

Identifying / confirming success criteria to guide development of options for the ECE funding system review

This paper outlines proposed success criteria for the MAG's confirmation, building on the initial discussion at the January 2026 workshop and feedback received at the sprint session on 5 Feb 2026. The intention is to finalise these criteria so they can be used consistently to inform the development and assessment of options.

Success criteria are used to systematically analyse and assess options, to help determine which best achieve intended objectives and address identified problems. They can also help expose trade-offs (as most options will have some negative and some positive impacts).

Within the overall design framework, success criteria represent the key “could-do’s” of the system. These are the desirable outcomes that the operating model should ideally enable and/or achieve. These sit alongside the “must-do’s” (such as legislative and regulatory restrictions) and the “should-dos” articulated through the system design principles. The success criteria therefore help clarify what it would look like for the system to perform well and provide a basis for comparing options.

The success criteria presented in this note incorporate the MAG's early feedback and are provided for consideration and confirmation at the 19 February workshop.



Initial Success Criteria identified by the MAG

At their January Hui, MAG members identified potential success criteria to use to assess potential options for change to the ECE funding system. These were written up by Ministry of Education officials and subject to further discussion by the MAG at their sprint session on 5 February.

The following table identifies the draft success criteria identified at the workshop (first column) and the MAG's further consideration of them on 5 February (second column).

Initial draft criteria	Feedback / suggestions (as per notes taken at 5 Feb Sprint)
First order criteria	
Addresses cost and other barriers to access / participation (give examples of other barriers)	
Supports the quality of ECE (<i>define quality</i>) so that it positively contributes to child development and wellbeing outcomes	What does defining quality look like?
Supports supply of ECE services to match demand / need (includes rurality, language etc)	Make language more specific ie 'immersion' or 'language skills of teachers'

Enhances equitable outcomes for children (in terms of access, participation, learning and development outcomes etc)	
Reduces funding system complexity (complexity includes number of funding streams, transparency, administrative load, interactions between different funding elements etc)	
Supports service viability? [answered thru Deloitte work rather than a success criterion?]	
There is proportionality with respect to administrative and accountability requirements	
Enables / supports maternal employment / labour market participation	Good criteria as it notes measure is maternal employment
Second order criteria	
Raises the status of ECE	
More explicitly supports the use of te reo Māori	Inclusion of Pasifika and other language nests? Make more general to language provision (reo Māori, Pacific languages) and relate to participation, quality, and meeting community need (rather than a stand-alone criteria). Maybe address via criteria about matching supply and needs i.e.. if more need for te reo services then funding should support this.
Helps reduce child poverty	Discussion about the role of ECE in relation to this criteria, given wide range of factors that affect child poverty rates. Agreement on “mitigating the impacts of child poverty” as preferred framing
Helps support general labour market participation	
General feedback:	
- Integrate second order criteria into first order ones where appropriate (noting that the ECE funding system is one of a number of levers that can address the identified second order criteria, in some cases indirectly, or may not be the most effective lever)	

At the 5 February sprint, officials also introduced the following additional potential success criteria, taken from standard criteria identified by NZIER (NZIER Policy Advice Masterclass on Options Assessment) as useful in most circumstances:

- Cost (or savings) – fiscal implications and how this fit within parameters for decisions
- Strategic consistency (e.g. is it consistent with the existing policy and any relevant strategies)
- Ease of implementation (timeframes, implementation costs, or risks)
- Stakeholder support (noting it may be that different groups of stakeholders have different views)
- Durability (e.g. whether something will cope with the current population but won't meet needs in 10 years due to population growth).

- Population impacts (e.g. on individuals, groups of individuals, or on areas. This can involve analysing winners and losers)
- Implications for the Treaty of Waitangi policy and relationships
- Implications for sectors / sub-sectors affected by the policy options.

These standard criteria were not discussed in any detail by the MAG. However, some high level feedback from MAG members was that some of these criteria could be more appropriately described as 'constraints' (e.g. fiscal parameters) or system design principles (e.g. consistency / alignment with core system goals and objectives). As such they should be addressed via the relevant aspects of the overall framework for identifying and assessing options, and in the context of considering the overall package of options. Given this, we have not suggested any changes relating to the adoption of these criteria.

Suggested changes based on the MAGs feedback

Based on the feedback and suggestions provided by the MAG, the following key changes have been identified and used as the basis for drafting a revised set of success criteria:

- **Clearer definitions:** Access, participation, and quality criteria are now more explicit (e.g., specific barriers, reference both structural and process quality).
- **Merged or streamlined items:** Equity has been integrated into other criteria; labour market participation criteria have been merged; and system complexity retained but made more specific.
- **Some criteria removed:** Several criteria are no longer standalone but are picked up via specific references within other criteria, removed given limited ability of ECE funding system to directly address a criteria (e.g. 'status of ECE'), or removed as they are addressed through the system design criteria (e.g. proportionate accountability).

Revised Success Criteria for MAG agreement

In line with the changes outlined above, the following success criteria are proposed for MAG consideration and agreement. These criteria are intended to support the shortlisting of options. Additional 'standard' or technical criteria such as those identified by NZIER (e.g. fiscal parameters, ease of implementation, population / distributional impacts) can be applied at the point of assessing proposed packages of options.

We note that the consolidation of the previous criteria means that there are now only five criteria identified. The MAG may wish to consider whether this is the about the right number, given that these sit alongside the system design principles.

These criteria are articulated in terms of ***the extent to which the proposal:***

1. Addresses cost and other barriers to access and participation (including geographic barriers, need for non-standard hours of provision, and barriers related to disability and additional learning needs) to enhance equitable outcomes for all children and mitigate the impacts of child poverty.

2. Supports the structural quality (e.g. staff ratios and qualifications) and process quality (e.g. curriculum delivery, stimulating learning environment and warm, responsive educator interactions with children) of ECE so that it positively contributes to children's development and wellbeing outcomes.
3. Supports supply of ECE services to match demand and diverse community needs (including the provision of culturally inclusive, language immersion and bilingual services) and enable choice where possible.
4. Reduces funding system complexity (including the number of funding streams, administrative load, lack of transparency, and complex interactions between different funding elements).
5. Supports maternal employment in particular, and parental labour market participation more generally.