

5 February 2009

IM60/100/52/3

**Education Report: Advice on Ratio Improvements and Other
Quality options in Early Childhood Education.**

Executive Summary

[information deleted in order to maintain the current constitutional conventions protecting the confidentiality of advice tendered by ministers and officials]

Information is also included on an opportunity to reduce a ratio-related compliance burden by making a regulatory change to current counting methods.

Recommended Actions

It is recommended that the Minister of Education:

- a. **note** ratios on their own will support but not guarantee quality improvements for under-twos;
- b. **note** that ratio improvements need to be complemented by professional development (PD) and teaching and learning resources to ensure quality gains;

[information deleted in order to maintain the current constitutional conventions protecting the confidentiality of advice tendered by ministers and officials]

- f. **agree** that following your decision to rescind previous government ratio decisions, a Cabinet paper seeking this change be provided by 31 March 2009;

AT

AGREE / DISAGREE

[information deleted in order to maintain the current constitutional conventions protecting the confidentiality of advice tendered by ministers and officials]

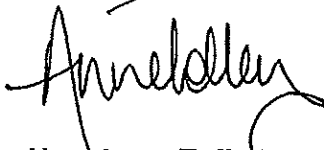
- h. **note** that there is an opportunity to reduce compliance burdens for services by making changes to the counting method for regulated ratios; and

[information deleted in order to maintain the current constitutional conventions protecting the confidentiality of advice tendered by ministers and officials]


Rawiri Brell

Deputy Secretary
Early Childhood and Regional Education

NOTED / APPROVED



Hon Anne Tolley
Minister of Education

12/2/09

Education Report: Advice on Ratio Improvements and other Quality options in Early Childhood Education.

Purpose of Report

1. This report provides information on quality in early childhood education (ECE) and options for implementing government's manifesto commitment to improve adult: child ratios for under-two year olds from 1:5 to 1:4.

Background

Impact on quality

2. Positive outcomes occur for all children across the socioeconomic range only if they attend high quality ECE. Larger gains are possible for children that come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Low-quality ECE is associated with poorer child outcomes, regardless of socioeconomic background. Returns on government investment in ECE can only be made through ensuring the quality of ECE.
3. Supporting quality in ECE involves supporting positive, sensitive and responsive interactions between staff and children. This might include an environment rich in resources and opportunities to extend children's development of language, thinking and interactions.
4. The government's manifesto commitment on improving ratios for under-tuos aims to address a problem with the quality of ECE for children under-two. A ministry funded study that was considering the impact of the ECE strategic plan found that services with more than 20 percent of under-tuos were rated lower on overall quality ratings.¹ International studies have shown that an early starting age into low quality ECE can be associated with higher levels of anti-social behaviour.²

¹Mitchell L and Hodgen E (2008) *Locality-based evaluation of Pathways to the Future – Ngā Huarahi Arataki – Stage 1 report*. Wellington: Ministry of Education p 88

²Mitchell L, Wylie C and Carr M [NZCER] (2008) *Outcomes of Early Childhood Education: Literature Review*. Wellington: Ministry of Education. p 3

Comment

[information deleted in order to maintain the current constitutional conventions protecting the confidentiality of advice tendered by ministers and officials]

Change to Counting Method

19. A reduction in compliance costs associated with current ratio requirements could be achieved through a change to the method used for counting adult to child ratios. Currently once a child turns two, they are counted in the two and over ratio. If a service is working to the maximum of regulated ratios, this could mean that they are required to employ another teacher because of the transition of just one student from the under-two age group to the two and over group.
20. The ministry recommends you agree to more flexible counting method for ratios. That is, to allow for children in the older age band to count towards children in the younger age band if there are correspondingly fewer children in the younger age band. This will overcome the current issue that some centres experience in having to employ an additional staff member when a child turns two while the total number of children in their service remains the same.

Table 2: Counting Methods

	Under-two years	Two years and over	Total
No of children	5	20	25
No of teachers required	1	2	3
Current counting method			
No of children after child turns two	4	21	25
No of teachers required	1	3	4
Suggested counting method			
No of children after child turns two	4	21	25
No of teachers required	1	2	3

21. As Table 2 reflects, this change could reduce the number of teachers required by services and is in line with government's manifesto commitment to reduce unnecessary compliance burdens for the ECE sector. This increased flexibility would lead to lower administration and employment costs and reduce the pressure on teacher supply. This counting method was discussed as part of earlier consultations with the ECE sector about ratio improvements and it is possible to implement this as part of the amended 2008 regulations.

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