



## Briefing Note: Evaluation Report | Provision of Internet Connectivity and Devices

<b>To:</b>	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
<b>Cc:</b>	Hon Kelvin Davis, Associate Minister of Education Hon Jan Tinetti, Associate Minister of Education Hon Aupito William Sio, Associate Minister of Education		
<b>Date:</b>	2 December 2021	<b>Priority:</b>	Medium
<b>Security Level:</b>	In Confidence	<b>METIS No:</b>	1278617
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<b>Messaging seen by Communications team:</b>	No	<b>Round Robin:</b>	No

### Purpose of Report

The purpose of this briefing is for you to:

- a. **Note** the attached evaluation report which assesses the provision of internet connectivity and devices, through the education 2020 COVID-19 distance learning response, especially key findings, lessons learned and conclusions;

**Noted**

- b. **Note** that the evaluation specifically assessed whether, and in what ways, the provision of internet connectivity and fit-for-education devices had an impact on learners and their whānau and clearly demonstrates the positive benefits for participants both educationally and for their wider wellbeing;

**Noted**

- c. **Note** that it is intended that the key findings and lessons learned through the evaluation inform ongoing work to 'close the digital divide', both within the education context in Budget 2022 and, more broadly, across government;

**Noted**

- d. **Agree** to share this report with Hon Dr David Clark and the Digital Ministers Group;

**Agree / Disagree**

- e. **Agree** that the attached evaluation report will be proactively released through online publication, following this being shared with Hon Dr David Clark, Digital Ministers Group and other invested agencies;

**Agree / Disagree**

- f. **Agree** that this Briefing will not be proactively released at this time for reasons of Budget sensitivity.

**Agree / Disagree**

## Summary

- Following a request from you, the Ministry has been working with teachers, learners, parents and whānau across Aotearoa to evaluate the impact which access to the internet and fit-for-education devices has had on educational and wider social outcomes [METIS 1248643 and 1272098 refer].
- The evaluation focussed on understanding the impacts which the Ministry's work had on the following:
  - a. Learner attendance and engagement;
  - b. Learner progress and achievement;
  - c. Teaching practice;
  - d. Wellbeing of learners and social, cultural, and economic impacts for learners and whānau; and
  - e. Sustained access to connectivity and devices.
- The evaluation draws out rich insights and data on the positive benefits derived from improved digital inclusion for participants, both educationally and for their wider wellbeing. These insights are invaluable to the design and implementation of further education work in this space, as well as that of the wider public sector.
- As stated in the evaluation report, the "achievements of the connectivity and devices rollout were significant," but that "[n]otwithstanding these successes, some learners in Years 9 to 13, and many in Year 1 to 8, still do not have digital access," (page 26). There is more work to be done.
- To help inform and progress this important cross-agency mahi, you may wish to share the attached report with Hon Dr David Clark and Digital Ministers.

  
Ellen MacGregor-Reid  
Hautū | Deputy Secretary  
Te Poutāhū | Curriculum Centre

  
Hon Chris Hipkins  
Minister of Education

02/12/2021

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## Background

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1. In response to COVID-19 related lockdowns over 2020-21, the Government approved funding for the Ministry of Education ('the Ministry') to work alongside schools and kura to improve equitable access to online teaching and learning by:
  - a. contracting with internet service providers to connect a total of around 40,000 learner households to the internet;<sup>1</sup> and
  - b. supplying over 48,500 fit-for-education devices (laptops, iPads and Chromebooks) to schools and kura for learners in-need [CAB-MIN-20-0136 refers].
2. Following a request from you, the Ministry has been working with teachers, learners, parents and whānau across Aotearoa to evaluate the impact which access to the internet and fit-for-education devices has on educational and wider social outcomes [METIS 1248643 and 1272098 refer].
3. The scope of this included evaluation of the impacts of the provision of connectivity and devices to recipients that were delivered from March 15, 2020 to September 31, 2020).

## Evaluation objectives, approach and framework

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4. The evaluation focussed on understanding the impacts the Ministry's work had on the following:
  - a. Learner attendance and engagement;
  - b. Learner progress and achievement;
  - c. Teaching practice;
  - d. Wellbeing of learners and social, cultural, and economic impacts for learners and whānau; and
  - e. Sustained access to connectivity and devices.
5. Associated evaluation measures aimed to gather data from multiple sources to provide triangulation to inform judgements, and evaluation activities included:
  - data investigation of administrative data on recipient learners and a matched comparison group that had not been identified as needing the provision of digital access;
  - four case studies with schools including a Kura Kaupapa Māori and schools that had a high proportion of Pacific learners;
  - surveys of recipient learners (learners over 16-years-old; in Year 11 to 13 in 2020)
  - whānau of younger recipient learners (learners under 16-years-old; augmented with follow-up interviews with respondents; and
  - a description of the connectivity and device rollout.
6. These activities captured views from a broad range of learners and whānau, including high proportions of Māori and Pacific learners to ensure the evaluation respondents reflected the population of recipients. Māori learners and whānau have been drawn from both Kura Kaupapa Māori and English medium schools and include those in

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<sup>1</sup> This number includes: successful connections where learners and whānau are actively using the connection; successful connections where learners and whānau are not actively using the connection; connection attempts that were still in-progress at the end of the evaluation period and will be connected in the future; and connections that are still in progress and will at some point in the future be rejected (e.g. for address issues).

smaller and larger urban centres; Pacific learners and whānau were drawn from secondary schools in South Auckland and from outside Auckland.

## Key findings

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7. Drawing from insights relating to the provision of connectivity and devices from March to September 2020, the full evaluation report is now attached for your review. The key findings are laid out in the executive summary (page 1) and there is a 'lessons learned' section (page 26) as well as the report's conclusion (page 27).
8. The evaluation draws out rich insights and data on the positive benefits derived from improved digital inclusion for participants, both educationally and for their wider wellbeing. These insights are invaluable to the design and implementation of further education work in this space, as well as that of the wider public sector.
9. Some of the key conclusions reached through this evaluation are set out below:
  - The rollout supported learner engagement, achievement, and progress. On balance, it is likely the rollout has supported learner engagement, achievement, and progress, so recipients were not more adversely affected by Covid-19 than their peers with digital access.
  - Analysis of rollout assumptions shows that strong causal conclusions about the extent of the impact of digital access are not warranted. The extent to which the provision of connectivity and devices supported learner engagement, achievement and progress cannot be determined by this evaluation. The evidence is not complete enough or detailed enough to support a conclusion about the magnitude of any impacts. For example, the rollout data does not show how long different recipient learners had digital access.
  - The provision of connectivity and devices has been supportive of learner wellbeing and had a positive impact on learners and whānau socially, culturally, and economically.
  - The March 2020 and subsequent lockdowns, together with the provision of digital access, led to some changes in teaching and learning practice but this might not represent pedagogical change - teachers did not report school-wide change.
  - Universal, educationally functional, digital access to connectivity and devices has not been sustained over the year. Many of the 2020 device-recipients – including around four in 10 Year 11 to 13 learners who did not otherwise have a device – also did not have access to a school device during the Covid-19 lockdown that started in August 2021.<sup>2</sup>
  - Learners that needed digital access did get access, but some have missed out. The Ministry is aware of an ongoing shortfall of devices and a need for complex connections (nearly 5,000 households). This evaluation identified many other instances of Year 9 to 13 learners in need of connections and devices. The extent of the ongoing need in this group is not known.

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<sup>2</sup> This was, in part, due to the swiftness of the regional lockdowns in August 2021 – which may have resulted in devices being temporarily inaccessible if left on school or kura sites. We are aware that this has happened where school/kura practice was to leave devices on-site, rather than allowing them to travel to learners' homes.

## Next Steps

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10. As stated in the evaluation report, the “achievements of the connectivity and devices rollout were significant,” but that “[n]otwithstanding these successes, some learners in Years 9 to 13, and many in Year 1 to 8, still do not have digital access,” (page 26). There is more work to be done.
11. On 29 November 2021, Cabinet approved, as a Budget 2022 pre-commitment against Vote Education, the period of Government-funded internet subscription, keeping all eligible learner households connected until 30 June 2022 [CAB-21-MIN-0503 refers]. While connections and devices brokered through the Ministry can help, it has become clear that a whole-of-system response is the only way to realise the systemic shifts required across Aotearoa.
12. We will continue to work with relevant agencies, including the Department of Internal Affairs (DIA) and the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE), to find solutions which mean these learners and their whānau can continue to enjoy the educational and social benefits which digital access carries.
13. To help inform and progress this important cross-agency mahi, I invite you to share the attached report with Hon Dr David Clark and Digital Ministers. Following this, the Ministry intends to publish the evaluation report and make these important findings available online before the end of 2021.

## Proactive release

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14. It is recommended that proactive release of this briefing be deferred to early 2022 due to Budget sensitivity.

## Annex

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Annex 1: Provision of Internet Connectivity and Devices to Learners | Evaluation Report - A  
2020 Covid-19 response

Proactively Released