliver high quality, culturally appropriate services as guided by the New Zealand Teachers Council (NZTC) key framing documents:

- *Graduating Teacher Standards: Aotearoa New Zealand (2007)*
- *Registered Teacher Criteria (2009)*
- *Tātaiako: Cultural Competencies for Teachers of Māori Learners (2011)*<sup>67 68 69 70</sup>

However, it is ironic that this Government affirmation of aspirations articulated by the NZTC comes whilst it is simultaneously proposing the Education Amendment Bill No 2<sup>71</sup> that will replace the NZTC with the new body, EDUCANZ, members of which will be Government appointees, charged with changing the NZTC "Code of Ethics" to a new "Code of Conduct".

There is a need for this new Council to uphold the current NZTC guiding documents, including the following over-arching aspirations:

- The Treaty of Waitangi extends equal status and rights to Māori and Pakeha. This places a particular responsibility on all teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand to promote equitable learning outcomes;
- In an increasingly multi-cultural Aotearoa New Zealand, teachers need to be aware of and respect the languages, heritages and cultures of all akonga/learners; and
- In Aotearoa New Zealand, the Code of Ethics/Ngā Tikanga Matatika commits registered teachers to the highest standards of professional service in promoting the learning of those they teach.<sup>72 73</sup>

Current policy does not prioritise high quality provision in the burgeoning private ECCE centres, despite the Government-commissioned ECE Taskforce Report highlighting the research which demonstrates the educational benefits to children of attending high quality ECCE programmes.<sup>74</sup> Additional evidence is provided by a literature review commissioned by the Ministry of Education.<sup>75</sup> This highlights the extreme importance of high quality provision for infants and toddlers in ECCE settings, since the absence of "attuned responsive caregiving constrains the developing brain creating 'black holes'... in the architecture of the brain that can persist throughout a lifetime".<sup>76</sup>

Current regulations do not stipulate that there be a minimum number of qualified educators in infant and toddler sections of ECCE centres. Nor are the current minimum ratios of one educator to five babies adequate to ensure quality, engaged and responsive care.

Services are now able to have a maximum of 150 children enrolled (with a maximum of 75 under-2-year-olds), with no limits set for group size. These conditions were not amended even when in 2011 the ECE Taskforce report recommended regulating for a minimum of 80% registered staff in teacher-led, centre-based services, as well as strengthening quality measures for home-based services, education and care for children under two years of age, and reducing maximum group sizes.<sup>77</sup>

## **RECOMMENDATION 5**

**Increase the ratios of adults to children for infants and toddlers, and provide clear recommendations and guidance regarding appropriate group size.**

# Barriers to participation

ECCE is provided in a range of environments with variable costs. On 15 May 2014, the Finance Minister announced a funding increase of \$155.7 million for early childhood education. Nearly \$54 million is for increasing subsidy rates, “to help keep fees affordable for parents”. The remainder will be allocated over the next four years to help meet the forecast extra demand to be created by increased participation as the Government seeks to have 98% of children enrolled in ECCE by 2016.<sup>78</sup>

Despite the increase, subsidy rates will still not reach the levels that applied prior to the National Government’s funding cuts in 2011. Then, the top subsidy rate for 20 hours ECCE was \$12.73 per child per hour for kindergartens and childcare centres in the 100% fully qualified staff funding band, and \$11.78 for those in the 80-99% funding band. From July 2014, after the increase, the top rate will be just \$11.43 for childcare centres and \$11.72 for kindergartens; for under-2s, the top rate will be \$12.12 per child per hour in childcare, compared with \$13.35 in 2010. Rates for sessional services will continue to be significantly lower than those for all-day services.<sup>79</sup> The cost of high quality, appropriate ECCE will remain a barrier for many families.

ECCE is only ‘free’ to parents for 20 hours for 3 and 4 year olds. Typical charges faced by parents in Auckland may be around \$270 a week for a child under 2 for a full week and \$166 for a child 3 and over, but can be a lot higher. A 2011 survey of income, expenditure and fees of ECCE providers, shown in Table 2, showed estimates of fees charged, in addition to the Government subsidies and fund-raising, and excluding optional charges for discrete items and one-off activities.<sup>80</sup> Parental charges for ‘20 hours ECE’ include optional charges for care, not for discrete items and one-off activities, and nearly 40% of services levied additional charges.

*The distribution of fees varied between service types. Playcentres charges were less than \$1 an hour at 95% of services, while 72% of home-based services charged between \$5 and \$6 an hour. Education and care services and kindergartens had wider distributions, with 68% of education and care services charging between \$4 and \$7 an hour, and 76% of kindergartens’ charges between \$2 and \$4 an hour.<sup>81</sup>*

Table 2. Average parental charges per hour

Service Type	Under Two		Two and Over (excl 20 Hours ECE)		20 Hours ECE	
	Midpoint Estimate	95% Confidence Interval	Midpoint Estimate	Range	Midpoint Estimate	95% Confidence Interval
Education & Care	\$5.55	\$5.39 - \$5.70	\$5.26	\$5.14 - \$5.38	\$0.34	\$0.27 - \$0.41
Kindergartens	-	-	\$3.13	\$3.08 - \$3.19	\$0.13	\$0.12 - \$0.14
Home-based	\$5.83	\$5.68 - \$5.98	\$5.81	\$5.66 - \$5.96	\$0.18	\$0.12 - \$0.24
Playcentre	\$0.37	\$0.30 - \$0.44	\$0.44	\$0.37 - \$0.51	-	-
<b>Total (weighted)</b>	<b>\$4.86</b>	<b>\$4.67 - \$5.06</b>	<b>\$4.41</b>	<b>\$4.31 - \$4.51</b>	<b>\$0.26</b>	<b>\$0.23 - \$0.29</b>

Work and Income provides an income tested per hour subsidy to help low income parents. As can be seen from Table 3, for 2014, the subsidies reduce very rapidly as soon as income is earned over the threshold. For a one child family on a gross annual income of \$62,400, earning another gross \$10,400 a year means that all the subsidy disappears. Even without allowing for other imposts on that extra \$10,400 such as tax, this operates like an effective 100% tax. It is a confusing and scary picture for families with incomes around the threshold amounts.

**Table 3. Work and Income childcare subsidies, 2014<sup>83</sup>**

Number of children	Gross weekly income	Childcare Subsidy (per hour, per child)	Childcare Subsidy (per week, per child for 50 hours)
1	Less than \$1,200.00	\$3.98	\$199.00
	\$1,200.00 to \$1,299.99	\$2.78	\$139.00
	\$1,300.00 to \$1,399.99	\$1.54	\$77.00
	\$1,400.00 or more	nil	nil
2	Less than \$1,380.00	\$3.98	\$199.00
	\$1,380.00 to \$1,489.99	\$2.78	\$139.00
	\$1,490.00 to \$1,599.99	\$1.54	\$77.00
	\$1,600.00 or more	nil	nil
3 or more	Less than \$1,540.00	\$3.98	\$199.00
	\$1,540.00 to \$1,669.99	\$2.78	\$139.00
	\$1,670.00 to \$1,799.99	\$1.54	\$77.00
	\$1,800.00 or more	nil	nil

Families struggling with financial deprivation face overwhelming challenges in ensuring that their children gain access to high quality ECCE services. They may not have a vehicle, and may live some distance from public transport, which also entails costs. Many ECCE services charge additional fees beyond the 20 hours subsidy even if the family requires only 20 hours. There are bureaucratic hurdles to overcome including complex family income forms to fill in when applying to Work and Income for childcare subsidies.

Children require adequate nutrition in order to face a day of active engagement in an educational setting, and parents may be required to provide a lunchbox full of (costly) ‘healthy kai’ for their child to eat during the day. Other additional costs include clothing, sunhats, footwear, raincoats, and medical costs for older family members if their child brings home an illness picked up from other children at the ECCE setting. The illness of a parent or caregiver, particularly in winter, can mean that a child is unable to be transported to the ECCE, which may result in that child losing her/his place on the roll.

Additional problems confront low income families who are compelled to move frequently as they seek affordable rental accommodation. Places are lost where families cannot maintain continuity of residence near the ECCE service.



ECCE centres point to numerous problems regarding the administration of this programme, many of which add to the barriers faced by families. For example, for parents in education or training, Work and Income subsidies cease during term breaks. This creates either an impossible cost burden for the family to retain the place for that child and maintain attendance; or a dilemma for the service provider: do they keep the child's place and the necessary staff at their own cost, or do they open that space for another child who will generate the income for the centre to remain viable?

There is another set of problems for families and providers around accessing the support funding for children with special needs or with health problems.

## **RECOMMENDATION 6**

**Government acknowledge the hidden costs of attendance at ECCE and subsidise or fund low income families to enable timely, equitable access to quality ECCE services.**

### Recognising rights of beneficiaries and their children

It is now mandatory for beneficiaries to ensure that their 3-5 year-old children are enrolled in and regularly attend a licensed ECCE service or that they themselves participate in a MSD-approved early parenting programme.<sup>85</sup> If they fail to ensure their child's attendance, benefits can be reduced by up to 50%.<sup>86 87</sup> This compulsory ECCE attendance is not required of any children other than those of beneficiaries, and is imposed in a context in which the quality and relevance of the provision accessible to these children may be questionable, and may even be found wanting by Government agencies such as the ERO.

Such discrimination against beneficiary families flouts the research on bonding and intellectual and social development for children as discussed above. In this reprehensible, discriminatory situation, beneficiary families and their children receive messages that they are second-class citizens, and that as parents they are unqualified to determine the best form of care and support for their young children. Such discrimination may offend against our own human rights legislation, and there is no doubt that it contravenes Article 2 of the UNCROC to which New Zealand is a signatory:

*1. States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.*

*2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians, or family members.*

## **RECOMMENDATION 7**

**Government ends the discriminatory policy of enforcing compulsory ECCE participation for individual beneficiary families and children who are already struggling with multiple challenges, not least of which is poverty.**

### Reliance on for-profit sector for ECCE provision

Since the 1990s there has been a lack of Government oversight of the growth of the for-profit sector of early childhood care and education. This is despite the dramatic increase in the enrolments of children in private for-profit ECCE centres (excluding home-based centres), from 36,950 in 2000, to 83,349 in 2013.<sup>89</sup>

Historically the ECCE sector has been seen as non-compulsory, and therefore has not been viewed by Government as a core responsibility. More recently, to support the political preference to encourage women to engage in the workforce, it became economically useful to have places for young children available in ECCE services, although there have never been enough high quality, culturally responsive, affordable and accessible places available nationwide. In this context ECCE meets the needs of the economy, rather than meeting the needs of children for high quality, culturally responsive ECCE provision.

The 2007 Labour-led Government's introduction of '20 Hours Free ECE' (subsequently changed to be no longer fully 'free') was a huge boon to the private ECCE sector,<sup>90 91</sup> and the resultant mushrooming of for-profit centres led to Government concern about this expenditure. However, there was no mechanism to deliver equitable access to ECCE services in low socio-economic and rural areas, and for-profit services showed little interest in filling this gap. While some efforts are now being made to address this gap through targeted participation programmes, nevertheless: "The model of market-based provision and demand subsidies has clearly not worked for New Zealand's poorest and most vulnerable children".<sup>92</sup>

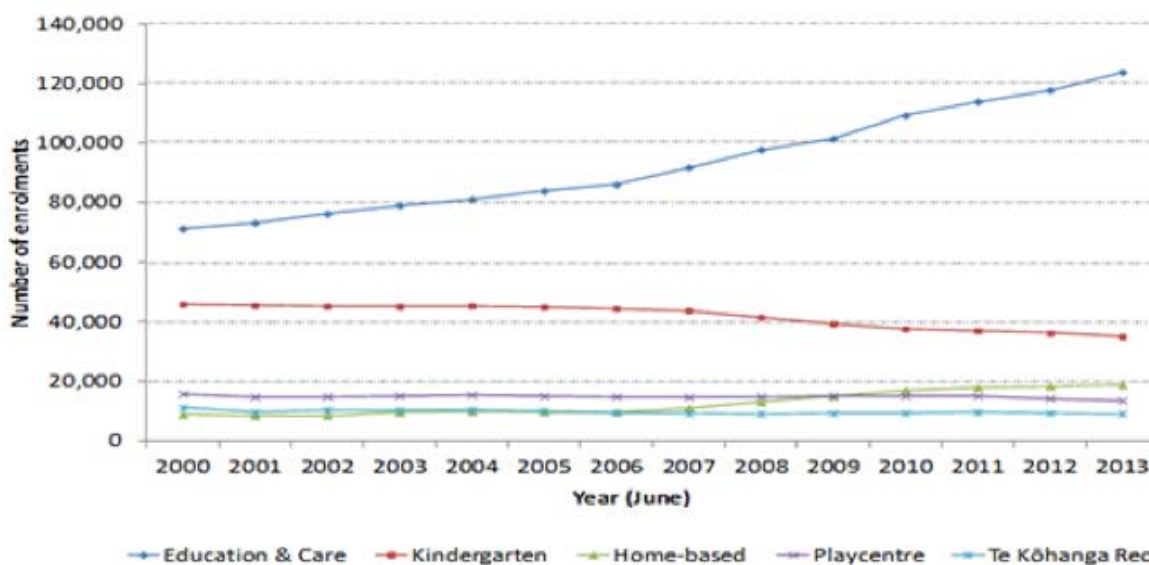
## **RECOMMENDATION 8**

**The Ministry of Education develop and implement a strategic plan to ensure equitable nationwide provision of high-quality, culturally responsive, inclusive ECCE programmes for all children.**

## Increased provision of home-based ECCE

Whilst private provision has grown significantly, enrolments in not-for profit services have fallen: enrolments fell in kindergartens (by 22%), Ngā kōhanga Reo (by 11%), and Playcentres (by 11%).<sup>93</sup> As well as increased private for-profit enrolments, Ministry of Education data also demonstrate a huge growth in private home-based childcare, more than doubling between 2000 and 2013 to almost 20,000 (see Figure 3).<sup>94</sup>

Figure 3. Changes in rates of ECCE attendance 2000 to 2013<sup>95</sup>



The current Government has set itself a range of “Better Public Services” targets, and recently proclaimed its success in achieving 98% participation in early childhood education.<sup>96 97</sup> Whilst on the surface this appears to be worthy of celebration, it is important to recognise that this push for higher participation is occurring in a context in which the Government has lowered the requirement for qualified teachers in any ECCE setting. Moreover, in home-based services, one qualified person may oversee, mostly from a distance, the care of up to 80 children in 20 or more different home-based environments.

Given the range of responsibilities of the educator, it is also of some concern that included in the 2009 amendments to the Education (Early Childhood Services) Regulations 2008, was an amendment lowering the age at which a person is counted as an adult from 20 to 17 years for the purposes of the requirements for working in both home-based services and centre-based services (see Schedule 2 of the ECE Regulations). Under UNCROC, a person under 18 years of age is defined as a child.<sup>98</sup>

In 2011, the Ministry of Education’s ECE Taskforce reported that:

*While home-based services have some strong quality characteristics, such as small group sizes and low ratios, they do not have a qualified, professional workforce, which we regard to be essential to good outcomes from early childhood education. Instead, up to twenty educators without high-level early childhood education teaching qualifications are supervised by a single qualified teacher in the role of the network’s coordinator.<sup>99</sup>*

Furthermore, the Taskforce was concerned that “One teacher can be responsible for educators in charge of 80 children in total. Despite this, home-based services are funded as teacher-led services in the existing funding system. This is unacceptable.”<sup>100</sup> The Taskforce described ERO concerns regarding home-based ECCE provision as “deeply troubling”.<sup>101</sup>

## **RECOMMENDATION 9**

**The Ministry of Education provide clear expectations for the extent and nature of supervision of home-based carers, and the Education Review Office be resourced to undertake careful monitoring of the quality of home-based ECCE provision.**

## **RECOMMENDATION 10**

**The Ministry of Education require all home-based educarers to be either qualified teachers, or to attend and complete a required set of professional learning opportunities for home-based provision, which could be offered as modules toward an NZQA certificate in home-based ECCE.**

## Conclusion

Currently, the New Zealand Government is failing in its obligations to protect children’s rights, which include the right to be able to access high quality, culturally appropriate education. While there has been a concerted focus on improving participation – and even of requiring participation by some beneficiary families – this has not been accompanied by an equal focus on ensuring that all services are of high quality. A recent article analysing UK and Australian ECCE policies could be applied equally here in that our Government’s market-oriented approach and preference for private provision is “in tension with their rhetorical commitment to social investment in children and ECCE. Consequently, Governments’ objectives about investing in high quality ECCE for all children have been overshadowed by the imperatives of providing opportunities for private investment.”<sup>102</sup>

It is of great concern to CPAG that low income children and families, made increasingly vulnerable by punitive and targeted social policies, may in addition suffer the harm of poor quality early childhood care and education. Given the huge growth in private providers of what is essentially a state responsibility, there must be accountability not only for Government funding but also for ensuring that services are responsive to families’ values and aspirations for their children. Regardless of the type of service, or the ownership – private, community or state – the Government has a responsibility to ensure that each and every child who participates in ECCE experiences a learning environment where they and their families feel that they belong and where their wellbeing is nurtured. If this approach is followed, the potential benefits of ECCE are more likely to be realised for children, their families, and our communities.

We urge adoption of these recommendations under cross-party agreements, to ensure that the children’s rights we have already committed to deliver will be applied, monitored, and evaluated in a reflective and ongoing long-term process. We know that age- appropriate participation in high quality ECCE benefits children, whereas poor quality services and over-provision do damage. We

also know that children who are already disadvantaged are the most likely to benefit from high quality ECCE provision, and at the same time are the most vulnerable to potential harm. It is essential therefore that Government policies to increase participation are accompanied by an equal focus on ensuring that all ECCE services are of high quality and are culturally responsive, putting the needs of children before the needs of the economy, and ensuring there are no barriers to participation by our poorest children and their families. Moreover, compulsory participation for the children of one group of parents should have no place in government policies.

## Full list of recommendations:

1. Require all staff in centre-based, teacher-led services who are counted in the teacher: child ratio to be qualified, registered teachers.
2. The Ministry of Education and ERO work together to ensure provision of high quality, culturally and linguistically responsive ECCE services, with particular emphasis on quality for infants and toddlers; EDUCANZ must ensure that students graduating from Initial Teacher Education programmes have the knowledge, competence and dispositions to implement and sustain high quality provision for all children.
3. Policies be generated and resources made available to oversee the enhancement of te reo Māori and Pacific Islands communities' languages and cultures within the ECCE sector.
4. Culturally attentive ECCE services be resourced to serve as community hubs, providing integrated responses to local needs.
5. Increase the ratios of adults to children for infants and toddlers, and provide clear recommendations and guidance regarding appropriate group size.
6. Government acknowledge the hidden costs of attendance at ECCE and subsidise or fund low income families to enable timely, equitable access to quality ECCE services.
7. Government ends the discriminatory policy of enforcing compulsory ECCE participation for individual beneficiary families and children who are already struggling with multiple challenges, not least of which is poverty.
8. The Ministry of Education develop and implement a strategic plan to ensure equitable nationwide provision of high-quality, culturally responsive, inclusive ECCE programmes for all children.
9. The Ministry of Education provide clear expectations for the extent and nature of supervision of home-based carers, and the Education Review Office be resourced to undertake careful monitoring of the quality of home-based ECCE provision.
10. The Ministry of Education require all home-based educarers to be either qualified teachers, or to attend and complete a required set of professional learning opportunities for home-based provision, which could be offered as modules toward an NZQA certificate in home-based ECCE.

# Audio-visual resources

Catriona MacLennan (2014) Child Poverty in Aotearoa Episode 4: the focus is on early childhood care and education and features interviews with Carol Smith (Te Rarawa no Ahipara, Te Whare Wananga o Wairaka), Lucy Koro (Fa'amasani Aoga Preschool/ Daycare), Linda Petrenko (Small Kauri Childcare Centre), and Meg Moss (MARC Early Learning Centre): [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nyTtJi-Pr\\_E](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nyTtJi-Pr_E).

NZEI Te Riu Roa (2014) Quality for infants and toddlers: what does quality look like in the care and education of children who are under two? [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xs9bd1RV\\_Fw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xs9bd1RV_Fw)

Humewood House Association (2013) First Five Years Fund, at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eis-CLs6ds8>

The Ounce (2011) Quality Preschool Teacher-Child Interaction, at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=82wIKsW8tfo&index=13&list=PLoYCO2fwBJJpPrly7mLNSWnOPoSdMk-R>

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