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## **EARLY CHILDHOOD TARGETS MUST NOT BE WATERED DOWN**

An early childhood teacher supply summit delivered a strong message that there must be no watering down of targets for moving towards a fully qualified workforce, despite the added pressures they place on teacher supply.

The summit was organised by the education sector union NZEI Te Riu Roa. It involved private and public providers of early childhood education, teachers and teacher education providers. Teacher supply in early childhood education is complex and the summit provided a unique opportunity for often differing groups to look collectively at an issue which joins them all.

Demand for early childhood education and the number of services have risen dramatically in recent years. The current baby boom will also push larger numbers of children into early childhood services in the next few years.

Projections for next year show the sector could be well over a thousand teachers short because while the number of qualified teachers and the numbers in training has grown significantly, they can't keep up with demand.

Currently all early childhood centres must have 50% of their teachers fully qualified and registered to remain licensed, but that target is to increase in 2010 and again in 2012.

NZEI National Secretary Paul Goulter says it is clear that with the teacher shortages those targets present big challenges.

“What we don't want to see however - and it was a message that came through loud and clear at the summit - is any move to water or dumb down those targets as that would compromise the quality of education we are striving for our youngest children.”

“In terms of the reality of the situation, there was talk of deferring or delaying the targets or not tying service funding to them to try and let teacher supply catch up with demand, but they were clearly not the preferred options,” he says.

There is also a pressing need for the government and universities to review the funding caps on a number of teacher education programmes. In some areas hundreds of people want to enrol in early childhood teacher education, but due to funding caps, not enough places are available.

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