

Briefing report

Education Review Office (ERO): ERO's Assurance Review process for reviews of early childhood education services

Date	27 February 2019
Security Level	N/A
ERO Priority	Medium
ERO Reference	M19-4
Date requested	ERO initiated
Date due	ERO initiated
Proactive release	Recommended

Addressee	Action sought	Deadline
Minister of Education	<p>It is recommended that you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) note that ERO is trialling an Assurance Review approach between March-June 2019 b) note that this process has a focus on ERO's accountability function through assessing whether a service has taken reasonable steps to meet minimum regulatory standards/licensing requirements c) note that ERO will be advising the early childhood education sector and communicating further with the Ministry of Education about this approach. 	



Attachments:

***Education Review Office (ERO):
Process guidelines - How ERO
undertakes Assurance Reviews of
early childhood services.***



Comments:

Minister's Office to complete

Noted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Seen	<input type="checkbox"/>
Approved	<input type="checkbox"/>
Referred to:	

Date signed by Minister: 3.3.19

Our Ref: M19-4

27 February 2019

Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister of Education

**ERO's Assurance Review process for reviews of early learning services
(except ngā kohanga reo)**

Purpose

1. The purpose of this briefing paper is to update you on the work ERO is undertaking to develop and trial an Assurance Review methodology.
2. This paper expands on my recent discussions with you about a need to fine-tune ERO's review approach and reporting in early childhood services in response to performance variability in the sector.

Background

3. As previously discussed, ERO is introducing an assurance approach to our reviews of early learning services. We have been concerned that with considerable and fast growth in the sector, an increasing number of new services and some poorly performing services have a limited understanding of their regulatory and legislative obligations.
4. The Assurance Review process will focus on ERO's accountability function, assessing that a service has taken reasonable steps to meet minimum regulatory standards/licensing requirements.
5. ERO is trialling this approach in a sample of centre-based services (excluding kōhanga reo) scheduled for review between March-June 2019. The trial will include standalone services and services that are part of large governing organisations. Guidelines outlining how ERO undertakes an Assurance Review are attached for your information. These will be shared with the Ministry of Education and services involved in the trial.
6. Each ERO review team will gather and record evidence informed by:
 - discussions with those involved with the service
 - analysis of documentation, including implementation of health and safety systems
 - observations of the environment/premises, curriculum implementation and teaching practice.
7. ERO's onsite evaluation will assess that a service is either 'meeting' or 'not meeting' each of the four regulatory standards. A brief report will include clear judgements about ERO's key findings and list identified non-compliances.

8. ERO will make one of the following judgements in Assurance Review reports:

At the time of the review ERO:

- a. found the service was taking reasonable steps to meet regulatory standards; or
 - b. identified non-compliance with regulatory standards that must be addressed; or
 - c. identified significant areas of non-compliance with regulatory standards that are an unacceptable risk to children.
9. Where services meet all regulatory standards, the next review of that service is likely to be an education (quality) review, based upon ERO's quality framework for early learning, currently under development.
10. Services that do not meet regulatory standards will be expected to address non-compliances promptly. ERO will recommend that the Ministry of Education follow up with the service. Where risks to children's health and safety and wellbeing are identified, ERO will continue to recommend that the Ministry reassess a service's licence. This means that existing procedures agreed between ERO and the Ministry of Education for 'not well placed' services will apply to assurance reviews.
11. During the assurance review trial, services will receive 4 weeks' notice of an ERO review. Once the methodology is finalised and reviewer training completed it is likely the notification period will be reduced. In some cases ERO will undertake assurance reviews at very short notice as "spot checks". This approach responds to concerns voiced in the sector that some services may "window dress" for their scheduled ERO review.
12. Once the methodology is finalised, ERO intends to undertake an Assurance Review process in any service:
- having its first ERO review – including if it is part of a governing organisation
 - previously identified as 'not well placed' or 'requiring further development'
 - that has moved from a provisional to a full licence
 - that has been re-licensed due to a change of ownership
 - where an Assurance Review process is determined to be appropriate.

Communication with stakeholders:

13. ERO will provide the Secretary of Education with information regarding the upcoming Assurance Review trial.
14. Information about ERO's Assurance Review approach will be shared with Ministry staff to be disseminated to regional offices.
15. ERO will discuss these changes with members of the Ministry's Early Childhood Advisory Committee (ECAC) at their meeting on 6th March. Previous ECAC meetings have included briefings on our work around Assurance Reviews.
16. ERO will communicate with the early childhood education sector, through our website and by using trial documents to promote understanding of the Assurance Review approach.

17. Feedback on ERO's Assurance Review approach will be sought from services involved in the trial.

Recommendations

18. It is recommended that you:

- a) **note** that ERO is trialling an Assurance Review approach between March-June 2019 **noted**
- b) **note** that this process has a focus on ERO's accountability function through assessing a service has taken reasonable steps to meet minimum regulatory standards/ licensing requirements **noted**
- c) **note** that ERO will be advising the early childhood education sector and communicating further with the Ministry of Education about this approach. **noted**



Nicholas Pole
Chief Executive

NOTED/APPROVED



Chris Hipkins
Minister of Education

3 / 3 / 19