



Briefing Note: Meeting with Alternative Education National Body members on Wednesday 23 June 2021

To:	Hon Jan Tinetti, Associate Minister of Education		
Cc:	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
Date:	17 June 2021	Priority:	Medium
Security Level:	In Confidence	METIS No:	1261612
Drafter:	Kosal Kong	DDI:	463 8949
Key Contact:	Ben O'Meara	DDI:	463 8704
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Purpose of paper

This paper provides background information for your scheduled meeting with members of the Alternative Education National Body (AENB).

Summary

We understand the AENB is interested in discussing the progress of the Alternative Education Redesign, current issues facing Alternative Education (including complexity of student needs and provider finances), workforce development in the sector, and an update on the activities and initiatives of the AENB.

Proactive Release

Agree that this Briefing will NOT be released at this time because it includes information that is still under active consideration.

Agree / Disagree



Ben O'Meara
Group Manager
Education System Policy

17/06/2021

Hon Jan Tinetti
Associate Minister of Education

___/___/___


Background

1. You are meeting with members of the Alternative Education National Body (AENB) on Wednesday 23 June.
 - Joe Graham is the AENB Chair, and National Manager Relationships and Development with Blue Light NZ. He is the Regional Representative for the Waikato area and has been involved in Alternative Education for over 20 years.
 - Lois Conway is AENB Deputy Chair, and Director of the Invercargill Student Support Network. She is the Regional representative for Otago/Southland/South Canterbury.
 - Dr Adrian Schoone is Advisor to the AENB, and an AE academic researcher based at Auckland University of Technology.

Topics for discussion

2. The key reason for this meeting is relationship building. The AENB has good relationships with the Ministry, and with previous Ministers, and is keen to continue these close working relationships. We understand the AENB is interested in discussing:
 - a. Progress on the Alternative Education Redesign;
 - b. Current issues facing Alternative Education, including increasing complexity of student needs and financial difficulties facing providers;
 - c. Alternative Education sector workforce development;
 - d. An update on the activities and initiatives of the AENB.

Alternative Education Redesign

3. Priority 6 of the Learning Support Action Plan (LSAP) is to improve education for learners at-risk of disengagement. The AENB was closely involved in work occurring over 2019 to redesign the ideal state for At-Risk provision, and is interested in understanding how progressing the Redesign work fits with your priorities.
4. In April, you agreed that we should take a staged approach to making smaller improvements to build towards the larger system level change that is required, and you identified priority areas for us to focus on [METIS 1256724 refers].
5. We are preparing to engage with the sector to co-design options for changing the referrals process in late June/early July [METIS 1262117 refers]. The AENB is a part of this engagement, which includes a workshop day with sector stakeholders. We have consulted with the Chair of the AENB on the proposed attendance and agenda for the workshop day.
6. We will also continue to engage with the AENB at appropriate times during the development of further policy work on Alternative Education, 9(2)(f)(iv)


Suggested response

7. We suggest you advise the AENB that, while the COVID-19 situation has caused disruption to the intended timeline for this work, the government remains committed to progressing the redesign of the alternative education system, working with sector

stakeholders. The work done in 2019 on the redesign remains the basis for change moving forward.

8. You could also say that:

- I appreciate and thank the sector for your commitment to getting better outcomes for children going through Alternative Education.
- I remain committed to change. However, due to the current fiscal environment, the work will need to be undertaken more incrementally.
- I have asked the Ministry to prioritise work on options for changing the referrals process this year, and I understand you are working closely with the Ministry on this. I look forward to hearing what comes out of this work.
- I am also interested in your views on what the next priority focus areas should be for progressing towards the ideal state for at-risk provision.

Current Issues Facing Alternative Education

Increasing complexity of children's needs

9. The increasing complexity of children's needs is a theme across the education sector, and you recently discussed this with Perry Rush, National President of the New Zealand Principals' Federation, with a specific focus on challenging behaviour [METIS 1254782 refers]. There are flow on impacts for Alternative Education if students needs are not being recognised and managed by schools – whether these are related to behaviour or other learning support needs. Once a student enters Alternative Education, access to any school-based supports is required to go through managing schools – Alternative Education providers do not have direct access to supports.

Suggested response

10. You may wish to acknowledge the challenges that Alternative Education providers face in accessing supports for the learners in their settings. The intent is that, following the redesign of at-risk provision, once ākonga are in full-time intensive provision they will continue to have equitable access to school resources, facilities and information. You may wish to invite the AENB to engage with the Ministry through the redesign process to progress options that bring these aspects of the current state closer to the ideal state.
11. You may wish to recognise that identifying and putting in place the supports required to address the complex issues facing children and whānau needs to be done earlier, and that schools and alternative providers have a critical role to play in this space. We have increased our focus on prevention and early intervention, shifting away from exclusively focusing on responding to challenging behaviours with individual ākonga, and towards more preventative and collaborative culturally enhancing practices.
12. We are also focusing on supporting schools and alternative providers to develop inclusive learning environments where diversity is valued and planned for, as well as building the confidence and capability of teachers to understand and address the relational and environmental factors that influence behaviour.

Financial difficulties facing providers

13. We have had anecdotal evidence from providers saying that they might not be able to continue because current funding is not financially viable. We estimate that since Budget 2012, when we last addressed inflationary pressure for Alternative Education, the cost of service provision has increased by at least 11.7% (based on CPI).

14. Budget 2021 provided cost-pressure funding of a 5% increase to the Alternative Education per student funding rate, from \$11,792 to \$12,380 (\$588 per student place).
15. In recent years, providers have experienced difficulties in covering operating costs including utilities, staffing, learning resources and property leases. Providers have managed this by making difficult decisions between essential costs and seeking charitable funding to cover gaps where possible.
16. The current system of support for ākonga who are disengaged is under-resourced. Alternative Education in particular was originally designed as a short-term intervention, but it has become the main educational setting for a large number of at risk ākonga. Resourcing does not enable parity of provision with schools, or the necessary level of wrap-around support. For example, the resourcing model does not support the employment of registered teachers for ākonga in Alternative Education.
17. The Ministry funds 1888 student places across Alternative Education. The funding rate is not regularly adjusted for price increases and is expected to cover staffing, property and operational costs. The Budget 2021 adjustment will address to some extent the inflationary pressures experienced in Alternative Education since Budget 2012.

18. 9(2)(f)(iv)

Suggested response

19. You may wish to acknowledge that the increase in funding for Alternative Education as part of Budget 2021 was not sufficient to fully address the financial difficulties facing providers, but that it is a step in the right direction. This will not cover the cost of a new model of intensive provision but will help Alternative Education providers to meet cost pressures under the existing model.

20. 9(2)(f)(iv)

Workforce Development

21. We understand the AENB would like to update you on their work on road mapping pathways for staff development in the sector and seek ways to work with government to lift expertise. The Alternative Education workforce is primarily youth workers and tutors. Pedagogical leadership is provided by managing schools to Alternative Education tutors.
22. The AENB has recently commissioned research to understand the professional learning and development needs of the workforce. The report is being finalised and will be published shortly. The AENB may wish to share with you the preliminary findings of the report.
23. As part of Budget 2020, \$0.609m over two years was provided for Professional Learning and Development for Alternative Education Providers.
24. For the 2021 year Alternative Education PLD applications received show that:
 - a. 63% of providers have applied to attend the Alternative Education National Body Conference that will be held in late September.
 - b. 23% of providers have applied to attend Wellbeing workshops that cover training for trauma informed responses.

Suggested response

25. We suggest you express ongoing commitment to working with the AENB on workforce development for the sector, through encouraging continued engagement with the Ministry on this issue.

Activities and initiatives of the AENB

26. The AENB organises an annual Alternative Education Conference, which will take place in September this year. We understand that the AENB will invite you to attend and give a keynote speech at the conference.