Briefing Note: Te Rito Programme Update

To:	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
Cc:	Hon Jan Tinetti, Associate Minister of Education Hon Kelvin Davis, Associate Minister of Education – (Māori Education) Hon Aupito William Sio, Associate Minister of Education		
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Purpose of Report

The purpose of this paper is to provide you with an update on the Te Rito programme. It follows previous advice [METIS 1262630 dated 25 June 2021, 1266675 dated 30 July 2021, 1266679 dated 30 August 2021 and 1280313 dated 25 January 2022 refer].

This is the first in a series of three briefings about Te Rito with a second briefing on working group feedback and strategic priorities to follow in May, followed by advice about delivery options.

Summary

- In June 2021 we provided advice on cybersecurity in kura and schools in response to a rapid increase in cyber-attacks. We identified two areas of particular concern; the foundational digital infrastructure in kura and schools, and the software they run that holds personal and/or sensitive data, such as student management systems (SMS) and learning management systems (LMS). As a result of these concerns, we paused the national deployment of Te Rito, including the standardised Learning Support Register (sLSR).

- We continued to deliver enhancements to the underlying connection technology and to the dashboards available to connected schools while the rollout was paused in 2021. However, our work has shown that the full scope of Te Rito isn't possible or safe, including from a privacy and security perspective, until SMS market and technology barriers are addressed.

- A parallel independent quality assurance (IQA) report confirmed our findings – the programme faced major issues for delivery, which did not appear to be manageable or resolvable, and change was required. The report noted the programme was directed to start national deployment before the technology solution was adequately progressed.

- Work is underway outside of the Te Rito programme to develop the procurement and commercial strategies necessary to resolve these barriers and lift the capability of SMS [METIS 1269453 refers].

- Reset planning began in December 2021. As part of this work, we are reassessing what can be delivered within the existing constraints and current funding envelope for Te Rito. Approximately $17.4M of existing funding remains.

- We have taken a phased approach to sector engagement to inform revised delivery options. Our initial engagement with our working groups, Te Rau Whakatupu Māori and Te Rau Whakatupu Auraki, and our Sector Advisory Group, was positive. Members supported the reset but warned that the current COVID-19 context will affect sector ability to effectively engage in the coming months. Engagement with the wider sector will take place later in the year once delivery options and timeframes are defined.

- We will provide an update on feedback from our working groups in May, together with advice testing alignment with strategic priorities.

Proactive Release

a **agree** that this briefing is not published at this time under the provisions of section 9 of the Official Information Act: free and frank advice, section 9(2)(g)(i) and commercial sensitivity in relation to IT providers 9(2)(b)(ii).

Agree / Disagree.

Sean Teddy
Hautū Te Pae Aronui / Deputy Secretary

08/04/2022

Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister of Education

9 / 4 / 2022

I'd like a bit more information here please:
1. How much has been invested so far in Te Rito?
2. How did the project get so far down the track before the underlying SMS issues were identified? Was the project adequetely scoped in the beginning?
3. Is continuing to invest the remaining funding in Te Rito the best use of that money given the pressing cybersecurity issues that will need to be addressed before the benefits from Te Rito can be realised anyway?
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Background

Context

1. We established the Te Rito programme to provide a national repository and data sharing platform that would support the flow of information about ākonga as they grow and move between schools and kura.

2. At the end of 2018 we entered a commercial partnership with Canadian vendor CoreFour to deliver Te Rito. We have been working with them to develop and deploy Te Rito using their technology platform, Edsby.

3. An early-stage roll-out began in March 2020 to test connection technology and information dashboards. Wider rollout was paused in June 2021 following cyber security threats to education providers and the health system. In response, the programme team responsible for delivering Te Rito increased its focus on safely connecting to school SMS and initiated replanning.

4. Alongside replanning, during the second half of 2021 the programme continued to build connection technology, address security and privacy issues where it could and develop enhancements for schools and kura that are connected. For example, attendance dashboards were introduced in late 2021 in te reo Māori and English while the March 2022 release set the framework for future SMS connectivity.

5. In parallel, we commissioned an IQA from IQANZ. The IQANZ report crystalised the position our replanning had identified - the programme faced major issues for delivery that did not appear to be manageable or resolvable, and change was required. The report highlighted the complexity of the programme and the operating environment and noted that the programme was directed to start national deployment before the technology solution was adequately progressed. A range of actions were recommended around programme governance, programme scope, technical review and change management. It recognised the barriers in the SMS marketplace and that SMS providers do not meet the security requirements for connection to Te Rito.

Te Rito has delivered benefits

6. We have created a foundation technology platform, data standards and processes that may eventually allow for SMS to share data with each other and with the Ministry safely, securely and subject to appropriate permissions and authorisations. We intend to build on this work so that the value to and contribution from the sector is retained and delivery on government priorities continues.

7. 37 schools and kura and 34 early learning services (ELS) are currently connected to Te Rito. In addition, learning support coordinators in these schools have access to the sLSR. We will continue to support schools, kura, kāhui ako and learning support clusters that are already connected if they choose to remain with their current SMS provider.

8. We have made significant advances through the programme that can be leveraged for other key pieces of work. For example, establishing the common data standard may in future enable systems to interoperate so that learner information can be shared. This is necessary to the success of the Record of Learning initiative.

The reset decision

9. The safety and security of information about ākonga and their whānau has been a priority at every step of developing Te Rito. Over time it has become clear that some of the bigger ambitions we held for Te Rito simply aren't possible or safe without resolving current SMS market and technology barriers. Deploying Te Rito without resolving these barriers would create additional privacy and security risks.

10. In response to rising threats to cybersecurity, we implemented a range of initiatives outside of the Te Rito programme in 2021, including strengthening cybersecurity in schools and kura and exploring options for a 'managed choice' solution for SMS provision. [METIS 12262630 (25 June 2021), METIS 12262630 (30 July 2021) and METIS 1269453 (8 October 2021) refer].

11. In December 2021 we began planning for a reset of the Te Rito programme to focus on options that can be delivered within existing constraints, and to identify those aspects that would better be realigned to other initiatives across the Ministry or deferred. In the meantime, the Te Rito platform will continue to operate and be supported for connected schools, kura and ELSs that remain with existing SMS providers.

12. We are working on a reset plan, focussed on maintaining the original promise of Te Rito (information follows the child) and understanding what, in practice, can best be delivered within current constraints towards that promise. Priorities include:

    a. Keeping live connections going for schools, kura and ELSs;
    b. Reducing on-going programme costs while decision making occurs, noting that approximately $17.4M of funding remains;
    c. Recruiting the specialist skills needed to conduct reset work;
    d. Setting up revised internal governance for decision making following the establishment of Te Mahau;
    e. Working with Treasury and Gateway teams on the programme reset;
    f. Transitioning, where appropriate, cyber security and SMS vendor security work to other live Ministry initiatives;
    g. Stakeholder management and communications planning around the reset;
    h. Planning for future co-design work with our working groups around delivery options.

Sector Engagement

13. One of the strengths of the Te Rito programme, supported by the findings of the IQA, has been a strong commitment to collaboration. We entered into the programme guided by the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and with a willingness to co-design guiding our approach.

14. Our working groups, Te Rau Whakatupu Māori and Te Rau Whakatupu Auraki, who represent Māori and English medium schools, have been key stakeholders throughout the life of the programme. These groups have made an invaluable contribution to the programme and are deeply connected with the kaupapa. Their voice has informed the development from its inception including supporting the choice of vendor, shaping the approach to development and deployment, and representing the mahi to the sector. Te Rau Whakatupu Māori gifted the name Te Rito, and the whakatauāki that has been our guiding principle "Me tiaki te mana o te tamaiti me tōna whanau" (protect and uphold the mana of the child and the whānau).

15. We have engaged with our working groups following the principle of whanaungatanga. As the result of an enduring focus on building connections, with Te

Rito at the centre of our collective efforts, we have built a high degree of trust with our working groups. This approach has been positively received by Te Rau Whakatupu Māori who have felt listened to and respected and have asked for it to be used by other parts of the Ministry.

16. We are committed to retaining this approach as we review delivery options. Considering current sector capacity and feedback from our regional Directors of Education, we intend to take a phased approach to engagement, focussing first on working with our working groups to define delivery options before engaging with the wider sector once deliverables are defined.

17. We met with both of our working groups on 18 March to inform them of reset planning and to hear their initial feedback. We will work with them over coming weeks as we continue to review future options for Te Rito. Our working groups were supportive of the need for a reset and expressed their commitment and continued willingness to engage. They did, however, warn that the ability of the sector to engage in coming weeks and months may be limited due to the current COVID-19 environment.

18. In addition, we have a Sector Advisory Group, in place since 2017, to facilitate engagement with unions, peak bodies and other key stakeholders. We met with this group on 23 March to advise them of the reset and our commitment to continued engagement. All groups expressed a willingness to continue engaging through the reset process. A list of members of our Sector Advisory Group is attached as Annexe 1.

19. Our regional teams also report continued interest in the sLSR and Te Rito. Our decision to take a phased approach to engagement has been guided by recent feedback around a desire within schools for certainty as to the future of the sLSR. We want to provide these schools and kura with certainty as to what will be delivered and when, particularly in light of their limited capacity to engage at the current time.

Key Risks and Benefits

20. The reset offers an opportunity to reassess strategic alignment as well as alignment with sector priorities prior to moving into a delivery phase. Our sector groups are supportive of this work occurring at this point in the programme.

21. There may be reputation risks of delays to wider deployment for both Te Rito and the sLSR [METIS 1266679 refers]. Delays in deployment of the sLSR creates risk related to the ability to deliver on the benefits from the Learning Support Delivery Model for local and national understanding of learning support needs, effectiveness of responses, and data and evidence informed priorities for future investment.

22. We consider that these are outweighed by the need to deliver a safe and secure solution that respects the privacy and security of sensitive ākonga data.

23. Our working groups have signalled there is limited sector capacity to engage around Te Rito due to the current COVID-19 context. This is a significant risk which may affect timelines. We will mitigate this through a phased engagement approach and provide further updates as necessary.

24. A desire from schools for clear messaging around the sLSR is a further reputational risk. Again, our phased engagement approach is intended to mitigate this. We intend to communicate with schools once we have clear options.

Next Steps

25. Reset planning is under way and focussed on defining the way forward. As part of that plan, we will continue to engage with our working groups around future delivery options in April and May.

26. We will provide Ministers with an update on feedback from our working and sector groups in May, together with advice that tests alignment with strategic priorities, prior to future advice on delivery options.

Other Relevant Information

Strategic Alignment

27. Te Rito is a foundation technology that supports delivery of a number of government priorities, including facilitating the standardised Learning Support Register and the Ministry's commitment to implement the Data Protection and Use Policy 2019.

28. The platform that underpins the Te Rito programme has significant potential to achieve the aims of the Education System Digital Strategy for a learner centred, digitally-enabled connected education system when identified vendor marketplace issues are resolved. The platform has a wide range of capabilities which may, for example, support collaboration within and between schools and with parents and whānau, support tools for classroom administration, and enable a wide range of different education delivery modes.

29. Our work to define delivery options will include a strategic alignment assessment, including the Education System Digital Strategy, the Education Work Programme, the National Education and Learning Priorities, the Māori Education Strategic Framework (including Ka Hikitia) and the Action Plan for Pacific Education 2020-2030.

Annexes

Annexe 1: Te Rito Sector Advisory Group Membership

Te Rito Sector Advisory Group	
Name, position	**Organisation**
9(2)(a)	Te Kohanga Reo National Trust
	Ngā Kura-a-Iwi o Aotearoa
	(MSD) Data and Disability Group
	Te Rito Maioha Early Childhood New Zealand
	Statistics New Zealand
	Early Childhood Council
	Association of Intermediate and Middle Schooling
	NZ Council Education Research
	Secondary Principals' Association of New Zealand
	Te Runanga Nui o Ngā Kura Kaupapa Māori
	Post Primary Teachers' Association
	New Zealand Kindergartens Inc.
	New Zealand Catholic Education Office
	New Zealand Area Schools Association
	New Zealand Schools Trustees Association
	New Zealand Educational Institute Te Riu Roa
	New Zealand Principals Federation
	Social Wellbeing Agency
	Te Akatea, NZ Māori Principals Association
	Special Education Principals' Association New Zealand
	Oranga Tamariki
	School Business Managers Association