

In Confidence

Office of the Minister of Education

Chair, Cabinet Social Wellbeing Committee

Scope and process for the development of a Ten Year Strategic Plan for Early Learning

Proposal

- 1 This paper seeks Cabinet's agreement to develop a 10 Year Strategic Plan for Early Learning (Early Learning Strategic Plan), as well as the scope and process for developing this plan.

Executive Summary

- 2 Developing an Early Learning Strategic Plan is a key priority in my Education Portfolio work programme. This plan will articulate a shared vision for the future direction of the early learning sector with an aim to ensuring all children – regardless of their background, learning needs, or disability – receive early learning that enables them to learn and thrive in all aspects of their life. The plan will take a stepped approach to implementing shared priorities, with the early steps laying the foundations for later action.
- 3 I intend to work with parents, teachers, stakeholders and the wider community to develop a new Early Learning Strategic Plan. I consider it timely to develop this plan as:
 - 3.1 I am not confident all children are receiving quality early learning. Evidence suggests the quality of provision is variable.
 - 3.2 The previous strategic plan, which commenced in 2002, drove positive change by taking a systemic and stepped approach to strengthening the early learning sector. However, it was effectively discontinued by the previous Government.
 - 3.3 Significant changes in the early learning sector and New Zealand society have taken place since 2002. There is also a growing evidence base that shows the importance of early learning.
- 4 The Early Learning Strategic Plan will consider whether current policy settings are delivering the best outcomes for our children – this includes policies on funding, regulation and support, and the curriculum. It will focus on three key themes: raising the quality of early learning; improving educational equity; and the role of parental choice. The plan will also recognise, and seek to support, the role of early learning in facilitating labour market participation, particularly for women.
- 5 To inform the development of the Early Learning Strategic Plan, I intend to establish an independent Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) with five members from diverse backgrounds and with relevant expertise. The MAG will be supported by the Ministry of Education and a Reference Group made up of sector representatives. The MAG will take into account my priorities in the education portfolio and positions in relation to early learning, along with the efficiency and effectiveness of the early learning sector.

- 6 Where possible, I will coordinate stakeholder engagement. The plan will reflect the views and aspirations of Māori and Pasifika communities gathered through the refresh of Ka Hikitia and the Pasifika Education Plan. It will also be informed by the Education Summits process. I will also align the Early Learning Strategic Plan with other work streams in the Education Portfolio and across Government. This includes the Government's commitment to reduce child poverty.
- 7 In September 2018, with Cabinet approval, I will release a draft Early Learning Strategic Plan for public consultation. I will then seek Cabinet's approval for the final plan in December 2018.

Background

- 8 In the paper *Education Portfolio Work Programme* considered by Cabinet on 19 February 2018, I outlined my proposed work programme and objectives for the education system for the next three years. My focus is on championing a high-quality public education system for all New Zealanders and using the Education Summits as a vehicle to promote shared ownership of this vision.
- 9 My key objectives for the education system are:
- 9.1 *Learners at the Centre*: a greater focus on personalised learning and a system that celebrates and is responsive to diversity;
 - 9.2 *Barrier Free Access*: removing barriers to participation and ensuring all learners have the same opportunities regardless of their background;
 - 9.3 *Quality Teaching*: championing quality teaching and the importance of a respected and supported teaching profession;
 - 9.4 *Quality Public Education*: investing in and backing our world class, public education system for all students and children;
 - 9.5 *21st Century Learning*: focusing on learning that is relevant to the lives that New Zealanders live today and helps students and children thrive in all aspects of their life.
- 10 A key component of the work programme in the Education Portfolio is the development of an Early Learning Strategic Plan. Quality early learning plays a critical role in providing children with a strong foundation for future learning and positive life outcomes. However, I am not convinced current policy settings in the early learning sector are supporting quality educational outcomes for all children.
- 11 To this end, in the paper *Education Portfolio Work Programme*, I agreed to report back to Cabinet in March 2018 on the terms of reference for the Early Learning Strategic Plan and the membership of a Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG), which will assist me to develop this plan.

The rationale for developing an Early Learning Strategic Plan

- 12 I propose to work with parents, teachers, communities and wider stakeholders, including kōhanga reo whānau, and other kaupapa Māori early learning providers, to update *Ngā*

Huarahi Arataki – Pathways to the Future, the ten year strategic plan for early childhood education (ECE) that commenced in 2002.

13 *Pathways to the Future* outlined a high-level shared vision for the future of the early learning sector. It had three overarching goals:

13.1 To promote participation in good quality early learning;

13.2 To improve the quality of early learning; and

13.3 To enhance collaborative relationships between early learning services, parents, schools, and health and social services.

14 *Pathways to the Future* created a shared vision for the future direction of the early learning sector. It successfully drove changes to achieve this vision. This included increasing the number of qualified teachers in teacher-led centre-based services and increasing participation rates in early learning, particularly for Māori and Pasifika children.

15 However, *Pathways to the Future* was effectively discontinued by the previous Government in 2009. There is a strong case for re-establishing a strategic plan based on its role in setting a systematic and stepped approach to developing and strengthening the early learning sector. Having a strategic plan will ensure that the policy settings in early learning are fit-for-purpose and deliver the best outcomes for our children and tamariki and their families and whānau.

16 *Pathways to the Future* should be updated to take account of changes that have occurred since 2002 in the early learning sector and New Zealand society. There has been rapid expansion of early learning services, in particular some forms of provision, such as home based ECE. There is also a growing evidence base that shows the importance of early learning.

17 The previous strategic plan process began with the formation of an advisory group to assist with the development of the strategy. With Cabinet Agreement, I propose to establish a similar group. The terms of reference for the Early Learning Strategic Plan and membership of the MAG are outlined below. This group will be supported by a larger Reference Group, which includes members from the Early Childhood Advisory Committee and the ECE Research Policy Forum.

18 The MAG, Reference Group and Ministry of Education will all be able to provide me with advice to inform the development of the Early Learning Strategic Plan.

Purpose and scope of the Early Learning Strategic Plan

19 The purpose of the Strategic Plan is to provide a shared vision and road map for the early learning sector. This would give all children genuine opportunities for high quality early learning and development that supports their identity, language and culture and enables them to learn and thrive.

20 As stated in *Pathways to the Future*, “long-lasting improvement is most readily achieved through a deliberate journey.” The new Early Learning Strategic Plan will take a stepped approach to implementing shared priorities, with the early steps laying the foundations for later action. This will ensure any tension between different goals is managed and the building blocks to success are put in place in a considered way.

21 The terms of reference for the Early Learning Strategic Plan detail the proposed scope, process and objectives for the development of the Early Learning Strategic Plan. The early learning sector includes kindergartens, nga kōhanga reo, playcentres, home-based ECE services, education and care services, hospital-based services, and certificated services such as playgroups and ngā puna kōhungahunga. The main content of the terms of reference are outlined below.

22 The development of the Strategic Plan will be broad based. It will explore any matter relating to the early learning sector, such as policies around funding, regulation and support and the curriculum. It will focus on three key themes:

22.1 *Raising quality:* international research shows that the quality of early learning has a significant impact on the benefits children gain from participation. Low quality provision can be detrimental to children's learning and general wellbeing. Available evidence suggests that the quality of early learning in New Zealand is variable. However, we currently lack an agreed clear definition of quality in early learning, or a means to measure it.

The Early Learning Strategic Plan will explore how quality is best measured in early learning, and the most effective and efficient way we and the sector can work together to ensure the quality of early learning provision is consistently high.

22.2 *Improving equity:* children from disadvantaged backgrounds are somewhat more likely to attend lower quality early learning services and participate in early learning for shorter periods of time before school. These children often start school behind their peers and this achievement gap persists over-time.

Evidence also shows that our education system is not delivering for Māori and Pasifika children and children with disabilities or learning support needs. These children have a much higher risk of poor educational outcomes.

The Early Learning Strategic Plan will explore how we can work with the sector to improve educational equity and ensure early learning is responsive to the diverse needs of all children. All children should start school with the broad capabilities they need to learn and thrive, including language and social skills.

22.3 *The role of choice:* early learning provision has played a crucial role in enabling labour market participation, particularly for women. However, there has been rapid growth in the number of early learning services, particularly private services, which have grown from 28% of all services in 2002, to 46% in 2016. I therefore consider it timely to assess whether current policy settings remain fit-for-purpose.

The Early Learning Strategic Plan will explore whether Government should play a more active role in the early learning market to match the supply and demand of early learning provision, and limit any potentially detrimental effects of competition. In doing so, it will also aim to support early learning services to continue to be responsive to parents' labour market aspirations in a modern and rapidly changing working environment.

The Strategic Plan will take into account my key objectives for the education system and Government's wider work programme

My objectives for the education system

- 23 When providing me advice, the MAG should have regard to Government's objectives for the education system and positions in relation to early learning:
- 23.1 **Learners at the centre** – actively supporting the establishment of new public early learning services in areas of low-provision and supporting and lifting the quality of services that predominantly enrol Māori and Pasifika children, and children from disadvantaged backgrounds;
 - 23.2 **Barrier-free access** – putting the “free” back into the policy of 20 Hours ECE for all three and four-years-olds, and those five-year-olds who aren't yet in school, and addressing other non-financial barriers;
 - 23.3 **Quality teaching** – aiming to achieve 100% qualified teachers in all centre-based teacher-led early learning services and to improve group size and teacher:child ratios for infants and toddlers;
 - 23.4 **Quality Inclusive public education** – working to ensure that community-based early childhood education services are well supported;
 - 23.5 **21st century learning** – ensuring teaching practice and learning environments provide children with the right skills and dispositions to thrive in all aspects of their life.

Alignment with the Education Portfolio and Government's wider work programme

- 24 Early learning is significant for children's development and wellbeing and to parents' labour market participation. I therefore recognise the need to align the Early Learning Strategic Plan with other work streams in the Education Portfolio and across Government more broadly.
- 25 I intend to develop the Early Learning Strategic Plan alongside undertaking a Review of Home-based ECE. Home-based ECE has grown significantly in recent years, but little is known about the quality of education and care provided by home-based services. I therefore consider it important to start work on the Review of Home-based ECE now.
- 26 I will ensure Cabinet consider the policy and financial implications of the Review of Home-based ECE and the Early Learning Strategic Plan at the same time. The policy options considered in the home-based review will take into account the direction of travel set by the Early Learning Strategic Plan.
- 27 I will also ensure the Early Learning Strategic Plan takes into account the other key components of my education portfolio work programme, in particular:
- 27.1 the development of National Education and Learning Priorities
 - 27.2 an action plan for learning support
 - 27.3 developing a future-focused Education Workforce Strategy

27.4 the review of Tomorrow's Schools

- 28 Early learning contributes to child and whānau wellbeing and development by recognising and valuing cultural identity, particularly te reo Māori and te ao Māori and Pasifika culture and language. Ka Hikitia and the Pasifika Education Plan are being refreshed at the same time as the development of the Early Learning Strategic Plan. The Early Learning Strategic Plan will take into account the views and aspirations of Māori and Pasifika communities gathered through the refresh of Ka Hikitia and the Pasifika Education Plan.
- 29 High-quality early learning is particularly beneficial for children from low socio-economic backgrounds and those who face persistent adversity, poverty and hardship. Early learning services not only provide education and care, but often connect families and whānau with broader social and community services. In developing the Early Learning Strategic Plan, I will take into account:
- 29.1 work to overhaul of the welfare system in 2018, which includes the Childcare Subsidy administrated by the Ministry of Social Development, and
 - 29.2 Government's broader commitment to child poverty reduction.

Ministerial Advisory Group and Reference Group

- 30 I intend to establish a MAG with five members from diverse backgrounds and with relevant expertise. This group will provide me and the Ministry of Education support and guidance on the development and implementation of the Early Learning Strategic Plan.
- 31 The MAG's advice to me will be guided by the attached terms of reference (see Appendix 1). The Early Childhood Advisory Committee (ECAC) has been briefed on the draft terms of reference.
- 32 The MAG will be supported by the Ministry of Education and a Strategic Plan Reference Group. The Reference Group will include members from the Early Childhood Advisory Committee (ECAC) and the ECE Research Policy Forum.
- 33 The Reference Group and the MAG will be independent from Government and are free to provide me with their own advice and recommendations. Their recommendations will not be binding.

Appointments to the Ministerial Advisory Group

- 34 I seek Cabinet agreement to:
- 34.1 establish a MAG with five members for an initial term of one year commencing on 1 April 2018 and expiring on 1 April 2019;
 - 34.2 appoint Prof Carmen Dalli as Chair of the MAG;
 - 34.3 appoint Prof Meihana Durie, Dr Alex Gunn, Prof Stuart McNaughton and Dr Tanya Wendt Samu to the MAG.
- 35 Background information on the members of the MAG is provided in the below table:

Proposed Chairperson

Name	Summary
<p>Prof Professor Carmen Dalli</p> <p>School of Education, Victoria University of Wellington</p>	<p>Carmen has a BA (Hons) from the University of Malta, a MEd from the University of Bristol and a PhD from Victoria University of Wellington. Carmen is Honorary Consul for Malta in Wellington.</p> <p>Her research spans early childhood policy studies, professionalism in the early years, and under-three year olds in early childhood settings. She has a strong interest in children's transitions from home to their first early childhood setting and the nature of learning in the first years.</p> <p>Carmen was recently the principal investigator for the Quality early childhood education for under-two-year-olds report produced for the Minister of Education. Her research in early learning policy and practice has been widely published in New Zealand and internationally.</p>

Proposed membership

Name	Summary
<p>Prof Meihana Durie</p> <p>Māori Studies unit, Te Pūtahi-ā-Toi (School of Māori Art, Knowledge and Education), Massey University.</p>	<p>Meihana is the head of Massey University's Māori Studies unit. He is a current recipient of the Health Research Council of New Zealand Hohua Tutengaehe Postdoctoral Fellowship and received the Sir Peter Snell Doctoral Scholarship in Public Health and Exercise Science in 2008.</p> <p>He helped establish Ngā Purapura, a development committed to the empowerment of whānau through education in health, exercise, sport and the growth and creation of new Māori bodies of knowledge.</p>
<p>Dr Alex Gunn</p> <p>Associate Dean, Teacher Education University of Otago</p>	<p>Alex has taught in urban and rural not-for-profit and community-based education and care settings for children aged between birth and school-age.</p> <p>She has worked in general education, initial teacher education and post-graduate education studies at the University of Canterbury and the University of Otago.</p> <p>Alex's research interests include early childhood education, inclusive education and social justice, and educational assessment and teacher education.</p>

<p>Prof Stuart McNaughton,</p> <p>Chief Science Advisor, Ministry of Education</p> <p>Professor of Education and Director of the Woolf Fisher Research Centre at the University of Auckland</p>	<p>Stuart research areas are literacy and language development, the design of effective education for culturally and linguistically diverse populations, and cultural processes in development. He has published extensively of these topics and was awarded the Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to education in New Zealand.</p> <p>As a Director of the Woolf Fisher Research Centre, Stuart leads a research team in studies of effective educational interventions for schooling success with a focus on Māori and Pasifika children. He is a member of the Literacy Research Panel of the International Literacy Association and in 2014 was inducted into the Reading Hall of Fame.</p>
<p>Dr Tanya Wendt Samu</p> <p>Senior Lecturer, Pasifika education University of Auckland</p>	<p>Tanya has over twenty years' experience in under-graduate and graduate teaching, including course development and coordination.</p> <p>Tanya has experience in the tertiary sector focused on teacher education and collaborative research projects in Pasifika education – beginning with the former School of Education of the University of Auckland (1996-2000; 2002-2003), and then with the former Auckland College of Education (2004).</p> <p>Tanya has contributed to international curriculum development and teacher capacity building education projects in Samoa, Tonga, Kyrgyzstan and Nauru.</p>

Representativeness of appointments

- 36 I am satisfied that the appointment of the proposed chair and members will provide for a well-balanced Ministerial Advisory Group in terms of gender, age, ethnicity and geographic representation, and an appropriate mix of skills and experience.

Remuneration

- 37 The Strategic Plan Ministerial Advisory Group is classified as a Group 4, Level 2 committee under the Cabinet Fees Framework. The fees paid are \$680 and \$480 per day for the chair and members respectively. This is consistent with the Fees Framework.

Appointment process and consultation

- 38 I can confirm that an appropriate process has been followed in selecting the members of the MAG, in terms of the State Services Commission appointment guidelines. In summary, that process comprised identifying a list of appropriate candidates, shortlisting based on personal expertise and appropriate representation, and reviewing the candidates' CVs.
- 39 Probity checks are currently underway for all proposed appointees, and membership is conditional on no adverse findings.

Conflicts of interest

- 40 Information concerning conflicts of interest is still outstanding due to time constraints. The appointment will not be finalised before appropriate enquiries concerning conflicts of interest have been carried out in accordance with the State Services Commission appointment guidelines. I will report to Cabinet on the outcome of these enquiries should any issues arise.

Timeline to develop the Strategic Plan

- 41 From April 2018, the Ministry and the MAG, in consultation with stakeholders, will identify a list of focusing questions to guide wider public engagement that will occur after the Education Summits.
- 42 In September 2018, with Cabinet approval, I will release a draft Early Learning Strategic Plan for public consultation. This draft will be informed by advice provided by the MAG and will also be tested with the Reference Group before public consultation.
- 43 Public consultation on the draft Early Learning Strategic Plan will involve a number of regional hui across the country and include parents, families and whānau, teachers and other members of the early learning sector.
- 44 In November 2018, the Ministry will produce a consultation report that summarises feedback from the consultation process. This report will inform the final Strategic Plan. The Ministry will consult with the MAG and Reference Group on the final Strategic Plan in November, before seeking Cabinet approval in December 2018.

Consultation

- 45 The Treasury, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, Oranga Tamariki, Ministry for Women, Te Puni Kōkiri, Ministry for Pacific Peoples, New Zealand Qualifications Authority and Education Review Office have been consulted on this paper.

Financial Implications

- 46 Government spends approximately \$1.8 billion per year on early learning subsidies through the Ministry of Education. Changes to the funding and regulatory arrangements for early learning could have significant fiscal implications. When considering changes to the early learning system, I will consider both the efficiency and effectiveness of any changes and seek Cabinet approval before any changes are introduced.
- 47 When providing advice, I have asked the MAG to have regard to my objectives for the Education Portfolio and positions in relation to early learning. If introduced, my positions

in relation to early learning would have significant financial implications. This specifically relates to:

- 47.1 putting the “free” back into 20 Hours ECE;
- 47.2 aiming to achieve 100% qualified teachers in all teacher-led centre-based services;
- 47.3 improving group sizes for infants and toddlers;
- 47.4 improving teacher: child ratios for infants and toddlers.

s 9(2)(f)(iv) OIA

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The financial implications of the other policies are unclear, as they are dependent on the nature of the changes introduced.

49 In September 2018, I will brief Cabinet on the draft Early Learning Strategic Plan and any possible financial implications prior to releasing it for public consultation.

Publicity

50 A press statement will be issued once the MAG appointments and terms of reference have been approved and the chair and members have been notified.

Legislative Implications and Regulatory Impact Analysis

51 This paper does not give rise to any legislative implications.

Gender Implications

52 Early learning provision plays a crucial role in enabling women to participate in the labour market. I will take this into account in developing the Strategic Plan and ensure labour market implications are clearly identified. A key theme of the Strategic Plan is enabling parental choice, which needs to be balanced against ensuring equity and raising the quality of education and care.

53 The early learning workforce is predominately female. Any change to policy settings relating to this workforce will have a greater effect on women. In developing the Early Learning Strategic Plan, I will consider the gender implications of any proposed policy changes.

54 Easily accessible, quality early learning helps improve outcomes for teen parents, who face particular difficulty in either participating in the labour market or pursuing their own education. Young mothers supported by benefits are at very high risk of poor outcomes in adulthood. I will consider this when developing the Early Learning Strategic Plan.

Disability and human rights implications

55 Consistent with Government’s education work programme, the development of the Early Learning Strategic Plan will explore how Government and the sector can work together to ensure children with additional learning needs, disabilities, or particular language and cultural requirements, are well supported in the early learning sector.

Treaty of Waitangi implications

56 It is critical that the development process and content of the Early Learning Strategic Plan is consistent with Treaty principles of partnership, participation and protection. The early learning curriculum document, Te Whāriki, is a bicultural framework that embodies the Treaty principles. Te Whāriki and its commitment to bicultural outcomes are embedded within the terms of reference for the Strategic Plan.

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Recommendation

60 The Minister of Education recommends that the Committee:

Rationale for developing a new Early Learning Strategic Plan

- 1 **note** a key component of my work programme in the education portfolio is developing an Early Learning Strategic Plan;
- 2 **note** *Ngā Huarahi Arataki – Pathways to the Future*, the ten year strategic plan for Early Childhood Education 2002-2012:
 - 2.1 drove significant improvements in the early learning sector, which included increasing the number of qualified teachers and the level of participation in early learning;
 - 2.2 was effectively discontinued by the previous Government;
- 3 **note** I consider it timely to update *Pathways to the Future* and develop a new Early Learning Strategic Plan as:
 - 3.1 I am not convinced current policy settings in the early learning sector provide quality educational outcomes of all children;
 - 3.2 changes to the early learning sector and New Zealand society since 2002 provide a strong case for assessing whether the policy settings in early learning are fit for purpose;

4 **agree** for me to work with parents, teachers, communities and stakeholders, including kōhanga reo whānau and other kaupapa Māori early learning providers, to update *Pathways to the Future*;

Ministerial Advisory Group for the Early Learning Strategic Plan

5 **note** I intend to establish an independent Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) to provide me with advice on the content of the Early Learning Strategic Plan;

6 **note** I intend to establish a Reference Group that includes the Early Childhood Advisory Committee and ECE Research Policy Forum to support and advise the MAG, me and the Ministry of Education

7 **agree** to appoint Professor Carmen Dalli as Chair of the MAG;

8 **agree** to appoint the following members to the MAG:

8.1 Prof Meihana Durie;

8.2 Dr Alex Gunn;

8.3 Prof Stuart McNaughton;

8.4 Prof Tanya Wendt Samu

9 **note** the MAG will commence on 1 April 2018 and end on 1 April 2019;

10 **note** when providing me advice, the MAG will have regard to my objectives for the education system and positions in relation to early learning, which are:

10.1 putting the “free” back into 20 Hours ECE;

10.2 achieving 100% qualified teachers;

10.3 improving group sizes and teacher:child ratios for infants and toddlers;

11 **note** these positions have significant financial implications;

Scope of the Early Learning Strategic Plan

12 **note** the Early learning Strategic Plan will explore any matter relating to the early learning sector, including policies around funding, regulation and support, and the curriculum;

13 **note** the Early Learning Strategic Plan will address three key themes;

13.1 raising quality

13.2 improving equity

13.3 choice

14 **note** in developing the Early Learning Strategic Plan, I will be cognisant of the important role early learning plays in supporting labour market participation, particularly for women;

- 15 **agree** to the scope of the Early Learning Strategic Plan as outlined about and in the appended Terms of Reference;
- 16 **agree** that my office and the Ministry of Education issue a press release on the scope and process to develop Early Learning Strategy Plan and publically release the Terms of Reference for the Early Learning Strategic Plan and membership of the MAG.

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Chris Hipkins

Minister for Education

Proactively released

Hon Chris Hipkins

Minister of Education



TERMS OF REFERENCE:

Development of a 10 year Strategic Plan for Early Learning

Hon Chris Hipkins – Minister of Education – has asked the Ministry of Education to work with parents, teachers, stakeholders, including kōhanga reo whānau and other kaupapa Māori early learning providers, and the wider community to develop a ten-year strategic plan for early learning (Early Learning Strategic Plan). This will build on Ngā Huarahi Arataki – *Pathways to the Future 2002-2012, a 10 Year Strategic Plan for ECE (Pathways to the Future)*.

These Terms of Reference explain:

- the scope and guiding principles underpinning the development of the Early Learning Strategic Plan
- the development process, including how the Ministry of Education will work with the sector to co-construct a new Strategic Plan
- how people can participate in the development process.

The early learning sector comprises licensed services (kindergartens, nga kōhanga reo, playcentres, home-based ECE services, education and care services, and hospital-based services) and certificated services (playgroups, ngā puna kōhungahunga, and Pacific Island playgroups).

Context

In 2002, the Ministry of Education launched *Pathways to the Future*, which outlined a high-level shared vision for the future of the early learning sector¹. This was supported by subsequent actions, such as a review of funding and regulations in the early learning sector.

Pathways to the Future was effectively discontinued by the previous Government in 2009. There is a strong case for once again having a strategic plan to set out a systematic and stepped approach to continuing to develop and strengthen the early learning sector, to meet the needs of children and their families and whānau.

In doing so, the approach taken in *Pathways to the Future* will need to be updated to take account of changes that have occurred since 2002 within the early learning sector, and New Zealand society, and the growing evidence base which shows the importance of early learning.

There has been a rapid expansion of early learning services, in particular some forms of provision, such as home based education and care. Given this growth, it is timely to consider whether Government should play a more active role in the early learning market to match the supply and demand of early learning provision, and limit any potentially detrimental effects of competition. This

¹ Historically, and in statute, this sector has been referred to as 'early childhood education. However, ngā kōhanga reo identify as being whanau development rather than early childhood education. Therefore the term early learning is now used, to be inclusive of both early childhood education services and ngā kōhanga reo.

includes exploring whether our approach to network planning is ensuring access to high quality learning opportunities for all children.

Early learning provision has played a crucial role in supporting labour market participation, particularly for women. The development of the Early Learning Strategic Plan will also explore how Government and the early learning sector can work together to support parents' employment aspirations in the context of the 21st century work environment.

The early learning curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, expresses the vision that all children grow up in New Zealand as competent and confident learners, strong in their identity, language and culture. It emphasises our bicultural foundation, our multicultural present and the shared future we are creating. It is expected that the bicultural vision of *Te Whāriki* will inform the development of the Early Learning Strategic Plan.

The Government's Education Portfolio work programme

The Government's work programme for the Education Portfolio outlines a vision for a "high quality public education system that provides all New Zealanders with learning opportunities so that they can discover and develop their full potential throughout their lives, engage fully in society, and lead rewarding and fulfilling lives."

This Government believes in an education system that brings out the very best in everyone and that means our educational offerings need to be as diverse as the learners we cater for. We need our people to be resilient, creative, and adaptable, with great communication and interpersonal skills, and prepared to work collaboratively as well as independently. This is consistent with *Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa Early childhood curriculum*, which is underpinned by a vision of children as:

"competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society."

In order to be effective in meeting these aspirations, our education system needs to change to meet the needs of the 21st century.

The Government's work programme recognises the persistent inequities faced by Māori and Pasifika and learners with disabilities or learning support needs.

The work programme also notes that while there has been significant growth in early learning participation, this growth does not mean that all children are participating in similar amounts of early learning nor does it mean that all children have access to high quality learning opportunities.

Purpose

The purpose of the Early Learning Strategic Plan is to provide a shared vision and road map towards an early learning sector that gives all children genuine opportunities for high quality early learning and development that supports their identity, language and culture and enables them to learn and thrive.

As stated in *Pathways to the Future*, "long-lasting improvement is most readily achieved through a deliberate journey." The new Early Learning Strategic Plan should once again take a stepped approach, with the early steps laying the foundations for later action. This will help to ensure that any tensions between different goals are managed and that the building blocks for success are put in place in a considered way.

The Minister is setting up a Strategic Plan Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) to provide the Minister and the Ministry of Education with advice to inform the development of the Early Learning Strategic Plan to give effect to his vision for early learning.

Scope

In developing the Early Learning Strategic Plan, the MAG may consider any matter relating to the early learning sector, such as policies around funding, regulation and support and the curriculum.

The development process will be broad based but should explore the following key themes:

Theme	Focusing questions may include:
Raising quality	<p>How can government and sector work together to raise the quality of early learning provision?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. How can we ensure that every child accesses a rich curriculum and empowering pedagogies? ii. What is the best approach to developing teaching and leadership capability across the sector? iii. What regulatory and funding settings best support quality provision across diverse service types? iv. How do we build an early learning sector that enables continuity as children travel across educational settings, including school or kura? v. How best is quality measured across the early learning sector? How will we know it is improving? vi. How do we develop and support parents and whānau understanding of what high quality services look like in order for them to advocate for their children?
Improving equity	<p>How can government and sector work with parents and whānau to improve educational equity?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. How can government ensure that all children regardless of background or learning needs access high quality early learning? ii. How can we foster connections with broader social sector agencies, iwi and communities to support children's well-being and ensure that they have the support they need? iii. How can we drive pedagogical innovation and interventions that support equity?
The role of choice	<p>How best can the government and sector support parents and whānau understanding of high quality ECE so that they can make informed choices in their children's early learning while avoiding unnecessary duplication and quality services being undermined by competition?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. How best can government manage the match between demand and supply of early learning services? ii. How can choice be balanced against the drive for quality and equity? iii. How can our sector best support te reo Māori to thrive?

- iv. How best can the early learning sector respond to the educational, cultural and language aspirations of parents and whānau?
- v. What choices should be available to parents regarding the type, philosophy and location of early learning service they can access?

When framing its recommendations, the MAG is expected to consider both the efficiency and effectiveness of the early learning sector, and take account of the Government’s objectives and its positions in relation to early learning as set out below.

Objective	Implications
<p>Learners at the Centre</p>	<p>The Government is committed to placing learners at the centre of the education system with a much greater focus on personalised learning, the recognition and celebration of diversity, and a focus on learning environments that are culturally and socially responsive.</p> <p>In the context of early learning, this includes actively supporting the establishment of new public early childhood centres in areas of low-provision and supporting and lifting the quality of services that predominantly enrol Māori and Pacific children.</p>
<p>Barrier-Free Access</p>	<p>The Government is committed to breaking down the barriers to participation at all levels, with a particular focus on breaking down financial barriers by returning to the principle of a free public education that is available to all New Zealanders throughout their lives.</p> <p>In the context of early learning, this includes putting the “free” back into the policy of 20 Hours Free early learning for all three and four year olds, and those five-year-olds who aren’t yet in school.</p>
<p>Quality Teaching</p>	<p>The Government is committed to championing quality teaching and the importance of a respected and supported teaching profession at all levels of the system.</p> <p>In the context of early learning, this includes revisiting decisions by the previous government have undermined the shift towards a more qualified workforce.</p> <p>Over time, the Government’s aim is to achieve 100% qualified teachers in all centre-based teacher-led early learning services and to improve group size and teacher: child ratios for infants and toddlers.</p>
<p>Quality Inclusive Public Education</p>	<p>The Government is committed to investing in and backing our world-class, public education system for all students. This involves turning the tide away from a privatised, profit-focused education system.</p> <p>In the context of early learning, this includes working to ensure that community-based early childhood education services have well-maintained facilities and are able to expand to meet growing demand.</p>
<p>21st Century Learning</p>	<p>The Government is committed to focusing on learning that is relevant to the lives that New Zealanders are living today, the technology they will interact with, and the types of skills that will provide them with the opportunities to thrive in all aspects of their lives.</p>

Development process

The development of the Early Learning Strategic Plan will be led by a Strategic Plan Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG). This group is not a representative group of stakeholders. Rather, it includes a diverse range of people, with varying backgrounds and experience, who will challenge conventional thinking.

The MAG will be supported by a Strategic Plan Reference Group. This group will be made up of a wider range of representatives, including sector representatives and early learning academics. Membership of this group will include existing early learning representative groups; the Early Childhood Advisory Committee (ECAC) and the ECE Policy Research Forum.

The MAG, the Reference Group and the Ministry of Education will work together to develop an Early Learning Strategic Plan that provides a shared vision and road map to give effect to the Government's vision for early learning.

Engaging stakeholders

Public consultation will be conducted in September 2018.

There will be broad engagement through face to face hui and online forums. Parents, whānau and the sector will be consulted.

Key processes and outputs		
1	Education Summit and online engagement	There is the potential for the Early Learning Strategic Plan to be a topic of discussion at the Education Summits in May 2018.
2	Draft Strategic Plan	In September, the Ministry of Education will release a draft Strategic Plan for consultation. This first draft will be informed by the advice from the Ministerial Advisory Group. The draft Plan will be tested the reference group prior to public consultation.
3	Consultation Reports	In November, the Ministry will produce a consultation report from its consultation processes which summarises what has been heard from New Zealanders about the Strategic Plan. The consultation report will provide insight (including data and statistics) into the consultation and identify key trends and significant responses to inform the final Strategic Plan.
4	Final Strategic Plan	A final Strategic Plan will be drafted by the Ministry of Education, incorporating consultation feedback. The MAG and Reference Group will be consulted on the final Strategic Plan before it is submitted to the Minister in December.

Alignment with other ECE work programme commitments

The MAG and Reference Group will be kept informed of the sequencing and implementation of Government's wider education work programme where this work intersects with the Early Learning Strategic Plan. This includes:

- the review of home-based early childhood education
- work on Ka Hikitia
- work on the Pasifika Education Plan
- the development of the Statement of National Education and Learning Priorities, and
- the Education workforce strategy.

Proactively released