Purpose of Report

The purpose of this paper is for you to:

**Agree** to further policy changes to the NCEA qualifications to address the COVID-19 related disruptions for schools and kura that recently moved into COVID-19 Alert Level 2.

**Note** that we will shortly provide you with further advice on support for schools and students who may be facing significantly longer periods of lockdown.

Summary

1. In response to the impact of the disruption on students, we provided you with advice following engagement with NCEA PAG and peak body representatives on changes to NCEA [METIS 1269812 refers]. The policy changes approved and then announced on 2 September apply to any specific region or school is at least four weeks (20 school days) total of Alert Level 3 or 4 lockdowns over the course of an academic year. These include:
   a. Reactivating the Learning Recognition Credit system using the same parameters that you agreed last year (up to 10 Level 1 credits, 8 Level 2 credits, or 8 Level 3 credits, earned at a rate of 1 credit per 5 credits achieved)
   b. The NZQA Board confirming changes to University Entrance to reduce the requirements from 14 credits in three approved subjects to 12 credits in three approved subjects, along with the current literacy and numeracy requirements and attainment of NCEA Level 3.
   c. Changes to Certificate Endorsements and Course Endorsements to reduce the number of credits required for these Awards. Certificate Endorsements will require 46, rather than 50 credits at Merit or Excellence Level, and Course Endorsements will require 12 Credits rather than 14 at Achieved, Merit or Excellence Level.
A range of operational changes have also been implemented for all NCEA students to provide greater opportunity for teaching and learning, and more time for students to prepare for assessment:

a. Delaying the NCEA Level 1 Mathematics Common Assessment Task (MCAT) from 14 or 16 September for two weeks – to 28 or 30 September.

b. Delaying the dates of end of year NCEA and NZ Scholarship exams by two weeks. Subjects where students prepare a portfolio instead of sitting an exam also have the due date for these portfolios moved back by two weeks.

c. Waiving the requirement for schools to provide portfolios from students sitting NCEA Level 1 or Level 2 to NZQA to verify.

The Auckland region has already experienced over 20 school days (four weeks) in Alert Level 3 or 4, and students in that region are eligible for these NCEA policy supports. The rest of New Zealand moved into Alert Level 2 at 11:59pm on Tuesday 7 September and reopen for physical instruction for all students on 9 September, so will have experienced 16 school days without physical schooling at this point.

The Ministry and NZQA have received significant requests from schools and teachers for NCEA policy changes as recognition of the widespread disruption COVID-19 has caused, including to those schools and kura which have now moved to Alert Level 2.

We met with your NCEA Professional Advisory Group (PAG) and peak body representatives to discuss possible supports for these schools and kura. The PAG and peak body representatives strongly proposed erring on the side of generosity, and universally agreed that some provision should be provided to all schools and kura in New Zealand. While it was noted that there needed to be space for further changes if required, and the response had to be proportional to the relative disruption when compared with Auckland, they felt that supports could be provided without significant risk to the qualification credibility. Furthermore, the timing of this COVID-19 outbreak was a key consideration (when compared to the national lockdown in 2020) as the little time remaining in the year leaves less time for programme redesign so may put more students at risk of not attaining their qualifications or awards.

The sector representatives were in favour of the provision of Learning Recognition Credits to all students, and most were also in favour of including changes to University Entrance. However, NZQA has engaged with the Vice Chancellor’s Committee and Universities New Zealand (as part of the legislatively mandated consultation), who would strongly prefer to use discretionary entry powers rather than changes to University Entrance to recognise disruption of less than 20 school days. Accordingly, we have not included changes to University Entrance in our recommendations. Last year, changes to University Entrance were implemented alongside the other changes, after 31 days of schooling disruption.

Following the PAG and peak body representative feedback, we advise that all schools and kura have faced meaningful disruption due to the current outbreak of COVID-19, so support for those that have faced 16 school days of disruption is warranted.

We therefore recommend that a reduced support package be made available to provide support for all regions and schools that have not met the four-week (20 school day) threshold, and consist of:
a. Providing Learning Recognition Credits as students gain credits from assessment standards within the 2021 school year

b. A reduced cap on Learning Recognition Credits, to reflect the shorter impact – two fewer credits are available to be earned at each NCEA Level, reflecting the shorter length of COVID-19 disruption.

9 Alongside this additional support, we continue to believe that the changes announced on 2 September remain appropriate to support the Auckland students at this stage. Any students outside Auckland who experience further lockdowns which take them over 20 school days total this year will continue to be eligible for the full set of changes.

10 As per last year, exemptions will continue to be available for students who are unable to attend school physically due to their place of residence being under Alert Level 3 or 4.

11 We have had provisional discussions with the PAG and peak body representatives about the trigger point for additional supports in the case of significantly extended lockdowns. We will meet with them again later this week and provide you with advice on what further supports should be available for Auckland and at what stage.

Recommended Actions

The Ministry of Education recommends you:

a. **Note** that following consultation with your NCEA Professional Advisory Group and the sector peak bodies, the Ministry of Education and NZQA recommend implementing a further policy change to NCEA’s requirements, to respond to disruption to learning and assessment caused by COVID-19 in 2021.

b. **Approve** our recommended policy change to NCEA’s requirements:

   i. Providing Learning Recognition Credits as students gain credits from assessment standards within the 2021 school year (up to 8 Level 1 credits, 6 Level 2 credits, or 6 Level 3 credits, earned at a rate of 1 credit per 5 credits achieved), but not extend the other supports (changes to requirements for University Entrance, course and certificate endorsements).

   ii. These would be available to all students who have not met the threshold for the full package of supports announced on 2 September

   *Agree / Disagree*

   c. **Note** that we will meet the PAG and peak body representatives this week, to provide you with further advice on support for students facing significantly longer lockdowns.

   *Agree / Disagree*

   d. **Agree** to proactively release this report as part of the next regularly planned COVID-19 information release.
The full number of Learning Recognition Credits should be made available to students who have faced more than 20 days of school closure in other parts of the country due to a mix of COVID-19 restrictions and their school being closed for other reasons (eg natural disasters or property issues).
Next Steps

1. Pending your agreement, we will work with your Office to prepare for an announcement and provide key messages.

2. We will continue to monitor the ongoing impact of COVID-19 disruption and will meet with the NCEA PAG and peak body representatives shortly, to seek further advice on supporting Auckland students.

Proactive Release

3. It is intended that this Education Report is proactively released as per your expectation that information be released as soon as possible. Any information which may need to be withheld will be done so in line with the provisions of the Official Information Act 1982.

4. We recommend that this Education Report is released in the next regularly scheduled COVID-19 proactive release.