



## Education Report: NCEA COVID-19 Response for Auckland

<b>To:</b>	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
<b>Date:</b>	16 September 2021	<b>Priority:</b>	Urgent
<b>Security Level:</b>	In Confidence	<b>METIS No:</b>	1271668
<b>Drafter:</b>	James Gavey	<b>DDI:</b>	9(2)(a)
<b>Key Contact:</b>	Grant Klinkum	<b>DDI:</b>	
<b>Messaging seen by Communications team:</b>	No	<b>Round Robin:</b>	No

### Purpose of Report

The purpose of this paper is for you to:

**Note** the added significant disruption Auckland schools and kura have faced with the extended period of Alert Level 4 due to the current COVID-19 outbreak.

**Agree** to further policy changes to the NCEA qualifications to address the COVID-19 related disruptions for Auckland schools and kura that are still in Alert Level 4 as of 16 September.

### Summary

- 1 In response to the current COVID-19 outbreak, we engaged with the NCEA Professional Advisory Group (PAG) and peak body representatives on changes to NCEA. Following advice [METIS 1269812 refers], you agreed to reactivate the Learning Recognition Credit system, and to make changes to University Entrance, Course Endorsements, and Certificate Endorsements for schools which had been in Alert Level 3 or 4 for a minimum of 20 school days (four weeks in 2021). These changes were announced on 2 September. Additionally, you agreed to extend only the Learning Recognition Credits (at a reduced earning rate and attainment cap) to all schools and kura which had experienced over 16 days of disruption, but not met the four-week threshold [METIS 1271647 refers].
- 2 A range of operational changes have also been implemented for all NCEA students including delaying the NZQA examinations, Common Assessment Tasks, portfolio due dates and removal of portfolio verification requirements.
- 3 Schools and kura in Auckland have already been in Alert Level 4 for four weeks due to the current COVID-19 outbreak, as well as having been in lockdown for eight (and in some cases, such as Papatoetoe High School, 13) school days between February and March this year.

- 4 If the Auckland region is still in Alert Level 3 or 4 by the end of Term 3 (1 October 2021), we recommend further policy changes to support students in the Auckland region, who will have faced approximately eight weeks of lockdown through 2021.

Proactively Released

## Recommended Actions

The Ministry of Education recommends you:

- a. **Note** the added significant disruption Auckland schools and kura have faced with the extended period of Alert Level 4 due to the current COVID-19 outbreak.

**Noted**

- b. **Agree** to make the following further changes to NCEA for Auckland schools and kura if Auckland remains in Alert Level 3 or 4 beyond the end of Term 3:

- i. Change the Learning Recognition Credits earned as students gain credits from assessment standards within the 2021 school year (up to 16 Level 1 credits, 12 Level 2 credits, or 12 Level 3 credits, earned at a rate of 1 credit per 4 credits achieved).
- ii. Extend the reduction in credit requirements for Certificate Endorsements (from 46 to 44 credits).
- iii. These changes are a full reactivation of the further support provided to Auckland in 2020, following their second lockdown.

**Agree / Disagree**

- c. **Note** that the recommendations in this report apply to schools in the Auckland region and do not apply to schools outside of Auckland which have been affected by adverse events (for example natural disasters or property issues) in addition to COVID-19 disruptions (resulting in a total of more than 20 days of school closure).

**Noted**

- d. **Agree** to proactively release this report as part of the next regularly planned COVID-19 information release.

**Agree / Disagree**

*What's the rationale here?*



Hon Chris Hipkins  
Minister of Education

17/9/21



Ellen MacGregor-Reid  
Deputy Secretary  
Early Learning and Student Achievement

16/09/2021



Grant Klinkum  
Chief Executive  
New Zealand Qualifications Authority

15/09/2021

## Feedback from NCEA PAG and Peak Body Representatives

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1. The Ministry and NZQA have held several meetings with your NCEA PAG and Peak Body Representatives to discuss the impacts of the COVID-19 disruption on senior secondary education in 2021, including potential changes to support students learning, assessment and achievement.
2. The strong feedback from the sector was that, if Auckland is still in Alert Level 3 or 4 as the end of Term 3 approaches, then further changes to NCEA should be made for Auckland students. Even if lockdown does not last until 1 October, any date proximate to that would mean that physical teaching, learning and assessment would not fully resume until Term 4. There were also strong concerns that many students would not return to school until after the holidays if there were only a small number of days left in the school term when the Alert Level changes.
3. The sector representatives also proposed that any decisions and announcements should wait until there was further clarity on Alert Level changes, some of which was provided on 13 September with the announcement that Level 4 would be extended in Auckland until at least 21 September. If Auckland moves to Alert Level 3 on 22 September, Auckland schools will anticipate Alert Level 3 to last at least a week, which brings it close to the planned end of Term 3 (1 October).
4. In discussions with sector representatives, the Ministry and NZQA discussed the idea of waiting until near the end of Term 3 as the trigger for further LRC support. However, the sector broadly felt that was too late a trigger, noting that some schools and kura have faced additional disruption through the year, such as schools which had positive COVID-19 cases in the February to March COVID-19 outbreak.

## Recommended Changes

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5. In 2020, further support was provided to Auckland after a total of approximately eight weeks of significant disruption. Any date past 29 September 2021 (which is functionally the end of Term 3) would be an equivalent length of total disruption faced by schools and kura in 2021.
6. While the sector and schools are generally better prepared for COVID-19 disruption this year, the timing of the recent outbreak does reduce the replanning options available for schools and teachers. There is less time available for significant changes to learning or assessment programmes, so opportunities which have been lost may not be recoverable. While the total disruption would be equivalent to 2020, we are proposing triggering the additional support for Auckland after 4 additional weeks (rather than the 13 school days as per 2020). This reflects the increased credit and qualification attainment we saw across Auckland in 2020 (noting that this was variably distributed amongst students and schools).
7. Therefore, if Auckland remains at Alert Level 3 or 4 beyond 29 September, we recommend reactivating the further support provided in 2020 and making available the following support:
  - a. An increase in the earning rate and cap of Learning Recognition Credits to 1 earned every 4 credits attained, to a maximum of 16 at NCEA Level 1, and 12 at Levels 2 and 3. This is an additional 6 credits available at NCEA Level 1, and 4 at Levels 2 and 3.
  - b. Students only require 44 credits to gain a Certificate Endorsement (changed from 46 credits).

8. We note that, if Auckland were to move to Alert Level 2 just prior to 29 September, there would likely be significant sector calls for further NCEA support to be implemented, whether or not the above threshold had been publicly announced.

## Next Steps

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9. We have attached a draft Press Release (at Annex 1) and will work with your Office on a potential announcement pending your decisions.
10. The date provided (29 September) represents a length of significant disruption we are confident justifies the response recommended, however we do not recommend pre-emptively announcing the date. This may cause anxiety if schools fear they may narrowly miss out. Instead, we recommend announcing any agreed approach once it is clear that Auckland's disruption will surpass the trigger (or come sufficiently close to the threshold date).

## Proactive Release

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11. 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.
12. We recommend that this Education Report is released in the next regularly scheduled COVID-19 proactive release.

## Annexes

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13. Annex 1: Press Release

## Annex 1: Press Release

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### **NCEA remains within reach for Auckland students**

Additional Learning Recognition Credits (LRCs) for senior secondary school students in Auckland will recognise their extended time in Alert Levels 3 and 4, Education Minister Chris Hipkins announced today.

“These changes mean students in Auckland will have a fair opportunity to attain NCEA, despite the additional disruption they have experienced,” Chris Hipkins says.

Auckland students will be entitled to 1 LRC for every 4 credits they achieve through assessment in the 2021 school year, rather than one LRC for every 5.

These students will be eligible for up to 16 LRCs at NCEA Level 1, and 12 LRCs at levels 2 and 3, instead of the current caps for students who have spent [16 days](#) or [20 days](#) under Alert Levels 3 or 4.

The threshold for Auckland students to be awarded a Certificate Endorsement will also be adjusted to 44 credits at Merit or Excellence level, rather than 46 for students who were able to return to classroom learning sooner.

“These changes are a full reactivation of the support provided to Auckland in 2020, following their second lockdown,” Chris Hipkins says.

“The disproportionate impact of disruption from COVID-19 on Auckland also means some students and their families will remain nervous about returning to school, and it will take time for students to readjust to classroom learning.”

“The opportunity to earn additional LRCs provides reassurance to students that their qualification and awards remain within reach.”

“I would also like to thank schools, teachers and whānau in Auckland for the work they have done to support students during the extended disruption caused by COVID-19,” Chris Hipkins says.

ENDS