

He Pānui Kōhungunga

the Early Learning Bulletin



COVID-19 and employment relationships

The closure of early learning services and ngā kōhanga reo due to COVID-19 has meant that some of our education workforce are facing uncertainty around their income. We would like to thank you all for showing extraordinary leadership and effort around staffing matters during these unprecedented times.

We continue to receive a number of queries relating to funding and the COVID-19 wage subsidy. Today's special bulletin draws together information relating to the key themes that you have been asking about, and where to get the further the information you may need regarding your workforce and payroll.

Funding

Normal Ministry of Education operational funding will continue to be paid to early learning services as usual, even though services are closed and there are no children attending. Your operational funding will not be reduced at this time.

In addition, any service where their service's revenue has fallen by 30% or more can access the COVID-19 wage subsidy managed through the Ministry of Social Development.

COVID-19 wage subsidy

The COVID-19 wage subsidy will pay eligible services a flat rate of \$585.80 per week for every full time employee, and \$350 per week for every part time worker (before tax), paid upfront in one lump sum to cover twelve weeks.

Early childhood learning services that receive this COVID-19 wage subsidy must do their absolute best to pay their staff - hopefully at 100%, but certainly at least 80%. If for some reason the employer can't pay at least 80%, then they have to pay the employee at least the full value of

the wage subsidy - unless that's more than what the employee would normally get, in which case they should pay the employee what they normally earn. Services are expected to continue to pass on the 20 hours subsidy to kaiako as they would under normal circumstances.

Employers can expect their employees to continue working from home if and as required under these conditions (for example, sending helpful info and tips to support families at home with their child's individual needs, or planning and working on the curriculum to make it relevant to children's current interests).

If you have questions about your eligibility, please see [Work and Income's COVID-19 wage subsidy information pages](#). Please be patient if you call them, as they have a high volume of calls at this time.

The COVID-19 wage subsidy is a Government payment to help employers pay wages. It does not change any other employment law obligations.

Please see [Minister Hipkins' Facebook post](#) where he answers some of your questions.

How to apply for a wage subsidy

Kaiako who are contractors or self-employed need to apply for the subsidy themselves, rather than the home-based service they contract to, or get work from.

Kaiako are required to declare that they have had a 30% revenue loss at the time of application, and do not need to provide any proof/verification of their loss in income.

If you are an employer whose staff member is not entitled to a COVID-19 wage subsidy payment, you can refer them to the [Work and Income emergency COVID-19 pages](#) on other types of assistance available.

Where your early learning service or association directly employs relief teachers, you should apply for the wage subsidy on their behalf. You need to make your employees aware that you are applying for them as part of the wage subsidy requirements as soon as possible. We understand from the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) that in some cases, relief teachers are applying for the wage subsidy scheme where an application has already been made on their behalf by an early learning service or association. This is causing some confusion and will impact on the time it takes to process applications.

If you employ relief teachers on a regular basis and have made an application on their behalf, you must make sure you have told them you have done this as soon as possible. They must not make a separate application to the Ministry of Social Development.

Relief teachers who operate as sole traders or contractors may also be eligible for the wage subsidy scheme. For more information, please see the [Ministry of Social Development's COVID-19 wage subsidy information pages](#).

Term break changes do not affect early childhood learning services

In general, employees should be able to decide when to take their annual holidays. If the

employer and employee can't agree when annual holidays are to be taken, then the employer can require the employee to take annual holidays, but must give the employee at least 14 days' notice. An employer cannot direct an employee to take leave in advance (that is, before they become entitled to the holidays after their annual holiday anniversary).

Leave

In general, employees should be able to decide when to take their annual holidays. If the employer and employee can't agree when annual holidays are to be taken, then the employer can require the employee to take annual holidays, but only if they give the employee at least 14 days' notice. An employer cannot direct an employee to take leave in advance (that is, before they become entitled to the holidays after their annual holiday anniversary).

Charging parent fees

We appreciate that these are unprecedented times and many parents, whānau and caregivers are facing some considerable pressures during this difficult time. For some, the requirement to pay additional fees is a burden, especially if faced with substantial or complete loss of income.

The Government is continuing to support early learning services through the ECE subsidy funding with no clawbacks during the lockdown period, and the access to the Covid19 wage subsidy. We ask you to seriously review your policy of collecting parent fees during the lockdown.

Employment disputes/queries

The Government's Labour Inspectorate is monitoring employers to make sure they are keeping to the rules and operating in good faith. In some cases, employees may be paid slightly more or less than normal. Bear in mind that payments are being made remotely with the information available. The vast majority of NZ employers want to do the right thing. It is especially difficult for small and medium sized businesses at this time.

If you have a query regarding an employment/payroll situation, please contact the [Labour Inspectorate through the Ministry of Innovation, Business and Employment website](#). Please bear in mind that it is a small team dealing with a lot of queries, and that they will get back to you as soon as they can.

Further clarification regarding self-isolating groups

A reminder that families who need additional support with caring for children, for example when both or all caregivers must continue working, or there is need for respite care, have been able to put private arrangements in place so long as these comply with certain conditions. In forming this group, everyone in it must understand how crucial it is to keep it tight and to an absolute minimum number of people.

Where an in-home carer or nanny agrees to continue to provide care during the lockdown, it is essential that they limit their bubble to their own household and the family whose home they are

working in. Any arrangement must be mutually agreed between the employee and employer. This may not always be feasible and in these circumstances the home based carer may qualify for the wage subsidy.

Be kind - we're all in this together

This is a difficult time for all New Zealanders. Since the introduction of COVID-19 in our country, everyday circumstances have changed dramatically and futures can seem uncertain. As difficult as it is, and as different our circumstances may be, we are all united in our determination to do what it takes to make New Zealand COVID-19 free. Along the way, we need to remember our Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's words: 'be kind, keep safe, and look after each other'.
