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Submission to the Ministry of Education on Adult to Child Ratios – New Options Early Childhood Education

The National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) is an umbrella organization representing 40 nationally organized societies and a number of individual women. NCWNZ has 32 branches to which women from 150 societies are affiliated. The Council's function is to serve women, families and the community through research, study, consultation and action. NCWNZ has a strong interest in early childhood education sustained over 108 years. This submission has been prepared using survey responses from members of 7 branches, 3 Church groups, 1 Business, 4 individuals - about 80 people in all, and from NCWNZ education policy.

This submission is arranged to fit the Feedback Form provided in the Consultation Document.

1st preference:

Most respondents supported Options 3 and 4 in almost equal numbers. The main reasons given in support of Option 3 were that it provided the best quality for best age bands of children. Respondents who supported Option 4 did so because two bands of age groups were deemed more manageable in terms of staffing and affordability.

Other reasons and further explanations.

The lower ratio for children between the ages of 1 and 3 years was supported because of the greater mobility and need for supervision of children in this age group. One group suggested that a 1:10 ratio for over three year olds was too great and suggested a 1:8 ratio so that these children receive the amount of supervision, guidance and individual attention they need. Children with disabilities and special needs must continue to affect ratios as they need extra staffing.

Several argued that there should be greater flexibility especially in rural areas. Childcare facilities should be able to alter the staffing arrangements depending on the needs of the client population which could differ depending on the socio-economic environment of the client base. Less expensive, untrained staff could be used to keep costs down in some cases. Compliance implications for staffing are a major concern where age groups change on a daily basis. If individual arrangements are approved there would need to be adequate monitoring for client satisfaction and quality.

It is NCWNZ policy that adequate training should be provided for all early childcare workers. This training should be appropriate for the work that is being done. If the work is mainly supervisory, and many respondents mentioned the need for 2 – 5 year olds to be well supervised, those providing this part of the care require less expensive training. Although the adult-child ratio document specifically referred to the adults as teachers, NCWNZ would like to see attention paid to the requirements of early childcare education in terms of child supervision concurrently with early





childhood education when making decisions about adult to child ratios because this will have financial and training implications. The consultation document does not differentiate sufficiently the work and responsibility of the adults in the adult: child ratios.

NCWNZ thanks the Ministry of Education for providing the opportunity to respond to this important consultation document.

Christine Low
National President

Frances Townsend
Convener, Education Standing Committee