



## Briefing Note: Update – Early Intervention Service performance data

<b>To:</b>	Hon Tracey Martin, Associate Minister of Education		
<b>Cc:</b>	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
<b>Date:</b>	25 September 2020	<b>Priority:</b>	Medium
<b>Security Level:</b>	In confidence	<b>METIS No:</b>	1240802
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<b>Messaging seen by Communications team:</b>	No	<b>Round Robin:</b>	No

### Purpose of Report

The purpose of this paper is for you to:

**Note** that waiting times for the Early Intervention Service have significantly reduced, and the key factors that have contributed to this.

**Agree** that this Briefing will be proactively released.

**Agree / Disagree**

### Summary

- At the 8 September 2020 Status meeting we advised you of the improved performance in waiting times for the Early Intervention Service. As at 31 August 2020 the average waiting time for Early Intervention support is 84.52 days.
- This is a significant reduction on our position at the end of the 2019/20 financial year (104.21 days) and reflects three main drivers:
  - The work of regions in 2019/20 towards clearing the backlog of long waiting cases. Having fewer of these long waiting cases included in the waiting time calculation has led to a lower average waiting time.
  - The impact of Covid-19. During lockdown levels 3 and 4 (April and May 2020), We experienced a significant reduction in new requests for support. There was a simultaneous increase in staff use of telepractice which meant that all regions were able to continue to start support in new cases. In fact, more early intervention cases were started in April and May 2020 than in the same period in 2019.

- The significant investment in the Early Intervention Service in Budgets 2018 and 2019 have enabled us to increase the number of learning support specialists working in the early intervention space.
- The decrease in the average waiting time is encouraging, however there are some key practice changes that need to be maintained if we are to hold this improved level of performance. These include continuing to shift to working in a tiered support model (that is, increasingly providing preventative and targeted supports, in addition to supports for individual children), and building on Covid-19 learnings about expanding and modernising the range of methods used to deliver support, eg telepractice. Work is underway to ensure that these practice changes are maintained.



Katrina Casey  
**Deputy Secretary**  
**Sector Enablement and Support**

25/09/2020



Hon Tracey Martin  
**Associate Minister of Education**

28/ 9/ 2020

## Background

1. There has been significant investment in recent Budgets to respond to increased demand for early intervention support. Budget 2018 provided \$21.537 million over four years for the Ministry's Early Intervention Service; Budget 2019 provided a further \$24.768 million over four years to better meet demand.
2. It has taken considerable time for this investment to have an impact on the time children, their whānau and educators, wait to receive early intervention support.
3. Although regions have been testing and refining new, local, ways of working to provide support more quickly and give effect to the Learning Support Delivery Model (LSDM), recruiting specialists to newly funded roles took longer than anticipated.

## August 2020 Early Intervention Service performance data

4. As at 31 August 2020 the average waiting time for Early Intervention support is 84.52 days. This is a significant reduction on our position at the end of the 2019/20 financial year (104.21 days), and our performance over the same period last year.

**Table 1: Early Intervention waiting times – July-August 2019 and July-August 2020**

	31 Jul 19 YTD	31 Aug 19 YTD	31 July 20 YTD	31 Aug 20 YTD
Tai Tokerau	30.5	28.67	21.37	19.22
Auckland	104.8	103.35	87.17	90.69
Waikato	105.38	102.57	52.16	52.21
Bay of Plenty/Wairariki	156.65	150.23	95.26	90.16
Hawke's Bay/Tairāwhiti	100.87	104.73	47.48	54.25
Taranaki/Whanganui/Manawatū	216.83	184.1	80.43	87.21
Wellington	118.8	113.66	127.97	143.13
Nelson/Marlborough/West Coast	92.55	103.29	117.33	128.76
Canterbury/Chatham Islands	95.69	90.63	68.27	63.46
Otago/Southland	91.3	89.27	84.29	74.50
<b>National</b>	<b>113.52</b>	<b>110.23</b>	<b>81.90</b>	<b>84.52</b>

5. The number of children waiting for early intervention support has also reduced. As at 31 August 2020 there are 1,960 children waiting to receive support.

**Table 2: Early Intervention waiting lists – July-August 2019 and July-August 2020**

	31 Jul 19 YTD	31 Aug 19 YTD	31 July 20 YTD	31 Aug 20 YTD
Tai Tokerau	35	44	21	30
Auckland	876	904	696	718
Waikato	175	162	79	102
Bay of Plenty/Wairariki	281	219	141	150
Hawke's Bay/Tairāwhiti	126	148	76	78
Taranaki/Whanganui/Manawatū	337	333	133	159
Wellington	309	276	253	277
Nelson/Marlborough/West Coast	33	37	48	37
Canterbury/Chatham Islands	279	313	242	276
Otago/Southland	143	146	132	133
<b>National</b>	<b>2,594</b>	<b>2,582</b>	<b>1,821</b>	<b>1,960</b>

## Key drivers of our improved performance

6. Our improved performance is due to the three main factors set out below.

### *Work in 2019/20 towards clearing the backlog of long waiting cases*

7. The average waiting time metric only counts cases once support has begun. If a region's waiting list consists largely of longer waiting cases, these will increase the average waiting time as soon as support begins and they are 'counted'. Having fewer long waiting cases to absorb into the average will result in lower waiting times.
8. Over 2019/20, regions with backlogs of long waiting cases worked steadily to clear these. As at 31 August 2020, there are 64 children on the Early Intervention Service waiting list who have been waiting over 150 days, down from 311 children in August 2019.

**Table 3: Number of children waiting over 150 days for support from the Early Intervention Service – July-August 2019 and July-August 2020**

	31 Jul 19 YTD	31 Aug 19 YTD	31 July 20 YTD	31 Aug 20 YTD
Tai Tokerau	1	0	0	1
Auckland	19	22	31	17
Waikato	15	14	0	1
Bay of Plenty/Wairariki	94	72	10	1
Hawke's Bay/Tairāwhiti	20	22	8	2
Taranaki/Whanganui/Manawatū	91	100	13	7
Wellington	63	62	70	28
Nelson/Marlborough/West Coast	7	5	25	6
Canterbury/Chatham Islands	1	10	1	0
Otago/Southland	5	4	1	1
<b>Total waiting over 150 days</b>	<b>316</b>	<b>311</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>64</b>

9. The Bay of Plenty/Wairariki and Taranaki/Whanganui/Manawatū regions made notable progress over the last 12 months, reducing the number of children waiting over 150 days by 71 children and 93 children respectively, between August 2019 and August 2020. This is why we saw the average waiting times in these regions increase in 2019/20.
10. Having cleared a large proportion of these long waiting cases in 2019/20, there are now significantly fewer long waiting cases to absorb into the average waiting time figure. This is the key driver in the improvement in waiting times we are now seeing.
11. A contributing factor is that the average waiting time metric is cumulative across the financial year. Because the August results only draw from the data of the first two months of the 2020/21 financial year, it does not carry forward the prior higher figures from 2019/20.
12. We are currently looking at alternative ways of reporting on waiting times that would lessen the impact of the change in financial year on the data, and support better performance monitoring. One option we are considering is using a three month rolling average.

13. Covid-19 Level 3 and 4 conditions affected our early intervention waiting list and waiting time position in two key ways:
  - We saw a significant reduction in demand for Learning Support services over April and May 2020, which is one of the reasons our waiting lists are lower than they have been in recent years.
  - It prompted the increase in the use of telepractice by our specialist staff to provide virtual support to children, and their educators and whānau during the lockdown period. This proved to be an efficient way of working - during April and May 2020, our specialists 'started service' in 1,535 Early Intervention Service cases, 131 more cases than over the same April - May period in 2019.
14. Prior to the lockdown period, telepractice (eg using videos to provide modelling, coaching and feedback to parents and educators), had been a dimension of support provided by some specialists and was used in some geographically remote areas, but it had not been widespread. For many staff, lockdown was the first time working in this way.
15. Lockdown was unique in that the majority of whānau and educators were also at home. These circumstances provided an opportunity for Ministry specialists, whānau and educators to adapt methods of working together. The fact that technology was being used to deliver other services (such as GP consultations) and connect socially assisted in normalising these new methods.
16. Some whānau reported feeling 'more equal' working with specialists via telepractice. Often it meant that more family members were available to participate and hear support strategies. Telepractice also enabled us to engage with some whānau we have previously been unable to.
17. In Nelson/Marlborough/West Coast, for example, a Speech Language Therapist (SLT) was able to provide improved individual support by using telepractice and video coaching. Previously, when visiting the parent and child in the home, the involvement of the parent was limited. The benefits were:
  - no travel time
  - improved relationship between the parent and specialist
  - the parent saw herself as the person who could make the difference with her child.
18. In addition to providing individual support for children and whānau, Ministry specialists also used telepractice to deliver targeted programmes (for example Incredible Years and Positive Behaviour for Learning School-Wide) for groups of teachers and whānau.
19. In Tai Tokerau, for example, SLTs began delivering Hanen parent courses<sup>1</sup> via Zoom. Prior to Covid, parents of pre-school children identified as having a language delay were referred to a waiting list to attend an in-person Hanen course. Covering a large geographical area meant that parents often had to wait for significant periods of time for a course to be offered in their local area.

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<sup>1</sup> The Hanen Centre in Canada produce a number of evidence based programmes that focus on upskilling parents and educators in how to support speech, language and communication in natural contexts.

20. Since moving to delivery via Zoom SLTs have noticed the following benefits:
- parents can attend the next available course regardless of their geographical position – waiting times are reduced
  - as two facilitators are required to deliver these courses, SLTs based in different locations can now deliver the training rather than waiting for two SLTs in the same location to become available
  - parents found the course more accessible and therefore attendance improved. Eg parents could attend even if they or their child was unwell, and parents working on farms could attend for all or part of the sessions
  - there was a reduction in set up and travel time for the SLTs.

*Impact of Budget 2018 and 2019 investments*

21. There has been substantial investment in recent Budgets to respond to increased demand for early intervention support. Budget 2018 provided \$21.537 million over four years for the Early Intervention Service, and a further \$24.768 million was provided in Budget 2019. This investment has enabled us to significantly increase the number of learning support specialists working in the early intervention space.
22. SLTs make up the biggest proportion of our early intervention workforce, and are always in high demand. We have made a number of changes to strengthen our ability to increase the number and proportion of SLTs scholarship recipients that work for the Ministry after graduation. Last year for the first time we ran a centralised graduate recruitment process for SLTs. We have also strengthened the SLT scholarship package to provide students with:
- a shadowing opportunity at a Ministry regional office
  - one guaranteed placement at a Ministry regional office during their practicum block course, with a \$1,500 payment as added incentive (this is something other organisations providing SLT practicums also offer, and will support students to travel to regions outside of Auckland and Canterbury for a placement)
  - a guaranteed job interview with the Ministry on successful completion of the programme as part of an annual SLT graduate recruitment round
  - strengthened support for Māori scholarship recipients by connecting them with a network of Ministry Māori SLTs and allowing greater flexibility in their placement experience.
23. These changes have supported the recruitment of additional SLTs and we are looking to build on them in 2020/21.

## Work underway to maintain our improved performance

24. The improved waiting time position is encouraging, however since June 2020 demand for specialist support has been rapidly picking up, and there are some key practice changes that need to be maintained if we are to hold the improved level of performance. Namely:
- continuing to shift to working in a tiered support model (that is, increasingly providing preventative and targeted supports, in addition to supports for individual children)
  - building on Covid-19 learnings on flexible and modern methods of service delivery.
25. Work is underway to ensure that these practice changes are maintained.

### *Supporting specialists to work in a tiered support model – He Pikorua Practice Framework*

26. A service delivery model that only provides support to individual children with learning support needs is not sustainable or consistent with the LSDM. It has to be balanced with work focussed on continuous and system improvement, building capability and self-reliance in whānau and the sector.
27. We have been working to shift to consistently working in a tiered support model, providing supports which increase in intensity, depending on the needs and the context. The evidence base for this way of working is well established.

#### **Tiered Support Model**



28. To support our staff to work in this way, we have recently launched He Pikorua, the new shared practice framework for RTLB and Ministry Learning Support specialists. Until now there have been six frameworks between the two services, making working together challenging for everyone and less cohesive for children, whānau and educators.
29. He Pikorua will better support RTLB and Ministry specialists to provide tiered support and work within the LSDM. While the LSDM provides an operating model to strengthen the way we provide Learning Support, He Pikorua gives life to operationalising the changes we want to see.

30. The framework will be used by Ministry specialists and RTLB in their day to day work and will support specialists to transition:

From supports that	To supports that
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• are based on funding levels</li> <li>• fit learners into categories/criteria</li> <li>• are hierarchical – pointy end gets the most funding</li> <li>• create barriers to collaboration with RTLB and other supports</li> <li>• are reactive rather than proactive</li> <li>• emphasise individual case approach</li> <li>• respond to demand rather than need.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identify and respond to need in more flexible ways</li> <li>• intervene early with more proactive support</li> <li>• take robust evidence-informed approach</li> <li>• create continuous system improvement.</li> </ul>

31. He Pikorua is online (<https://hepikorua.education.govt.nz/>) and open access. Whānau and teachers can get information about how we work and what to expect partnering with us to meet learning support needs. An online platform means real examples (eg videos, stories) from whānau, educators and specialists can be added to highlight innovation within the LSDM.
32. He Pikorua emphasises flexible support. This includes working in partnership with a range of people, using methods that fit with their context. The deliberate exploration of a range of options with whānau and educators sits within the He Pikorua principle of working in child and whānau centred, rather than practitioner led ways.
33. Increasing practitioner confidence, capacity and capability using telepractice will support the required expansion of the way we deliver in more modern and flexible ways.

*Building on the experience of using telepractice during lockdown conditions*

34. The experience of using telepractice and virtual provision of learning support services during Alert Levels 3 and 4 has demonstrated the potential benefits of this way of working. Telepractice has the potential to have a major impact on our service delivery, particularly in rural areas.
35. To build on Covid-19 innovations and experience, we have convened an internal telepractice working group made up of regional champions. The group recently initiated a survey of Ministry field staff to understand what experience they have had of telepractice, the extent to which they are continuing to use it post-lockdown, and what support they need to advance and embed these skills into their regular practice.
36. We received nearly 500 responses to this survey, which will provide us with strong direction as to what professional development our regional staff might need to ensure effective telepractice is embedded into how we work going forward.



## Other work to strengthen early intervention as part of LSAP Priority 3

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37. A research team has been selected to progress the process evaluation of the Early Intervention service. The evaluation will describe how the service is being delivered, why these approaches have been taken, and to what extent we see evidence of good practice and delivery across the tiered model of support (universal, targeted and individualised). This will include consideration of service responsiveness to the local needs of children, whānau and their communities. The work in this financial year will help identify improvement opportunities, and feed into an outcome evaluation in 2021/22 and 2022/23.
38. Four regions have been selected, Auckland, Tai Tokerau, Tairāwhiti/Hawkes Bay and Otago/Southland to get a wide view of how the service is being delivered across different locations. This will result in eight case studies and a summary evaluation report by June 2021.
39. As you know, Budget 20 also provided \$2.840 million to continue our partnership with Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust (TKRNT) to deliver ongoing targeted professional learning and development to support kōhanga whānau to effectively identify, assess and manage the learning support needs of their tamariki. We have held initial meetings with TKRNT to begin discussions around their long term vision and how we work together over the next four years to contribute towards achieving that.
40. Regions are increasingly providing support to their local kōhanga reo by focusing on building on kaiako capability to address the needs of diverse learners. For example, in Tai Tokerau, Ministry staff have partnered with a group of local kōhanga reo that have identified a need to be upskilled in Autism Spectrum Disorder. Autism New Zealand are now providing the kōhanga with targeted support. This is an alternative to kōhanga making individual referrals and aligns with the LSDM.

## Proactive release

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41. We recommend that this briefing is proactively released as per your expectation that information be released as soon as possible. Any information which may need to be withheld will be done so in line with the provisions of the Official Information Act 1982.