



Survey of Government Agency Parents Rooms by MBIE Women in Leadership Network: an overview

By Anna Tavoï, Natalija Andrejic & Monique Esplin
Contact email: womeninleadership@mbie.govt.nz

In 2019-20, three members of the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) employee-led Women in Leadership Network conducted surveys of Parents Rooms across public sector offices in Wellington. The primary reason for these visits arose from deficiencies that we noted in the Parents Room located in MBIE's Stout Street office. In order to make informed recommendations to MBIE decision-makers about improving the Parents Room, we wanted to find out what facilities were provided in Parents Rooms at other government agencies. A secondary objective of the survey was to provide a view of the range in quality of Parents Rooms across the public sector, to enable agencies to reflect on the standard of their Parents Rooms and effect improvements as recommended in the Parents Room Report.

This overview discusses:

- The key elements we found in Parents Rooms across government
- The criteria we used to assess the standard of Parents Rooms across government
- A summary at a broad level of the results of our survey of government agency Parents Room standards
- Our assessment of the MBIE Parents Room at Stout Street
- Improvements that have been made to the MBIE Parents Room at Stout Street following our survey
- A summary and recommendations for the Parents Room at your agency

We would like to thank all the agencies who participated in the survey for generously taking the time to show us their Parents Rooms.

We contacted all Departments of the Public Service listed in Schedule 1 of the State Sector Act 1988 to give them the opportunity to participate in the survey. We conducted site visits at 26 public sector agencies.¹ These agencies were:

Accident Compensation Corporation	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade
Crown Law Office	Ministry of Health
Department of Conservation	Ministry of Housing and Urban Development
Department of Corrections	Ministry of Justice

¹ We also conducted site visits at Wellington offices of the Accident Compensation Corporation and New Zealand Defence Force, which are not included in Schedule 1 of the State Sector Act 1988.



Department of Internal Affairs	Ministry of Māori Development (Te Puni Kōkiri)
Government Communications Security Bureau	Ministry of Social Development
Inland Revenue Department	Ministry of Transport
Ministry for Culture and Heritage	New Zealand Customs Service
Ministry for Pacific Peoples	New Zealand Defence Force
Ministry for Primary Industries	New Zealand Security Intelligence Service
Ministry for Women	Oranga Tamariki (Ministry for Children)
Ministry for the Environment	State Services Commission
Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment	Statistics New Zealand
Ministry of Defence	The Treasury
Ministry of Education	

Some of these agencies have multiple sites across New Zealand and internationally. We visited one building for each of the 26 agencies. The building we visited was usually the agency's main Wellington office.

We wrote up the results of our survey as a report. The report included our assessment of the current state of Parents Rooms across government agencies, including recommendations for improvements to these rooms. The report was provided to our Network sponsors. With endorsement from MBIE's senior leaders, we are sharing an overview of the survey with the agencies who participated in the survey, the Legal Leaders' Group, and the Government Women's Network.

Key elements of a Parents Room

The main purpose of Parents Rooms in government agencies is to provide a space for working parents to breastfeed, express milk, or bottle-feed their babies. They may also be used for other baby-related activities, such as changing nappies or heating infant food.

Some of the different features of Parents Rooms we observed during our site visits included:

Comfort	Accessibility
Private	Signage on door
Adequate temperature	Signage elsewhere
Appropriate seating	Staff awareness of room's location
Adjustable lighting	Capacity compared to demand
	Exclusive access by breastfeeding/bottle-feeding staff
Facilities	Swipe card access only
Changing table	Scheduling system
Closed bin	
Microwave	Other
Sink	Clock
Drinking water	Radio
Hot water	Artwork
Boiling water	Mirror
Fridge	Noticeboard
Wet wipes	



Coffee table	
Paper towels	
Tea/coffee	
WiFi	
Power plug	

Essential Elements for Parents Rooms

We did not consider all of these elements to be essential or of equal importance. To enable comparison of Parents Room facilities across different sites, we created a list of 14 criteria to assess the Parents Rooms that we visited against. We based our criteria on:

- MBIE's *Code of Employment Practice on Infant Feeding*, which provides employers with guidance on how to fulfil their obligations on the provision of breastfeeding breaks and facilities
- International standards and guidelines for Parents Rooms²
- Our personal experiences of using Parents Rooms while at work.

The criteria we considered essential were:

1. **Privacy:** Sufficient separation from office work areas and adequate blinds on any windows so that no one can see into the room.
2. **Appropriate temperature:** Ideally the room should be centrally heated so that it is the same temperature as the rest of the building. The parent should not be required to come into the room and turn on an alternative heating source.
3. **Changing table:** Ideally this should be fixed to the wall, able to be latched away when not in use, and include a safety belt for the infant.
4. **Closed bin:** The benefit of a closed bin is that any odour produced from items put in the bin is less likely to escape, which ensures a pleasant environment for users of the room.
5. **Microwave:** This could be used for heating milk or infant food, or sterilising equipment.
6. **Signage on door that indicates purpose of room:** Clear signage ensures that the purpose of the room is understood and it is less likely to be utilised by staff members who are not breastfeeding, expressing breastmilk or bottle-feeding.
7. **Appropriate seating:** Comfortable chairs that are conducive to breastfeeding, expressing breastmilk and bottle-feeding.

² In the United States, for example, employers must provide Parents Rooms if they have a member of staff who wishes to breastfeed on site. Some individual States set out basic requirements for what should be in a Parents Room. In Hong Kong, there are requirements for Parents Rooms that anticipate a wide range of parents' needs. Internationally, breastfeeding advocacy organisations such as the Australian Breastfeeding Association have also made suggestions about what Parents Rooms should contain. The Australian Breastfeeding Association has published criteria for Parents Rooms which take a holistic view of the needs of mothers feeding their children in various ways at work.



8. **Sink:** Primarily for washing equipment and washing hands.
9. **Adequate capacity compared to demand:** Multiple Parents Rooms may be needed for buildings which accommodate large numbers of staff.
10. **Drinking water facilities:** Parents should have access to drinking water facilities in the comfort of the room without having to exit for drinking water.
11. **Hot water available:** For washing equipment/hands.
12. **Exclusive access by breastfeeding/bottle-feeding staff:** This ensures privacy and comfort for the user. In our view, it is not suitable to combine a Sick Room with a Parents Room because this potentially exposes the child and parent to illness.
13. **Awareness of location:** In our view, all agencies should include information about the location of the Parents Room in inductions for new staff members. Information about the room should also be provided on the staff intranet.
14. **Adequate fridge:** A fridge is essential for storing milk away from common staff areas.

Summary of Results

Figures 1 and 2 give an overall picture of how well the government agencies we visited met our essential criteria.

Figure 1: Number of agencies that met the essential criteria

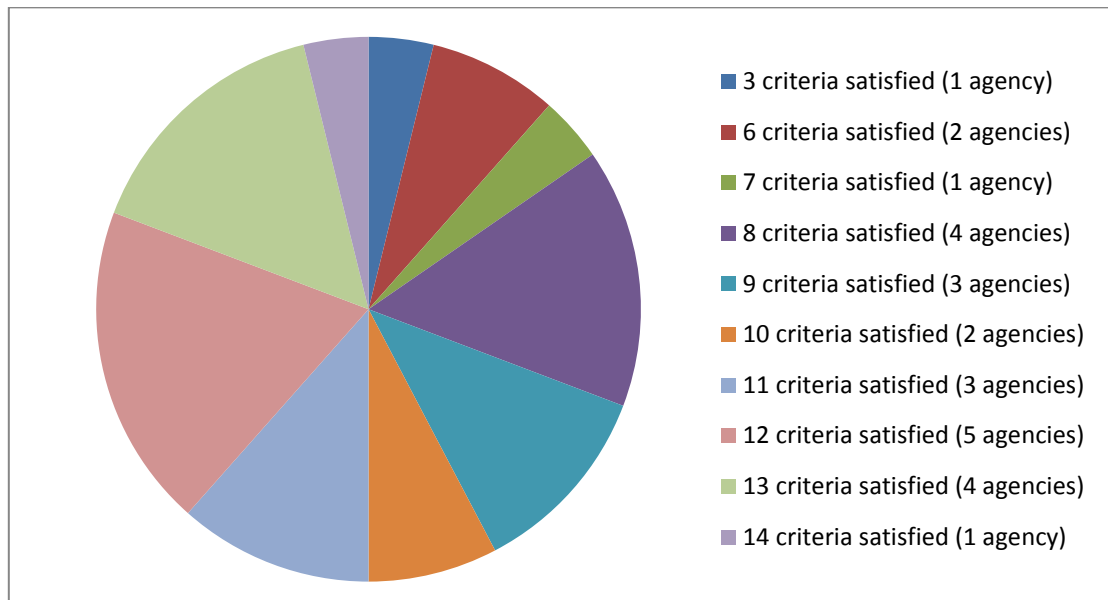
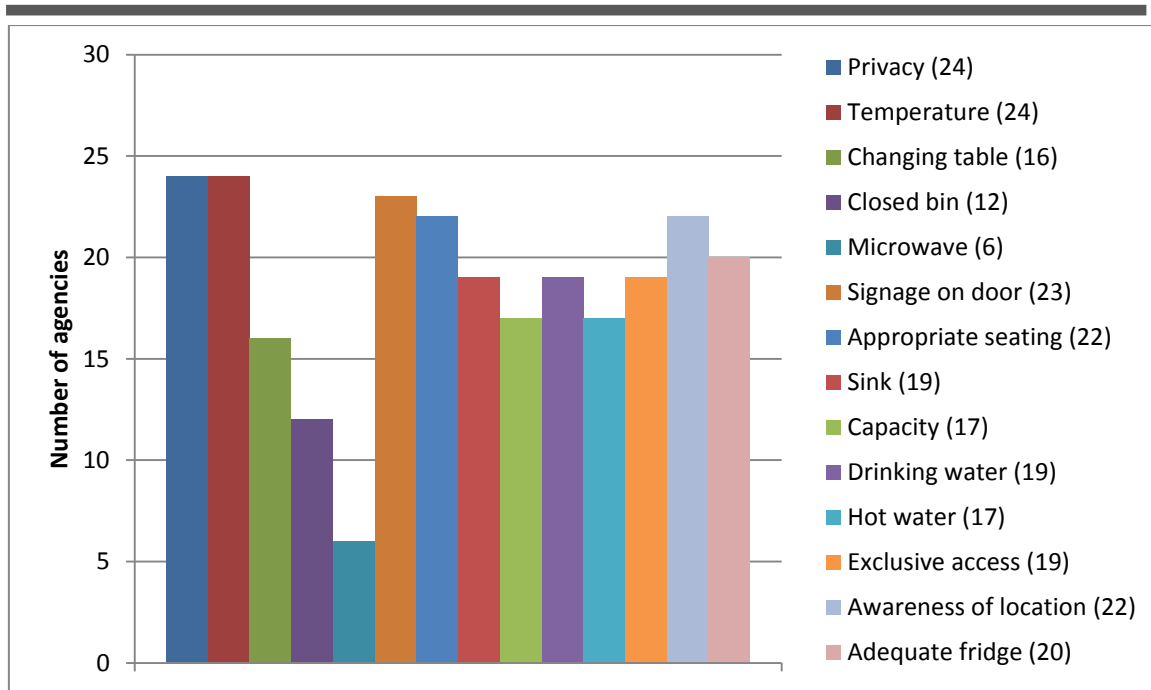


Figure 2: Results of assessment against criteria across agencies



Only one of the agencies we visited had all of the 14 elements we considered essential for a Parents Room.

Almost all of the agencies satisfied the essential elements of privacy and temperature (24 out of 26 agencies). These agencies ensured their Parents Room was in an isolated location and heated using the central heating system so that it was the same temperature as the rest of the building.

Almost all of the agencies ensured the Parents Room had a sign on the door to indicate that it was to be used by parents only (23 out of the 26 agencies).

A majority of the agencies (22 out of 26 agencies) ensured that staff were aware of the existence and location of the Parents Room. Usually this was achieved by including it in the induction process for new staff and by providing information on the staff intranet.

A majority of agencies had an adequate fridge (20 agencies out of 26 agencies).

A much smaller number of agencies (12 out of 26 agencies) ensured the Parents Room included a closed bin.

A minority of agencies (6 out of 26 agencies) ensured the Parents Room included a microwave. We appreciate that some of the agencies had a microwave in another room, but some agencies provided a microwave on an entirely different floor. This would be inconvenient for parents to access.



Parents Room at MBIE's Stout Street Office

MBIE received the lowest score out of any government agency that participated in the survey of Parents Rooms. MBIE's Parents Room only had two of the essential elements that we looked to find in Parents Rooms. These were appropriate seating, and a changing table.

We concluded that the Parents Room at MBIE's Stout Street office was insufficient for its intended purpose. The room designated as a Parents Room used to be the landlord's office and no refurbishments had been made to ensure its suitability for use as a Parents Room.

The main issues with the room included:

- Its location at a thoroughfare used by a large number of staff to access the building meant that the room was not quiet and private.
- The room did not have central heating and was too cold for use.
- The size and layout of the room did not accommodate a reasonable capacity of potential users of the room and did not provide adequate privacy for people using the room in the event that multiple people should require the room at any one time.

In our report, we recommended the following changes to the MBIE Parents Room at Stout Street:

- Adequate quiet and privacy
- A more adequate changing table
- A closed bin
- A microwave
- New seating
- Increased capacity to accommodate demand
- A sink
- Signage on the door and inside the room to indicate the room's purpose
- New carpet

We also discovered a general lack of awareness about the existence of the Parents Room. We thought information about the room should be provided on the staff intranet and included as a mandatory part of the induction for new staff members.

Subsequent Improvements to MBIE's Parents Room

In our view, it is particularly important that MBIE sets the benchmark for excellence in the Parents Room facilities it provides to staff because:

- MBIE has established itself as the authority on what employers should provide to breastfeeding and bottle feeding parents as the author of the *Code of Employment Practice on Infant Feeding*.



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- MBIE is one of the largest government organisations in New Zealand. This means that a large number of employees are affected by the breastfeeding facilities provided.
 - The breastfeeding facilities provided are a reflection of the value MBIE places on the wellbeing of staff members who are parents.

After the findings and recommendations from our report were presented to the staff network sponsors and property and facilities teams, MBIE used the information from the report to schedule improvements to the Stout Street Parents Room, including:

- Internal and external signage for the room
- Replacement of items in the room including new chairs, fridge, microwave, rubbish bin and changing table.
- Wifi access in the room
- More adequate heating for the room