



## Briefing Note: Advice to support your meeting with the New Zealand Union of Students' Associations

<b>To:</b>	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
<b>Date:</b>	17 November 2021	<b>Priority:</b>	Medium
<b>Security Level:</b>	In Confidence	<b>METIS No:</b>	1277192
<b>Drafter:</b>	Jenni Barrett	<b>DDI:</b>	9(2)(a)
<b>Key Contact:</b>	Kieran Forde	<b>DDI:</b>	
<b>Messaging seen by Communications team:</b>	No	<b>Round Robin:</b>	No

### Purpose

This briefing provides you with background information and talking points to support your upcoming meeting with Andrew Lessells, President of the New Zealand Union of Students' Associations (NZUSA), via Zoom at 4:30-5pm on Thursday 18 November. Other NZUSA attendees are yet to be confirmed.

### Summary

- NZUSA has requested discussion of the impacts of COVID-19 on learners; learners' experiences of the Education (Pastoral Care of Tertiary and International Learners) Code of Practice 2021; Te Pūkenga; and how the Whiria Ngā Rau framework can support a move towards student partnership in a learner-centred tertiary education sector.
- Gillian Dudgeon and Stuart Cambridge will attend from the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) to support any discussion about the implementation of the Hardship Fund for Learners, which was put in place to provide temporary financial assistance for learners facing hardship due to COVID-19. Nicola Meek will attend from the Ministry of Education to support discussion about Whiria Ngā Rau and student partnership.
- You will also be attending NZUSA's Student Voice Summit via Zoom, from 10–10:45am on Friday 19 November. This will include formal presentation of Whiria Ngā Rau by student leaders to you, and the opportunity for you to give a short speech on your role in growing learner voice and partnership in the sector. We will supply you with separate notes for this event shortly [METIS 1277204 forthcoming].

## Recommendations

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The Ministry of Education recommends you:

**Agree** that this Briefing is proactively released after your meeting with the New Zealand Union of Students' Associations, and with any redactions in line with the provisions of the Official Information Act 1982.

**Agree**

**Disagree**



Kieran Forde  
**Acting Manager**  
Access and Participation Policy  
17/11/2021



Hon Chris Hipkins  
**Minister of Education**  
18/11/2021

## Background

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### The impacts of COVID-19 on tertiary learners

1. NZUSA has regularly engaged with the Ministry of Education and wider Government about the impacts of COVID-19 on tertiary learners since the pandemic's onset early last year. Representatives have been attending regular COVID-19 focused meetings between student leaders and government officials, and with the wider education sector and government officials, since the nationwide shift to Alert Level 4 in August 2021. This has recently involved providing learner perspectives to support the Ministry's development of guidelines for how the COVID-19 Protection Framework will apply to the tertiary education sector.
2. In both 2020 and 2021, NZUSA presented you with a 'National Student Action Plan for COVID-19,' which it drafted with student leaders from national and regional student associations. The 2021 Action Plan included renewed requests for a 'Universal Education Income' for learners, increased funding for the Hardship Fund for Learners (HAFL),<sup>1</sup> increased mental health support, and timely and accessible communication about COVID-19 for learners, among other requests [METIS 1269811 refers]. NZUSA has also published media releases and opinion pieces about the impacts of COVID-19 on learners, and Government's support for learners during COVID-19.
3. More recently, NZUSA indicated strong support for Government requiring mandatory vaccinations for in-person tertiary study to reduce confusion and uncertainty for learners, compared to adopting a more flexible approach. However, NZUSA is also concerned that mandatory vaccinations could exacerbate existing inequities in tertiary education, including for Māori, Pacific, disabled, and rural learners.
4. We have heard positive stories from student associations about learners and providers working in partnership to combat these potential inequities in providers' COVID-19 responses. Examples of these include learners from Otago University Students' Association organising "by and for Māori" vaccination drives and working to create a website of collated information to support vaccine-hesitant learners to make decisions about vaccination; and students at Manukau Institute of Technology working with staff to provide in-home, personalised, and culturally appropriate support for Māori and Pacific learners and families who are vaccine-hesitant.
5. Regardless of the detail of requirements for tertiary education under the new COVID-19 Protection Framework, NZUSA has called for clear and consistent communication from Government to the education sector and from providers to learners, and a framework which recognises the equity needs of diverse learners and tertiary staff.

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<sup>1</sup> NZUSA initially expressed dissatisfaction with the mechanisms for distributing HAFL funding and not sufficiently involving learners in decision-making. NZUSA met with the TEC to discuss its concerns and has not recently raised concerns with officials about HAFL allocation. Gillian Dudgeon and Stuart Cambridge from the TEC will attend your meeting with NZUSA to support any potential discussion about the operation and implementation of the HAFL.

## **The Education (Pastoral Care of Tertiary and International Learners) Code of Practice 2021 (the code)<sup>2</sup>**

6. NZUSA has repeatedly emphasised the importance of the code for learners' wellbeing and safety, particularly in relation to COVID-19. Representatives have noted that, under the code, providers should ensure sufficient sharing of information with their learners, and involvement of learners and their communities in decision-making where practicable. NZUSA has expressed concern that not all providers are sufficiently involving their learners in decision-making, particularly where individual providers are choosing to introduce vaccine requirements for their learners and staff. The Ministry is working to ensure providers' obligations under the code are reflected in guidelines for the tertiary sector about the COVID-19 Protection Framework.
7. NZUSA was strongly involved in the development of the code, and the accompanying dispute resolution scheme for domestic learners, including supporting the Ministry to arrange consultation with regional learners earlier this year. NZUSA also participated in targeted consultation on near-final drafts of the code and the dispute resolution scheme rules and was involved in a sector advisory group for the code's development (its involvement in this group remains ongoing, although the group now exists to support the New Zealand Qualifications Authority in the implementation of the code).
8. NZUSA's primary interest in discussions with the Ministry and wider sector about the code and dispute resolution scheme continues to focus on the importance of learner voice, and learners at the centre. We expect their discussions with you on Thursday will feature these interests prominently. You may also want to update NZUSA on the progress of the dispute resolution scheme: we recently sought your agreement to appoint an operator for the scheme [METIS 1272227 refers] and will publically announce your decision once it has been made. The scheme will also be in operation by 1 January 2022.

### **Learner voice and Te Pūkenga**

9. Learner voice in the vocational education and training (VET) sector is not as developed as in other tertiary education sub-sectors, particularly universities, although NZUSA is trying to grow its reach into the VET sector, including to learners enrolled at Te Pūkenga.
10. This year, Te Pūkenga established an Interim Learner Advisory Committee with representatives from each of its subsidiaries, whose role is to provide learner perspectives for Te Pūkenga's policy development and strategic governance processes. Members of the Interim Learner Advisory Committee have been included in recent meetings about COVID-19 between the Ministry and student leaders, including NZUSA. These representatives have been key in providing the Ministry with insights about the impacts of COVID-19 for regional and vocational learners.

### **Whiria Ngā Rau and Student Partnership**

11. Whiria Ngā Rau is a framework developed with tertiary learner leaders from NZUSA, Te Mana Ākonga, Taura Pasifika, and the National Disabled Students' Association, in partnership with Ministry of Education officials in the last half of 2020, and published

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<sup>2</sup> The code comes into effect on 1 January 2022. Until then, tertiary education providers with domestic learners are expected to comply with the Education (Pastoral Care of Domestic Tertiary Students) Interim Code of Practice 2019, and signatories and schools enrolling international learners must comply with the Education (Pastoral Care of International Students) Code of Practice 2016.

on NZUSA's website in September 2021.<sup>3</sup> The work progresses learners' ambition to strengthen learner voice in tertiary education, and Government's goals for the tertiary education system, drawing on the Education and Training Act 2020, the Tertiary Education Strategy, Ka Hikitia and Tau Mai Te Reo, and the Action Plan for Pacific Education.

12. Whiria Ngā Rau is intended as an offering for learners and tertiary education providers to use to inspire discussion about strengthening learner voice, building connections, learning from each other, and growing partnerships, including practical ways of working to make it real and stories of learner experiences. The framework helps to demonstrate how the code's expectations on providers to develop relationships with learners and communities and involve learners and communities in decision-making may work in reality.
13. Whiria Ngā Rau has received positive attention from providers and learners since its publication. The Academic Quality Association is integrating the framework into its quality assurance audits of the university sector. 9(2)(ba)(i)  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] It is our understanding that this process – developing a framework based on learners' experiences, in partnership with learners and Government, and voluntarily adopted by key organisations 9(2)(ba)(i)  
[REDACTED] – is unprecedented internationally.
14. During your meeting on Thursday, NZUSA will likely want to share Whiria Ngā Rau with you and discuss how the framework might contribute to shifts towards student partnership and learners at the centre across the tertiary education sector. This will be particularly relevant for providers' responsiveness to learners' needs during COVID-19. Nicola Meek from the Ministry will also be in attendance to support you in these discussions.
15. On Friday 19 November, you will be attending NZUSA's Student Voice Summit via Zoom from 10–10:45am. This will include formal, public presentation of Whiria Ngā Rau by student leaders to you, and the opportunity for you to give a short speech on your role in growing learner voice and partnership in the sector. We will supply you with separate notes for this event shortly [METIS 1277204 forthcoming].

## Annexes

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### **Annex 1:** Talking Points for your meeting with NZUSA

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<sup>3</sup> Whiria Nga Rau is publically available at: <https://www.students.org.nz/whiria-nga-rau>.