

In confidence

Office of the Minister of Education

Cabinet Chair

COVID-19 – Bolstering our Distance Learning Response

Proposal

- 1 This paper seeks agreement to a series of actions to bolster our distance learning response to Covid-19 disruptions for schooling and early learning.

Relation to Government priorities

- 2 This is an operational paper which seeks agreement to bolster distance learning support for schooling and early learning both immediate and ongoing as a result of changes to Covid-19 Alert Levels.

Background

- 3 On 23 March 2020, Cabinet authorised Ministers of Finance and Education to jointly approve the provision of immediate funding of \$36.440 million in 2019/20 and 2020/21 to ensure students can access teaching and learning online if their school is temporarily closed [CAB-MIN-20-0136 refers]. On 7 April 2020, a further \$51.340 million was authorised by the COVID-19 Ministerial Group, with Power to Act, to ensure "reach and equity".
- 4 Since March 2020, work has continued to ensure the Ministry of Education ('the Ministry') is well-placed to support schools and kura, and targeted early learning services, through Covid-19 related disruption to face-to-face teaching and learning [METIS 1234656 refers].
- 5 This has included:
 - Business continuity planning and working with schools, kura and early learning services, to assist them to effectively plan for any school or site closure.
 - An ongoing proactive internet connectivity campaign across South Auckland, Northland, Bay of Plenty and Waikato; and
 - Having contingency stocks of fit-for-education devices, learning packs as well as generating new broadcasting content (live and on-demand).
- 6 I have heard that many schools and kura are feeling confident about their ability to continue teaching and learning remotely. However, I am also aware that a number will require further distance learning support from the Ministry, and it is important to respond as we can to these needs and to be prepared for possible further Alert Level changes in the future.

- 7 Accordingly, your agreement is sought to a series of immediate actions to bolster the distance learning response.
- 8 The actions proposed will broaden and deepen existing levels of support for schools, kura and targeted early learning services for periods over which face-to-face teaching and learning is not possible due to Covid-19.

Analysis

Fit-for-education devices

- 9 Over the course of 2020-2021, we provided 36,851 fit-for-education devices to schools and kura for the use of their learners. Priority was given to secondary students given they were undertaking NCEA. Schools and kura now have access to any devices for distribution to students that were left on premises at the time of Alert Level 4 coming into effect.
- 10 As of June 2020, devices supplied met all known demand for students in Years 9-13+ (as expressed by schools and kura). However, new demand has since arisen due to the arrival of new entrants to Year 9 as well as general churn factors such as non-return or loss of devices, and the movement of students. National demand estimates anticipate that around 7,000 – 8,000 devices are required for Years 9-13+. The Ministry currently holds a small contingency supply of devices (1,929) [METIS 1248643 refers].
- 11 To meet anticipated demand in secondary schools and kura, your agreement is sought to the Ministry purchasing up to 7,000 additional devices up to a total, at a total cost of \$4.02 million.¹
- 12 Your agreement is also sought to the Ministry prioritising device provision as follows:
 - 12.1 Secondary schools impacted by a positive Covid-19 case e.g. Avondale College. This recognises that staff will not have access to the school site to distribute devices that remained on-site when Alert Level 4 came into effect.
 - 12.2 Secondary schools in Auckland, Coromandel, Waikato, Bay of Plenty and Northland. Delegating decisions to me as Minister of Education to alter these regions and/or order of prioritisation if needed due to new information on Covid-19.
 - 12.3 Within those regions prioritising first wharekura (to ensure equitable provision for ākonga in Māori-medium education), then higher year levels and lower deciles.
- 13 Your agreement is sought to delegate decisions to distribution of any residual devices (once the prioritisation steps above are taken) to me as Minister of Education.

¹ This will purchase up to 7,000 total devices, including up to 6,000 laptops and 1,000 Chromebooks. The Ministry may not be able to immediately source sufficient stock.

Internet access

- 14 The Ministry has successfully provisioned (or is in the process of provisioning) over 40,000 household internet connections for the period ending December 2021 [METIS 1266046 most recently refers].
- 15 Since March 2021, the Ministry has been working to proactively provide internet connectivity to learners in secondary schools and kura across South Auckland, and has recently expanded this offering to Northland, Waikato (including Coromandel) and the Bay of Plenty. This work is ongoing, and the Ministry will prioritise wharekura and households with students receiving devices [METIS 1252165 refers].
- 16 Existing funding is unlikely to be sufficient to fully meet demand across the country. New student roll return data shows about 20% of student addresses have changed since 2020 as well as new learners entering the system. Accordingly, the Ministry estimates that there are around 7,000 new connections that need to be made across Aotearoa New Zealand. This is likely to carry a total cost of 9(2)(f)(iv) .
- 17 To ensure the Ministry can meet this demand, your agreement is sought to delegate authority to joint Ministers of Finance and Education to approve funding to purchase up to 7,000 new internet connections, in the event these are needed. This delegated authority will not exceed a total value of .
- 18 Taking this connectivity work provides temporary relief but does not resolve longstanding issues affecting digital equity. Funding for connections provisioned through the Ministry ceases in December 2021. I understand that the Department of Internal Affairs are leading next steps to close the digital divide. I have asked the Ministry of Education to work closely with them on how to not lose the gains made through our efforts in response to Covid-19 Alert Level changes.

Learning packs – Years 1- 10 and targeted early learning

- 19 Not all learners are able to access online learning and online options are not always appropriate (particularly for younger children). Accordingly, we distributed over 280,000 learning packs over 2020 to respond to raised Alert Levels.
- 20 The Ministry holds a contingency supply of approximately 135,000 learning packs, appropriate for learners across a range of ages and settings. While work continues to support schools, kura and early learning services to develop their distance learning response plans to minimise demand for centrally provided learning packs, these learning packs nonetheless remain fit-for-purpose.² Note that the Ministry also holds a stock of learning packs for

² Learning packs supplied in English-medium settings are designed for different year levels – meaning that any learners who received learning packs over 2020 will have moved into the next year level so will receive a learning pack with new content. Learning packs supplied to Māori-medium settings have been augmented to ensure they offer new learning opportunities for ākonga. Kura and wharekura have also recently received new Matariki learning packs which offer a further avenue of support. Learning packs offer around four weeks of learning.

children in managed isolation facilities and that these are not included in this total.

- 21 Decisions will be made by early next week on the distribution of existing contingency supply. However, depending on sector demand, stock may need to be replenished to ensure preparedness for any ongoing or further Covid-19 disruption.
- 22 To allow the Ministry to manage this in a timely manner, your agreement is sought to delegate authority to joint Ministers of Finance and Education to approve funding to purchase new learning packs, in the event this is needed. This delegated authority will not exceed a total value of \$22 million.

Learning packs - NCEA

- 23 In the 2020 national lockdown, the Ministry established a system to allow schools to build individualised packs of NCEA subject resources from a range of licensed providers. Nearly 8,000 packs were distributed, but the highly customised approach created logistical challenges and was relatively slow.
- 24 Many secondary students will have access to online learning. However, some may not, due to connectivity issues or demand for access to their learning device from other members of their household.
- 25 The recommended approach is:
 - 25.1 That schools are encouraged to access, from their premises, any hard-copy material which students may need in order to ensure that what is sent matches their NCEA learning programme
 - 25.2 The Ministry produces refined NCEA learning packs, which focus on providing engaging, exciting resources that will augment education across learning areas in English and Māori-medium. These packs will contain resources that do not require further teacher input, have been well tested with Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu (correspondence school) students and can be produced relatively quickly.
- 26 As there are currently no NCEA learning packs in the Ministry's contingency supplies, your agreement is sought to approve immediate funding of \$600,000 to produce them.

Additional costs

- 27 To move with speed and reduce the chances of materials or devices being sent to the wrong address, the Ministry will ship learning packs to services and schools to on-send where possible. The Ministry will do the same with devices for schools. The Ministry is also asking schools and kura to produce and send their own learning materials and devices where they can.
- 28 Your agreement is sought to immediately establish a pool of funding of \$5 million to support with these additional costs. Any money not required will be returned to the centre.

- 29 I have asked the Ministry to provide me with further advice in due course on how we can both set and support clearer expectations for schools and kura about the level of pandemic preparedness they are expected to have in place, to reduce the need for centrally provided learning packs.

Live and on-demand content

- 30 As part of our previous distance learning support package, we funded television teaching and learning content in both English and te reo Māori. Previously aired footage is currently available on demand. There is also six weeks' worth of new content available to us to broadcast.
- 31 Decisions on activation of this new content on live and on-demand television, and for what time duration, will be made by early next week.
- 32 I am seeking your agreement to delegate authority to joint Ministers of Finance and Education to approve funding to procure additional television content, in the event this is needed, up to a total value of no more than [REDACTED]

Financial Implications

- 33 Your approval is sought to several changes to existing appropriations in Vote Education to give effect to the policy decisions outlined in this paper.
- 34 In particular, your agreement is sought to immediately provide funding of \$9.62 million to meet urgent needs.³ It is also recommended you agree that the proposed changes to appropriations for 2021/22 above be included in the 2021/22 Supplementary Estimates and that, in the interim, the increase be met from Imprest Supply.
- 35 Further, your agreement is sought to establish a contingency fund of \$28 million for the purchase of further distance learning supports, subject to additional demands expressed by the sector which will be heavily influenced by the period over which COVID-19 Alert Level 3-4 remain in-place.
- 36 Finally, your approval is sought to authorise the Minister of Education and the Minister of Finance jointly to draw down said tagged operating contingency funding (establishing any new appropriations as necessary), subject to their satisfaction with the outcome of the further work by the Ministry.

Legislative Implications

- 37 There are no legislative implications relating to matter described in this paper.

Proactive Release

- 38 It is not my intention to proactively release this paper at this time due to commercial sensitivity relating to procurement activities.

Recommendations

³ Including \$6.1 million operating and \$4.020 million capital.

The Minister of Education recommends that the Cabinet:

- 1 **note** that, since March 2020, work to support schools, kura and early learning services through ongoing COVID-19 disruption has continued [METIS 1237093, 1241053, 1248643 refer]; and that, while that many schools and kura are feeling confident about their ability to continue teaching and learning remotely, a number will require further distance learning support should Alert Levels remain raised;

Recommendations relating to fit-for-education devices

- 2 **note** that, while all known demand for devices across Years 9-13+ nationally in 2020 was met, new demand has since arisen;
- 3 **approve** immediate funding of \$4.02 million to purchase available fit-for-education devices up to a total of 7,000 devices;
- 4 **agree** that the Ministry of Education distribute devices to secondary schools, prioritising: those schools impacted by a positive Covid-19 case; schools in Auckland, Coromandel, Waikato, Bay of Plenty and then Northland; and within those regions prioritising first wharekura (to ensure equitable provision for ākonga in Māori-medium education), then higher year levels and lower deciles (para 13 refers)
- 5 **agree** to delegate decisions to the Minister of Education to alter priority regions, if needed, in response to information on Covid-19;
- 6 **agree** to delegate decisions to the Minister of Education relating to distribution of residual devices once the prioritisation steps in recommendation 4 are taken;

Recommendations relating to internet connections

- 7 **note** that the Ministry has continued to proactively provide internet connectivity to learners in secondary schools and kura across Auckland, Bay of Plenty and Waikato (including Coromandel), and that this work is ongoing [METIS 1252165 and 1266046 refer]
- 8 **note** that the Ministry estimates that there are around 7,000 new connections that need to be made across Aotearoa New Zealand;
- 9 **agree** to delegate authority to joint Ministers of Finance and Education to approve funding to purchase up to 7,000 new internet connections, at a total cost of no more than 9(2)(f)(iv)

Recommendations relating to learning packs

- 10 **note** that the Ministry holds a contingency supply of approximately 135,000 learning packs, but does not have NCEA specific packs in stock;
- 11 **agree** to immediately approve funding of \$600,000 to print and distribute learning packs for learners engaging in NCEA;

- 12 **agree** to delegate authority to joint Ministers of Finance and Education to approve funding to purchase new learning packs should demand for the contingency supply deplete the stock, up to a total value of \$22 million;

Recommendations relating to additional costs

- 13 **approve** the immediate establishment of a pool of funding of \$5 million to cover additional costs related to sourcing and distribution of distance learning materials and devices;
- 14 **note** that the Ministry will return any unspent funding to the centre;

Recommendations relating to live and on-demand content

- 15 **agree** to delegate authority to joint Ministers of Finance and Education to approve funding to purchase up to four weeks of new content, in the event this is needed, up to a total value of **9(2)(f)(iv)**

Financial recommendations – immediate funding

- 16 **approve** the following changes to appropriations to give effect to the policy decisions in recommendations above, with a corresponding impact on the operating balance and net core Crown debt:

	\$m – increase/(decrease)				
Vote Education	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26& Outyears
Minister of Education					
Multi-Category Expenses and Capital Expenditure:					
Improved Quality Teaching and Learning MCA					
Departmental Output Expense:					
Support and Resources for Teachers	5.600 ⁴	-	-	-	-
Non-departmental Capital Expenditure					
Schools Furniture and Equipment	4.020	-	-	-	-
Total Operating	5.600	-	-	-	-
Total Capital	4.020				

- 17 **agree** that the proposed change to appropriations for 2021/22 above be included in the 2021/22 Supplementary Estimates and that, in the interim, the increase be met from Imprest Supply;

⁴ Note this includes a pool of funding for additional costs relating to sourcing and distributing hardcopy materials (\$5 million) and \$600,000 for immediate printing of NCEA learning packs.

- 18 **agree** that the expenses and capital expenditure incurred under recommendation 16 above be charged against the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund established as part of Budget 2020;

Financial recommendations – establishing a contingency

- 19 **agree** to the purchase of further distance learning supports, subject to further work ascertaining additional demands expressed by the sector which will be heavily influenced by the period over which COVID-19 Alert Levels 3-4 remain in-place;
- 20 **agree** to establish tagged operating contingencies of up to the amounts as follow in Vote Education, to provide for further distance learning support:

	\$m – increase/(decrease)				
	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26& Outyears
Ongoing Distance Learning Support (Learning Packs) – Tagged Operating Contingency	22.000	-	-	-	-
Ongoing Distance Learning Support (Internet Connections) – Tagged Operating Contingency	9(2)(f)(iv)	-	-	-	-
Ongoing Distance Learning Support (Live and On-demand Content) – Tagged Operating Contingency		-	-	-	-
Total Operating		-	-	-	-

- 21 **authorise** the Minister of Education and the Minister of Finance jointly to draw down the tagged operating contingency funding in recommendation 20 above (establishing any new appropriations as necessary), subject to their satisfaction with the outcome of the further work described in recommendation 19 above;

- 22 **agree** that the tagged operating contingencies in recommendation 20 above be charged against the against the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund established as part of Budget 2020.

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Chris Hipkins

Minister of Education



Cabinet

Minute of Decision

This document contains information for the New Zealand Cabinet. It must be treated in confidence and handled in accordance with any security classification, or other endorsement. The information can only be released, including under the Official Information Act 1982, by persons with the appropriate authority.

COVID-19 – Bolstering our Distance Learning Response

Portfolio Education

On 20 August 2021, Cabinet:

- 1 **noted** that, since March 2020, work to support schools, kura and early learning services through ongoing COVID-19 disruption has continued, and that while that many schools and kura are feeling confident about their ability to continue teaching and learning remotely, a number will require further distance learning support should Alert Levels remain raised;

Fit-for-education devices

- 2 **noted** that, while all known demand for devices across Years 9-13+ nationally in 2020 was met, new demand has since arisen;
- 3 **approved** immediate funding of \$4.02 million to purchase available fit-for-education devices up to a total of 7,000 devices;
- 4 **agreed** that the Ministry of Education (the Ministry) distribute devices to secondary schools, prioritising: those schools impacted by a positive Covid-19 case; schools in Auckland, Coromandel, Waikato, Bay of Plenty and then Northland; and within those regions prioritising first wharekura (to ensure equitable provision for ākonga in Māori-medium education), then higher year levels and lower deciles;
- 5 **authorised** the Minister of Education to alter the priority regions in paragraph 4 above if needed, in response to further information on Covid-19;
- 6 **authorised** the Minister of Education to make any further decisions relating to distribution of residual devices once the prioritisation steps in paragraph 4 above are taken;

Internet connections

- 7 **noted** that the Ministry has continued to proactively provide internet connectivity to learners in secondary schools and kura across Auckland, Bay of Plenty and Waikato (including Coromandel), and that this work is ongoing;
- 8 **noted** that the Ministry estimates that there are around 7,000 new connections that need to be made across Aotearoa New Zealand;
- 9 **authorised** the Minister of Finance and Minister of Education to jointly approve funding to purchase up to 7,000 new internet connections, at a total cost of no more than **9(2)(f)(iv)** **subject to** decisions on the proposed tagged operating contingencies referred to in paragraph 19 below;

Learning packs

- 10 **noted** that the Ministry holds a contingency supply of approximately 135,000 learning packs, but does not have NCEA specific packs in stock;
- 11 **approved** immediate funding of \$600,000 to print and distribute learning packs for learners engaging in NCEA;
- 12 **authorised** the Minister of Finance and Minister of Education jointly to approve funding to purchase new learning packs should demand for the contingency supply deplete the stock, up to a total value of \$22.0 million, **subject to** decisions on the proposed tagged operating contingencies referred to in paragraph 19 below;

Additional costs

- 13 **approved** the immediate establishment of a **9(2)(f)(iv)** funding pool to cover additional costs related to sourcing and distribution of distance learning materials and devices;
- 14 **noted** that the Ministry will return any unspent funding to the centre;

Live and on-demand content

- 15 **authorised** the Minister of Finance and Minister of Education jointly to approve funding to purchase up to four weeks of new content, in the event this is needed, up to a total value of **9(2)(f)(iv)**, **subject to** decisions on the proposed tagged operating contingencies referred to in paragraph 19 below;

Financial Implications – immediate funding

- 16 **approved** the following changes to appropriations to give effect to the above policy decisions, with a corresponding impact on the operating balance and net core Crown debt:

	\$m – increase/(decrease)				
Vote Education Minister of Education	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26& Outyears
Multi-Category Expenses and Capital Expenditure:					
Improved Quality Teaching and Learning MCA					
Departmental Output Expense:					
Support and Resources for Teachers	5.600 ¹	-	-	-	-
Non-departmental Capital Expenditure					
Schools Furniture and Equipment	4.020	-	-	-	-
Total Operating	5.600	-	-	-	-
Total Capital	4.020				

- 17 **agreed** that the changes to appropriations for 2021/22 above be included in the 2021/22 Supplementary Estimates and that, in the interim, the increase be met from Imprest Supply;

¹ Note this includes a pool of funding for additional costs relating to sourcing and distributing hardcopy materials (\$5 million) and \$600,000 for immediate printing of NCEA learning packs.

- 18 **agreed** that the expenses and capital expenditure incurred under paragraph 15 above be charged against the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund established as part of Budget 2020;

Financial Implications – establishing a contingency

- 19 **noted** the proposal to establish tagged operating contingencies of up to the amounts as follows in Vote Education, to provide for further distance learning support (paragraphs 9, 12 and 15 refer):

	\$m – increase/(decrease)				
	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26 & Outyears
Ongoing Distance Learning Support (Learning Packs) – Tagged Operating Contingency	22.000	-	-	-	-
Ongoing Distance Learning Support (Internet Connections) – Tagged Operating Contingency	9(2)(f)(iv)	-	-	-	-
Ongoing Distance Learning Support (Live and On-demand Content) – Tagged Operating Contingency		-	-	-	-
Total Operating		-	-	-	-

- 20 **deferred** a decision on the proposal to establish tagged operating contingencies in paragraph 19 above;
- 21 **noted** that the Minister of Education and Minister of Finance will further consider the proposal to establish tagged operating contingencies to provide for further distance learning support and will report back to Cabinet.

Michael Webster
Secretary of the Cabinet