



Briefing Note: Update on Key Issues relating to Rural Education

To:	Hon Jan Tinetti, Associate Minister of Education		
Cc:	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
Date:	21 September 2022	Priority:	Medium
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Purpose of Report

You have requested information about rural education following your recent meeting with the National Body of Rural Education Activities Programme (REAP). This briefing provides information about the Ministry of Education's relationship with REAP and updates you on key issues in rural education and our response to these issues. It also provides information on the option of micro-credentialling within Alternative Education in rural communities.

Summary

- You recently met with members of the National Body of REAP. They discussed the wide-ranging education-related issues in rural communities. They also mentioned their involvement in the Rural Education Reference Group (RERG).
- Key issues for rural communities include the impacts of COVID-19, attendance, home-schooling, and Alternative Education.
- Micro-credentialling provides opportunities for people to complement existing qualifications, and/or build towards further qualifications. We suggest retaining a focus on supporting ākonga in Alternative Education to re-engage with education and/or enter their chosen tertiary or employment pathways.

Proactive Release

- a. **agree** that the Ministry of Education release this briefing in full once it has been considered by you.

Agree / Disagree



Tipene Chrisp
Group Manager
Te Puna Kaupapahere



Hon Jan Tinetti
Associate Minister of Education

21/09/2022

25 /09/ 2022

Background

1. There are 13 Rural Education Activities Programmes (REAPs) across Aotearoa, represented by a National Body. The Ministry of Education (the Ministry) holds an ongoing contract with the National Body of REAP related to early childhood education and compulsory schooling, with \$4.790m budgeted for this for FY 2021/22. We also hold contracts with individual REAPs.
2. The Rural Education Reference Group (RERG) is a collaborative sector group made up of national non-government organisations with significant involvement in rural education, including REAPs. The RERG's aspiration for rural education is for "a future where New Zealand learners who live or study outside the nation's urban centres enjoy access to a vibrant and well-resourced formal education network providing consistent, high quality learning opportunities and environments throughout their lives". The RERG meets regularly to discuss matters of concern regarding rural education. You attended the last meeting of the RERG on 29 August 2022.

Key Education Issues for Rural Communities and Our Response

3. Both the RERG and the National Body of REAPs have told us about key education issues that are affecting rural communities. We also know of issues from recent Te Mahau engagement with schools and peak bodies.

Impacts of COVID-19

4. School closures, staff and student illness, isolation periods and other factors have combined over the last three years to disrupt learning and wellbeing. We have received feedback from our engagement with Te Mahau regional teams about the impact of COVID-19 on learning:
 - a. Many schools expressed concern that student attendance and engagement continue to fall.
 - b. Many schools are prioritising learners' wellbeing as they are aware of the increasing amounts of anxiety that learners are experiencing.
 - c. There is significant concern for staff wellbeing as they manage pressure to help struggling learners as well as balancing their own health and that of their whānau. There have been high levels of staff absences and illness due to COVID-19 and other illnesses.
5. The Education Review Office has also recently engaged with schools on the impacts of COVID-19 they are experiencing and noted:
 - a. Staff shortages due to illness and loss of unvaccinated staff is impacting quality of teaching practice and teacher wellbeing. Rural schools and ECE services have experienced a high impact due to being isolated and difficulties in getting relief staff.
 - b. Ākonga are experiencing increased anxiety and decreased enjoyment of learning.
 - c. Attendance issues are widespread and of most concern to schools.
6. The Ministry supports several initiatives to improve access to remote learning including for ākonga in rural and remote areas. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry provided access to internet connectivity, digital resources and other learning equipment. Internet connections have been allocated to more than 40,000 households to help schools and kura continue to provide distance learning support for all students affected by COVID19-related school closures or mandatory isolation of ākonga and their households. New connections are still being provided to ākonga identified by their school as requiring connectivity to support their remote learning. The Ministry is reviewing the most effective way to continue to support ākonga to access remote learning on an on-going basis.

7. In response to the impacts of COVID-19 on schools, Cabinet has approved a further package of initiatives to support ākonga to accelerate their learning, with a focus on provision in Term 4 of 2022 and Term 1 of 2023. These include:
 - a. Expanding or re-starting existing community-led programmes across the country to support Māori and Pacific NCEA students;
 - b. Expanding the cap on Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu summer school enrolments (open to students in Years 11 and 12); and
 - c. Providing additional tuition for ākonga in Years 7 to 13.
8. In the allocation of funding to schools for additional tuition (7 c. above), an additional allowance has been made for isolated schools.

Attendance and Engagement

9. Attendance and engagement continue to be key issues for rural communities.
10. The Attendance and Engagement Strategy has been developed to respond to the decade-long decline in regular attendance and engagement in schools. A Regional Response Fund (RRF) of \$40m over four years has been established through Budget 2022 to meet local education needs, with a strong initial focus on ensuring ākonga are going to school and are engaged in their learning. Te Mahau staff are working with their communities and education sector to understand priorities for local investment using the RRF. The majority of RRF initiatives are at the engagement and planning stage in the regions, with some institutions now starting to receive funding.
11. The national Attendance Service is also placed to assist schools with ākonga attendance. The Central King Country REAP holds the local Attendance Service contract, with REAP staff members working to help ākonga and families where attendance is a concern.

Home-Schooling

12. There are no known issues or data specifically related to rural communities who may be home educating their children.
13. Budget 2022 provides an approximately 2.75% increase to the Home-Schooling Supervision Allowance and the new rates will apply from 2023. This is the first increase to the allowance in over 30 years and responds to requests from the sector to re-consider their funding. All Budgets are contested, and although the home-schooling sector was seeking full redress for 30 years of frozen funding, this was not possible in Budget 2022. We acknowledge that the increase does not address the fact that successive Governments have not adjusted the allowance over time.

Alternative Education

14. Additional funding of over \$2.2m was sourced through Budget 2022 to fund a 2.75% increase to the per-place cost of Alternative Education provision, for 1,888 places, effective from 1 January 2023. New Alternative Education contracts with revised delivery requirements will also come into effect from January 2023, to coincide with the new funding.
15. Funding can be used flexibly by providers to help to meet the costs of essential resources and supports, such as access to quality teaching and learning experiences; learning resources; access to health, mental health and broader social services; enrichment activities; transport costs; and other basic wellbeing needs.

Further Initiatives

16. Ka Ora, Ka Ako (Healthy Lunches in Schools) aims to reduce barriers to education by delivering a free and healthy daily school lunch to ākonga in schools located in communities with greater socio-economic barriers, including those in rural areas. The programme aims to reduce food insecurity, improve levels of concentration and achievement, and improve the overall health and wellbeing of ākonga. There are 256 rural schools and kura in the programme. The programme is also designed to ensure increased employment opportunities and growth for local economies, particularly in regional and rural areas.
17. The Access Barrier Boarding Allowance supports geographically remote ākonga, such as those living rurally or on offshore islands, to cover boarding school fees when there is no local secondary school. There are currently 2097 students who receive the Access Barrier Boarding Allowance. The Multiple Barrier Boarding Allowance is also available for ākonga with multiple barriers to attending their local school. The 2022 Budget increased allowances by 8%.

Micro-Credentialing within Alternative Education

18. You have asked for information on the option of providing young people in Alternative Education with the opportunity to gain micro-credentials through REAP.
19. Alternative education is a short-term intervention that provides educational and pastoral support to ākonga who have become disengaged in learning. It does so in a meaningful way that is targeted to their individual needs and supports them to transition back to mainstream school, further education, training or employment.
20. Micro-credentials, through short modular and job-specific training options, help people to progress in their chosen careers, to redeploy into new career opportunities or to find an entry point into employment or further education. Such short courses and credentials can complement people's existing qualifications, and/or build towards further qualifications.
21. For most people, especially young people and those with limited work experience, completing a substantial tertiary qualification early in their career offers the greatest long-term benefits, both in the labour market and in broader aspects of wellbeing. The income premiums offered by employers reflect the value of the transferable skills and deeper conceptual knowledge that longer qualifications can help people to develop.

REAP Marlborough and Micro-Credentialling

22. You are interested in an example of micro-credentialling that has come up through the Marlborough REAP. In 2022, REAP Marlborough took over the local Alternative Education contract.
23. They have elected to stop using Te Kura and are instead teaching to unit standards, which they see are of more value to students. The unit standards include a mix of literacy, numeracy, careers, communication, health and practical subjects e.g., apply safe working practices in a commercial kitchen.
24. From 2023, if Marlborough REAP retains the Alternative Education contract, they are looking at introducing micro-credentials, linked in with student work experience.

25. Marlborough REAP are partnering with two Iwi-linked organisations. These are:
- 1) Skills.org – an ITO in the process of developing PTE accreditation so it can ultimately offer Youth Guarantee courses.
 - 2) Te Tautoko Ora Foundation who are offering Mahi Whakaara – providing a pretrades training course for Māori rangatahi 15-24 years, 2 intakes per year, 1012 students, focussing on forestry, building, painting, Te Ao Māori, to develop pre-apprenticeship readiness.
26. These partnerships focus on building a transitions hub in Blenheim to address the high numbers of NEETs in Marlborough – all three organisations and programmes plan to offer micro-credentials in areas of interest and linked to work interests.
27. Our aim for ākonga in secondary schooling, including ākonga in Alternative Education, is to support them to determine their own path in education and their futures. Given that micro-credentials are generally used to complement people's existing qualifications, we would suggest it would be more appropriate to focus on supporting ākonga in Alternative Education to re-engage with education and/or enter their chosen tertiary or employment pathway first. This approach aligns with Priority 2 of the National Education and Learning Priorities, which highlights the importance of having high aspirations for every ākonga.