

**In confidence**

Office of the Minister of Education

COVID-19 Ministerial Group

**COVID-19 – Sustaining our Distance Learning Response**

**Proposal**

- 1 This paper seeks agreement to establish tagged operating contingencies to sustain 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 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 20 August 2021, Cabinet 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.
- 4 Cabinet authorised the Minister of Finance and Minister of Education jointly to approve funding to purchase further distance learning supports for schools, kura and early learning services, should this be needed, up to a total value of \$28 million, subject to further decisions being taken to set-up a tagged operating contingency [CAB-21-MIN-0329 refers].
- 5 Cabinet deferred a decision on the proposal to establish a tagged operating contingency for further distance learning support and directed Ministers of Finance and Education to report back on this, following further consideration [CAB-21-MIN-0329 refers].
- 6 Following on from decisions noted in CAB-21-MIN-0329 [at 21], your agreement is now sought to immediately fund production of learning packs, and to establish a tagged operating contingency to fund a series of distance learning supports for schools, kura and early learning services

## Analysis

### *Learning packs*

- 7 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. Each of these packs contains around four weeks of learning content.
- 8 The Ministry holds a contingency supply of approximately 135,000 learning packs for a range of ages. Proactively procuring these resources has set us up well for ongoing disruption and this is an approach the Ministry intends to continue.
- 9 Existing stock comprises:
  - 9.1 English-medium (Years 1-10): 64,000
  - 9.2 Māori-medium (Years 1-10): 20,600
  - 9.3 Early learning, including kōhanga reo: 43,000.<sup>1</sup>
- 10 Since the country moved to Alert Level 4 the Ministry's regional teams have been working with schools, kura and targeted services to identify how many packs would be needed, should Alert Levels remain raised for a longer period-of-time.
- 11 Available demand information shows priority region demand for learning packs uses up the current stock for English-medium. Schools and kura in the Auckland region alone are requesting over 40,000 English-medium packs.
- 12 The Ministry is working with schools and kura to encourage them to send their own learning materials to their students who need them rather than relying on Ministry packs.<sup>2</sup> On 19 August, all schools, kura and services were advised that small numbers of staff could enter their workplaces, in accordance with the COVID-19 Public Response (Alert Level Requirements) Order, to prepare and distribute materials and/or devices.<sup>3</sup> Schools, kura and services doing this will help ensure that material aligns with what their students were already covering with their teachers and kaiako.
- 13 I expect demand for learning packs to drop somewhat as schools and kura enter their sites to send their own materials, and become aware that we have

---

<sup>1</sup> To note, early learning packs will be provided to children in services that receive targeted funding rates, where those services identify that packs are needed. This is the same approach taken previously.

<sup>2</sup> To note much of the material in the Ministry learning packs has also been provided in printable version online.

<sup>3</sup> Under clause 18(2)) that a person can go to the premises in order to "enable workers to work, or continue to work, remotely or from their place of residence".

provided for some additional devices for secondary students. Never-the-less given I have asked the Ministry to immediately begin distributing existing learning packs, prioritising the Auckland region, as of 23 August and then the North Island (focusing on the regions around Auckland), it is now important we move quickly to replenish the supply.<sup>4</sup> If existing supply is exhausted, the Ministry's ability to swiftly respond to school and service closures will be significantly reduced. There is very little risk of wastage as any packs purchased but not required (e.g. should Alert Levels be lowered) can be warehoused for any possible future disruption or distributed for educational use should Alert Level need pass.

- 14 It is recommended that you approve immediate funding of [redacted] million to print learning packs for early learning, Years 1-10 and additional packs for NCEA – in both English and Māori-medium.

#### *Live and on-demand content*

- 15 As part of our previous distance learning support package, the Government 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 content available for broadcast, which is a mix of new and previously aired content.
- 16 I have asked the Ministry to commence TV broadcasting for for an initial period of two weeks with a rolling review on the basis of Government decisions about Alert Levels.
- 17 It is recommended that you authorise the Minister of Finance and Minister of Education to approve funding to purchase additional television content up to a total value of no more than [redacted] 9(2)(f)(iv), in the event this is needed. This is subject to decisions on proposed tagged operating contingencies (see recommendation 15) and Cabinet decisions on Alert Levels.
- 18 Due to the significant lead-time in creating new content, decisions would need to be made over the coming weeks about whether to seek some or all of this funding from the prospective tagged contingency.

#### *Internet connections*

- 19 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 and Bay of Plenty. This work is ongoing, and the Ministry will prioritise wharekura and households with students receiving devices [METIS 1252165 refers].

<sup>4</sup> To note it takes 2-3 weeks to prepare new packs.

- 20 Existing funding is, however, 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)
- 21 It is recommended that you authorise the Minister of Finance and Minister of Education to approve funding to purchase up to 7,000 new internet connections at a total value of no more than 9(2)(f)(iv), in the event this is needed. This is subject to decisions on proposed tagged operating contingencies (see recommendation 15) and Cabinet decisions on Alert Levels.

### Risks

- 22 There is significant risk associated with taking no further action to support schools, kura and early learning services with distance learning through ongoing COVID-19 related disruption. While many schools and kura are feeling confident about their ability to continue teaching and learning remotely, 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.
- 23 The swifter and more cautious Government response to the COVID-19 delta variant is likely to mean school and service sites are inaccessible for longer periods of time, and at shorter notice. Our central response needs to support learners who are unable to access timely, quality, relevant learning opportunities through their school or service and who may otherwise experience several weeks of lost or significantly reduced learning progress.

### Financial Implications

- 24 Your approval is sought to several changes to existing appropriations in Vote Education to give effect to the policy decisions outlined in this paper.
- 25 Your agreement is sought to immediately provide funding of \$22 million to print learning packs to meet existing and future demand. 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.
- 26 Further, your agreement is sought to establish a contingency fund of \$6 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. Any

funding drawn-down from the contingency will be charged against the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund established as part of Budget 2020.<sup>5</sup>

- 27 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

- 28 There are no legislative implications relating to matters described in this paper.

### Proactive Release

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

### Recommendations

The Minister of Education recommends that Cabinet:

- 1 **note** that, on 20 August, Cabinet immediately approved:
- funding of \$4.020 million to purchase available fit-for-education devices up to a total of 7,000 devices;
  - funding of \$600,000 to print and distribute learning packs for learners engaging in NCEA;
  - establishment of a \$5.0 million funding pool to cover additional costs related to sourcing and distribution of distance learning materials and devices [CAB-21-MIN-0329 refers];<sup>6</sup>
- 2 **note** that, subject to decisions on related tagged operating contingencies, Cabinet authorised the Minister of Finance and Minister of Education jointly to approve funding for the purchase of further distance learning supports for schools, kura and early learning services, comprising:
- new learning packs (should demand for the contingency supply deplete the stock), up to a total value of \$22.0 million;

<sup>5</sup> The initiatives for which funding is sought align with the Treasury Covid-19 Response and Recovery Funding guidelines, namely that: (1) the Ministry is unable to absorb costs within baseline, (2) the funding request is urgent and relates to current Alert Level changes; (3) the request is Covid-19 related.

<sup>6</sup> Comprising \$5.6 million operating and \$4.02 million capital.

- up to 7,000 new internet connections, at a total cost of no more than 9(2)(f)(v) million;
- up to four weeks of new content, in the event this is needed, up to a total value of 9(2)(f)(v) million [CAB-21-MIN-0329 refers];

3 **note** that Cabinet deferred a decision on the proposal to establish tagged operating contingencies and directed Ministers of Finance and Education to report back on this, following further consideration [CAB-21-MIN-0329 refers];

*Recommendations relating to learning packs*

- 4 **note** that demand for the Ministry's contingency supply of learning packs is high and that demand in priority regions alone already exceeds available supply for English-medium;
- 5 **approve** immediate funding of \$22 million to print learning packs for early learning, Years 1-10 and additional packs for NCEA – in both English and Māori-medium, prioritising the Auckland region;

*Recommendations relating to internet connections*

- 6 **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, and that this work is ongoing but that the Ministry estimates that there are around 7,000 new internet connections that need to be made for learner households across Aotearoa New Zealand;
- 7 **authorise** 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)(v) million, subject to decisions on the proposed tagged operating contingencies referred to in recommendation 15 below;

*Recommendations relating to live and on-demand content*

- 8 **note** that six weeks of live and on-demand learning content is available, should this be needed, but that this is a mixture of previously aired and new content and the Ministry may need to produce additional content if Alert Levels remain raised for an extended period of time;
- 9 **authorise** 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)(v) million, subject to decisions on the proposed tagged operating contingencies referred to in recommendation 15 below;

*Financial recommendations – immediate funding*

- 10 **approve** the following changes to appropriations to give effect to the policy decisions in recommendation 5 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	22.000	-	-	-	-
<b>Total Operating</b>	<b>22.000</b>	-	-	-	-

- 11 **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;
- 12 **agree** that the expenses incurred under recommendation 10 above be charged against the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund established as part of Budget 2020;
- 13 **note** that the Ministry will return any unspent funding to the centre;

*Financial recommendations – establishing a tagged contingency fund*

- 14 **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;
- 15 **agree** to establish tagged operating contingencies of up to the amounts as follow in Vote Education, to provide for the activities in recommendations 7 and 9 above;

	\$m – increase/(decrease)				
	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26& Outyears
Ongoing Distance Learning Support– Tagged Operating Contingency	6.000	-	-	-	-

Total Operating	6.000	-	-	-	-
-----------------	-------	---	---	---	---

- 16 **authorise** the Minister of Education and the Minister of Finance jointly to draw down the tagged operating contingency funding in recommendation 15 above (establishing any new appropriations as necessary), subject to their satisfaction with the outcome of the further work described in recommendation 14 above;
- 17 **agree** that the tagged operating contingencies in recommendation 15 above be charged against the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund established as part of Budget 2020.

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Chris Hipkins

Minister of Education





# COVID-19 Ministerial Group

## 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: Sustaining the Distance Learning Response

#### Portfolio

#### Education

On 17 August 2021, following advice that a community case of COVID-19 had been identified in Auckland, Cabinet authorised a group of Ministers comprising the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for COVID-19 Response and Associate Minister of Health (Hon Dr Ayesha Verrall) to have Power to Act to take decisions on Alert Level 4 timings and settings [CAB-21-MIN-0324].

Following discussions on 24 August 2021 with officials and Ministers, the group of Ministers with Power to Act:

#### Background

1 **noted** that, on 20 August 2021, Cabinet approved:

- 1.1 funding of \$4.020 million to purchase available fit-for-education devices up to a total of 7,000 devices;
- 1.2 funding of \$600,000 to print and distribute learning packs for learners engaging in NCEA;
- 1.3 the establishment of a \$5.0 million funding pool to cover additional costs related to sourcing and distribution of distance learning materials and devices;

[CAB-21-MIN-0329];

2 **noted** that, subject to decisions on related tagged operating contingencies, Cabinet authorised the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Education jointly to approve funding for the purchase of further distance learning supports for schools, kura and early learning services, comprising:

- 2.1 new learning packs (should demand for the contingency supply deplete the stock), up to a total value of \$22.0 million;
- 2.2 up to 7,000 new internet connections, at a total cost of no more than 9(2)(f)(iv)
- 2.3 up to four weeks of new content, in the event this is needed, up to a total value of 9(2)(f)(iv)

[CAB-21-MIN-0329]

- 3 **noted** that Cabinet deferred a decision on the proposal to establish tagged operating contingencies and directed the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Education to report back on this, following further consideration [CAB-21-MIN-0329];

### Learning packs

- 4 **noted** that demand for the Ministry of Education's contingency supply of learning packs is high, and that demand in priority regions alone already exceeds available supply for English-medium;
- 5 **approved** immediate funding of \$22 million to print learning packs for early learning, Years 1-10 and additional packs for NCEA (in both English and Māori-medium), prioritising the Auckland region;

### Internet connections

- 6 **noted** that:
- 6.1 the Ministry of Education has continued to proactively provide internet connectivity to learners in secondary schools and kura across Auckland, Bay of Plenty and Waikato, and that this work is ongoing;
- 6.2 the Ministry estimates that there are around 7,000 new internet connections that need to be made for learner households across Aotearoa New Zealand;
- 7 **authorised** the Minister of Finance and the 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 tagged operating contingencies referred to in paragraph 16 below;

### Live and on-demand content

- 8 **noted** that:
- 8.1 six weeks of live and on-demand learning content is available, should this be needed, but that this is a mixture of previously aired and new content;
- 8.2 the Ministry of Education may need to produce additional content if Alert Levels remain raised for an extended period of time;
- 9 **authorised** the Minister of Finance and the 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 tagged operating contingencies referred to below;

**Financial implications: immediate funding**

- 10 **approved** the following changes to appropriations to give effect to the policy decisions in paragraph 5 above, 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
<b>Multi-Category Expenses and Capital Expenditure:</b>					
Improved Quality Teaching and Learning MCA					
Departmental Output Expense:					
Support and Resources for Teachers	22.000	-	-	-	-
<b>Total Operating</b>	<b>22.000</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>

- 11 **agreed** that the 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;
- 12 **agreed** that the expenses incurred under paragraph 10 above be charged against the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund established as part of Budget 2020;
- 13 **noted** that the Ministry of Education will return any unspent funding to the centre;

**Financial implications: establishing a tagged contingency fund**

- 14 **agreed** 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;
- 15 **agreed** to establish tagged operating contingencies of up to the amounts as follow in Vote Education, to provide for the activities in paragraphs 7 and 9 above:

	\$m – increase/(decrease)				
	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26& Outyears
Ongoing Distance Learning Support– Tagged Operating Contingency	6.000	-	-	-	-
<b>Total Operating</b>	<b>6.000</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>

- 16 **authorised** the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Education jointly to draw down the tagged operating contingency funding in paragraph 15 above (establishing any new appropriations as necessary), subject to their satisfaction with the outcome of the further work described in paragraph 14 above;
- 17 **agreed** that the tagged operating contingencies in paragraph 15 above be charged against the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund established as part of Budget 2020;

- 18 **noted** that officials will be providing further advice to Ministers as appropriate on the provision and supply of devices, such as laptops, for use in New Zealand.

Janine Harvey  
Cabinet Office

---

Proactively Released