

8 September 2017

Consultation on State Sector Productivity

We are pleased to provide comment as part of the New Zealand Productivity Commission's consultation on how to improve measurement of state sector productivity in the health, education, justice and social development sectors.

About Te Rito Maioha Early Childhood New Zealand

Te Rito Maioha Early Childhood New Zealand (ECNZ) is a national organisation that promotes high-quality early childhood education (ECE) through initial teacher education, professional development, leadership programmes, advocacy and membership services.

ECNZ is a membership organisation. We represent ECE services and the teachers who provide education and care to thousands of infants, toddlers and young children. Our members are drawn from a diverse range of community-based and privately-owned education and care services, home-based services and kindergartens.

ECNZ is also one of New Zealand's top providers of initial teacher education for ECE teachers, and is recognised as a leader in bicultural teacher education. We deliver a suite of qualifications and teacher education programmes that are of interest to both domestic and international students.

ECNZ is committed to high-quality ECE for every New Zealand child. That has been our purpose for more than 50 years since our formation in 1963, originally as Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa | NZ Childcare Association.

About our submission

The views presented here are those of ECNZ as a provider of early childhood teacher education. We did not consult our membership when formulating our response.

With this submission, ECNZ is making a general response to the education-specific section of the Productivity Commission issues paper (pages 27-28), whose focus is primarily on compulsory schooling.

Our response

We note in the issues paper that under its terms of reference, the Productivity Commission must focus on narrow input/output definitions, and does not include detailed analysis of state sector services' outcomes. However, its inquiry can consider how changes in quality or effectiveness are captured in efficiency measures.

Although for the education section of the inquiry, the focus is on the compulsory schooling sector, we endorse Hanushek and Ettema's assertion (on page 27 of the issues paper) about the cumulative nature of education; that student outcomes and outputs are influenced by more than just the schooling received immediately prior to the outputs being measured.

There is strong evidence that participation in ECE has direct influence on educational outcomes for school students. It is not a stretch, therefore, to consider that ECE contributes to productivity in schools.

The expression of these factors can be measured. For example, inputs may include per child ECE funding, the percentage of qualified ECE teachers, child-to-teacher ratios; and for outputs, how many school entrants participated in ECE.

The data derived from government's efforts in recent years to boost participation in quality early childhood education (Better Public Services target) tells us that in 2016, 96.7% of children starting school had participated in some form of ECE. Government focused solely on providing a headcount of children who attended ECE prior to starting school, but a limitation of this data is that although the target stated "quality ECE", there was no mechanism or attempt to measure quality.

To ascertain the quality of the outputs – that is, the quality of the ECE services that 96.7% of children attended or the quality of the educational experience of that cohort – would require measures for assessing such things as children's self-regulation and school readiness. It would also require appetite by Government to undertake this assessment. The Education Review Office could be a good starting point; ERO regularly assesses how ECE services are placed to promote positive learning outcomes for children. This approach would likely also necessitate greater investment in improving ECE at a system level.

Conclusion

Te Rito Maioha Early Childhood New Zealand recommends that the Productivity Commission's inquiry adopts a broad approach and deliberately considers the contribution of quality early childhood education on the change in quality of outputs and productivity of New Zealand's education system.

Submission to the Productivity Commission by 8 September 2017 by email: info@productivity.govt.nz

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