



Briefing Note: Talking points – Minister's meeting with NZUSA

To:	Hon Jan Tinetti, Minister of Education		
Cc:			
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Purpose of Report

The purpose of this briefing note is to provide you with talking points and background information, to support your discussion with the New Zealand Union of Students' Associations (NZUSA) on 4 July 2023.

Summary

1. NZUSA represents 14 student associations from universities and polytechs around the country and works alongside other national student associations like Te Mana Ākonga and the National Disabled Students Association. NZUSA advocates on behalf of students on issues that directly affect them, as well as more general areas.
2. This briefing note provides talking points and additional information to support your upcoming meeting with NZUSA.
3. Representatives from NZUSA, Te Mana Ākonga, the National Disabled Students' Association, and the Victoria University of Wellington Students' Association will be in attendance.
4. NZUSA have indicated that they wish to discuss the following topics in this meeting:
 - a. The domestic focus of the outcomes of the Conference of Pacific Education Ministers (CPEM)
 - b. Upholding Te Tiriti at the heart of our education system
 - c. The context of the cost-of-living crisis and its impact on the quality of education, such as the move to blended learning models
 - d. The current exploitation of apprentices, interns, and postgraduate tutors
 - e. Secondary school pathways through to higher education

Proactive Release

1. Agree that the Ministry of Education release this briefing in full once it has been considered by you

☒ Agree / ☐ Disagree



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22/06/2023



Hon Jan Tinetti
Minister of Education

04/07/2023

Background information to support your discussion

9(2)(f)(iv)



Student leaders' analysis of Budget 2023

4. Following the release of Budget 2023, NZUSA provided us with their report *Budget 2023: The Student Scorecard* (see annex 2). This report, written in partnership with Te Mana Ākonga and the National Disabled Students' Association, outlined student leaders' analysis of Budget 2023.
5. The main analysis points in this report were around the adequacy of funding for tertiary education and the cost-of-living pressures on students.
6. NZUSA acknowledges the increase in funding for tertiary education but are concerned that the increase in funding is insufficient given current inflation.

NZUSA's objective for a universal education income

7. A universal education income (UEI), providing a higher level of living support for all students has been a long-term objective for NZUSA. This objective underpins the

issues NZUSA raise in relation to student support eligibility, entitlements, and the financial and mental wellbeing of learners.


8. The Government's response continues to be that a UEI has not been contemplated as it would not be well-targeted. That is, it would give an increased amount of funding to all 400,000 tertiary students irrespective of their diverse circumstances and need. It would also be costly (and such expenditure would need to be balanced against other government priorities).
9. The Ministry had roughly estimated a one-year running cost of \$720 million for a universal student allowance in 2020. This assumes the removal of the parental and personal income tests and the inclusion of postgraduate students while retaining all other eligibility criteria. Costs are likely to be higher depending on specific policy parameters and what rates are applied.
10. As a step towards a UEI, NZUSA would like to see student allowances reinstated for postgraduate study. This has not been a priority for the Government. Student allowances are targeted to those with the most need and in their initial years of study.

Exploitation of apprentices, interns, and postgraduate tutors

Apprentices

11. Between 2019 and 2021 the Government consulted on a range of options for addressing concerns about contracting arrangements (rather than employment relationships) being used in low-paid contexts, in ways that undermine the Government's labour market objectives. A tripartite working group with representatives from New Zealand Council of Trade Unions (CTU), BusinessNZ and government agencies was formed in 2021 to recommend a policy response.
12. The Group singled out apprentices for particular attention. They heard evidence that apprentices – usually young, new entrants to the labour market – were routinely being engaged as contractors rather than employees, particularly in the residential construction sector. The Group considered this to be inappropriate, observing that it was implausible for firms to assert that young apprentices were in business for themselves.
13. The Group recommended that the definition (in employment legislation) of employee be clarified so that the provision of labour under an apprenticeship agreement is considered employment, precluding the possibility of an apprentice being classified as a contractor.

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Postgraduate tutors and interns

16. On 5 April 2023, NZUSA presented to the Education and Workforce Committee enquiry into postgraduate stipends. During their presentation, they described

postgraduate tutoring, junior lecturing, and labour assistant roles as precarious labour, which (anecdotally, with some survey data) included:

- Unpredictable fixed-term and casual contracts
- Lower paid hours than the work demands
- Teaching misclassifications or incorrect pay rates
- Non-standard arrangements such as being paid through gift cards
- Cultural expectations to work over the agreed hours

17. Separately, the TEU has noted that there are disparities between New Zealand's universities in terms of starting pay for tutors, and that many postgraduate tutors earn under the living wage. Opportunities for tutorial work may also be reducing as universities attempt to lower their expenditure on staff.
18. We understand in the context of the Code issues where the line between students and employees are reportedly being blurred have arisen. Providers are subject to self-review of their performance and public reporting in relation to the Code.
19. The issues NZUSA have raised are part of much wider concerns in academia happening now all over the world, one of which is the employment relationship between universities and their staff and students.
20. Hon Dr Ayesha Verrall as Minister for Research, Science and Innovation has signalled work to reduce career precarity and develop clear pathways for future research leaders through Te Ara Paerangi - Future Pathways.
21. We are not aware of the specific issues with interns NZUSA may wish to raise. However, there have been media stories in the last few years about unpaid internships and how they can fall into a grey area between interns who ought to be paid and genuine volunteers.

Proactive Release

It is recommended that this Briefing Note is proactively released, with any information needing to be withheld done so in line with the provisions of the Official Information Act 1982.

Annexes

The following are annexed to this paper:


Annex 1: Talking Points

Annex 2: Budget 2023: The Student Scorecard [see attached PDF]

Annex 2 publicly available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f0515b1b1a21014b5d22dd6/t/6474919d5d377b792a957f3d/1685361106901/Budget+2023+The+Student+Scorecard+%282%29.pdf>

Annex 1: Talking Points

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