



28 August 2020



Tēnā koe

Thank you for your email of 2 August to Iona Holsted, Secretary for Education requesting the following information:

- 1. all the background papers and explanation of their intention for the COVID 19 Wellbeing funds*

Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act).

On 3 July 2020 the Government announced provision of a \$50 million Urgent Response Fund (URF) for centre-based early learning services, schools and kura to support the wellbeing needs of their learners and ākonga, and a further \$16 million to support education workforce wellbeing.

Further information on the fund is available at [education.govt.nz](https://www.education.govt.nz) here:

<https://www.education.govt.nz/news/66-million-for-learner-and-educator-wellbeing/#sh-URF>

Information about how to apply for the fund is available here:

<https://www.education.govt.nz/covid-19/urgent-response-fund/>

The Ministry provides regular updates to the early learning sector and school leaders, including information on the Urgent Response Fund, through He Pānui Kōhungahunga | The Early Learning Bulletin and He Pitopiro | Ministry Bulletin for School leaders, these are available at [education.govt.nz](https://www.education.govt.nz) here:

<https://www.education.govt.nz/early-childhood/how-the-ministry-works/early-learning-bulletin/>

and here:

<https://www.education.govt.nz/school/ministry-bulletin-for-school-leaders-he-pitopito-korero/>

Your request

We have identified seven documents in scope of your request, these are outlined in the table attached as **Appendix A** together with our decisions on their release.

We have included business process guidance provided for regional groups being convened to work with Regional Directors to identify priority needs in each region. These regional

groups will decide how the local allocation of the \$50 million fund is best distributed, to make a difference to attendance and engagement in learning for children and young people.

I am refusing documents 1 and 3 under section 18(d) of the Act as this information will soon be publicly available on the Ministry's website as part of a Budget 2020 Proactive release under the following link: <https://www.education.govt.nz/our-work/information-releases/issue-specific-releases/>.

Please note, the Ministry now proactively publishes responses under the Act on our website. As such, we may publish this response on our website after five working days. Your name and contact details will be removed.

Thank you again for your email. You have the right to ask an Ombudsman to review this decision. You can do this by writing to info@ombudsman.parliament.nz or Office of the Ombudsman, PO Box 10152, Wellington 6143.

Nāku noa, nā

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Katrina Casey', written over the printed name.

Katrina Casey
Deputy Secretary
Sector Enablement and Support

Document Number	Document Date	METIS	Title	Comment
1	15 April 2020	1225662	Education Report: Options for a Wellbeing Package to respond to COVID-19	Refused under section 18(d) of the Act. NB: Document will be made available at the following link: https://www.education.govt.nz/our-work/information-releases/issue-specific-releases/
2	4 June 2020	1230760	Education Report: Urgent Response Fund for early learning services schools and kura in 2019/20	Released in full
3	12 June 2020	1230312	Education Report: Wellbeing Budget Package announcement and options for guidance counsellors in secondary schools	Refused under section 18(d) of the Act. NB: Document will be made available at the following link: https://www.education.govt.nz/our-work/information-releases/issue-specific-releases/
4	27 July 2020		Memo to Katrina Casey from Susan Howan Subject: Extension of interim approach – Urgent Response Fund	Released in full
5	3 August 2020		Urgent Response Fund (URF) Sector Guidance	Released in full
6	August 2020		Urgent Response Fund [Draft] Terms of Reference	Released in full
7			Urgent Response Fund FAQs	Released in full



Education Report: Urgent Response Fund for early learning services, schools and kura in 2019/20

To:	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
Date:	4 June 2020	Priority:	High
Security Level:	Budget Sensitive	METIS No:	1230760
Drafter:	Laura Stokes	DDI:	04 463 8711
Key Contact:	Susan Howan	DDI:	04 463 2839
Messaging seen by Communications team:	No	Round Robin:	No

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to seek your urgent agreement that the \$2 million Urgent Response Fund made available by Cabinet for use in 2019/20 can be allocated immediately to early learning services, schools and kura with the greatest need, ahead of Government's announcement of the wider Wellbeing Budget package for supporting learners.

Recommendations

The Ministry of Education recommends that you:

- a. **Agree** that we begin immediate allocation of the 2019/20 \$2 million Urgent Response Fund to early learning services, schools and kura with the greatest need, ahead of Government's announcement of the wider Wellbeing Budget package

☒ Agree ☐ Disagree

- b. **Agree** that this Report will not be proactively released at this time because it is Budget sensitive.

☒ Agree ☐ Disagree

Katrina Casey
Deputy Secretary
Sector Enablement and Support

Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister of Education

04/06/2020

5 / 6 / 2020

Urgent Response Fund 2019/20

1. On 11 May 2020, Cabinet agreed to fund a package of initiatives across the education sector to support the wellbeing of learners, their family and whānau, and school staff in the wake of COVID-19. The package consists of initiatives that provide short-term support for immediate responses to the pandemic, longer-term initiatives to strengthen curriculum delivery and support positive whole of school/kura/early learning service learning environments, and improve access to wellbeing services for those who need it.
2. The Wellbeing Budget package includes \$52 million to establish an Urgent Response Fund for early learning services, schools and kura. This is made up of \$2 million in 2019/20 and \$50 million in 2020/21.
3. The Wellbeing Budget package including the Urgent Response Fund has yet to be announced by Government and is therefore Budget Sensitive.
4. We are seeking your urgent agreement that the Ministry's regional offices can begin to allocate the \$2 million available in 2019/20 to early learning services, schools and kura with the greatest level of COVID-19 related wellbeing needs. We intend to do this using an existing Ministry funding process (Special Reasons) which provides additional, as-needed funding for exceptional or unforeseen circumstances.
5. By starting allocation, we seek to ensure the Urgent Response Fund is utilised by 30 June 2020 for immediate support for wellbeing issues experienced by children and young people as a result of COVID-19, as intended by Cabinet.
6. If you agree to this approach, the Ministry's regional Directors of Education would identify early learning services, schools and kura with specific needs to allocate the funding. In line with the existing Ministry Special Reasons funding process, the purpose and value of the fund would not be publicised.
7. We will provide you a separate report about the wider Wellbeing Budget package announcement.

Proactive release

8. We recommend that this Report is not proactively released at this time because it is Budget sensitive.

11/07. 27/7

To: Katrina Casey, Deputy Secretary Sector Enablement and Support
From: Susan Howan, Associate Deputy Secretary, Strategy and Implementation *SH*
Cc: Helen Hurst, Associate Deputy Secretary, Operational Delivery
Pamela Cohen, Group Manager, System Innovation and Strategic Design
Date: 27 July 2020
Subject: Extension of interim approach - Urgent Response Funding

Purpose

1. This memo seeks approval to extend the interim approach for the Urgent Response Fund by releasing an additional \$2 million of the budget to the regional offices for distribution.

Background

2. On 11 May 2020, Cabinet agreed to fund a package of initiatives across the education sector to support the wellbeing of learners, their family and whānau, and school staff in the wake of COVID-19. The Wellbeing Budget package includes \$52 million to establish an Urgent Response Fund. This is made up of \$2 million in 2019/20 and \$50 million in 2020/21.
3. Directors are currently setting up regional groups to co-design the regional priorities and approach and make recommendations on the use of the fund in each region. An interim approach was used for June 2020 to allow Regional Directors to support those in need.

Next Steps

4. The immediate release of an additional \$2 million from this year's \$50 million fund to Directors would enable regions to maintain momentum in responding to needs identified in early learning services, schools and kura.
5. The approach for allocation to regions will be consistent with the interim approach used during June 2020. This has been agreed to by Damian Edwards, Deputy Secretary of Evidence, Data and Knowledge. Refer to Appendix One for the allocations and guidance.
6. Pending the set up of the regional groups, Directors would make decisions on this funding following the same business processes and documentation as used in June for the \$2 million fund allocated in 2019/20.
7. If the funding is not released, we will be unable to provide immediate support for the wellbeing of learners, their family, whānau, and school staff in the wake of COVID-19. Support will be unavailable until a collaborative sector implementation approach has been confirmed for the full \$50 million fund.

Recommendations

8. It is recommended that you:

- a) **Note** that this is an interim measure to continue support to early learning services, schools and kura while the new regional groups and decision making processes are implemented.

NOTED

- b) **Note** that decisions on this interim funding allocation will use the same business processes and documentation as applied in June 2020.

NOTED

- c) **Approve** the allocation to the regions of an additional \$2 million from the URF budget for regions to spend immediately.

APPROVED / NOT APPROVED


Katrina Casey
Deputy Secretary
Sector Enablement and Support

27.7.2020

Released Under the Official Information Act 1982

Urgent Response Fund (URF) Sector Guidance

COVID-19 Wellbeing Fund

03 August 2020

Released Under the Official Information Act 1982

Contents

Urgent Response Fund: Identify and respond to local needs and priorities.....	2
Local decisions about the use of the funds	2
Funding Purpose	3
Eligibility	3
What the URF can and can't be used for	3
Operating and accountability requirements.....	4

Released Under the Official Information Act 1982

Urgent Response Fund: Identify and respond to local needs and priorities

The Urgent Response Fund (URF) has been established because many students need extra help, especially around supporting their return to school and their attendance and reengagement in their learning after such a difficult time. Many learners are stressed about their education, and the future of their families. Some have been impacted by an increase in family tensions during lockdown.

The URF is for immediate support for any learning, social and emotional, mental, behavioural, or other wellbeing issues which children and young people have and which are impacting on their attendance and or engagement with learning.

A national fund of \$50 million has been made available up to 30 June 2021 to support this initiative. The available funding has been allocated across the ten education regions based on the equity index.

Education Region	Total funding
Tai Tokerau	\$2,903,385
Auckland	\$14,510,125
Waikato	\$5,246,328
Bay of Plenty/Waiariki	\$4,434,844
Hawke's Bay/Tairāwhiti	\$3,340,310
Taranaki/Whanganui/Manawatu	\$3,988,202
Wellington	\$5,246,938
Nelson/Marlborough/West Coast	\$1,855,707
Canterbury/Chatham Islands	\$5,222,717
Otago/Southland	\$3,251,445
NZ	\$50,000,000

As a region, we will work together to determine how the available funding can best support the needs of the children and young people in our rohe. A regional group or groups of around 6-8 sector leaders will work together with the Director of Education to design the approach to understanding local needs and priorities, and determining the best use of the funding to respond to those needs and priorities in a way that makes a real difference for children and young people.

Regional groups are likely to include representation from primary principals, secondary principals, early learning services, Māori medium, mana whenua and the Director of Education. Regions may decide to have a number of sub-regional groups rather than a single regional group to cover the whole region. The Chair can be one of the members that is not the Director of Education.

A draft Terms of Reference for regional groups is included as Appendix 1. Deciding how to work together is our starting point and we need to discuss and finalise our terms of reference.

Local decisions about the use of the funds

The URF has been allocated to regions, with decisions on applications from early learning services, schools and kura to be made by Directors of Education at a regional level based on recommendations from the

regional group/s. A regional group may want to work together to co-design proposals to respond to a specific local need, across multiple schools and early learning services.

A regional group may decide that within the agreed priorities, the Director of Education can make rapid approvals of funding requests up to a certain value. This is to ensure that urgent situations can be addressed quickly.

The Group may ask the Director to ensure regular reporting to it of attendance data and may decide on that basis to put in place some short term initiatives across clusters of schools that it considers would assist to address these issues – so the funds can both be spent on individual issues at a child or school or early learning level or at a cluster level.

There are some clear parameters for this funding that we will work within:

- funding purpose
- eligibility
- what it can and can't be used for
- operating and accountability requirements.

These are set out below.

Funding Purpose

The Government has provided a \$50m URF to support schools and early learning services to get children and young people back on track after the COVID-19 lockdown. This includes supporting sustained improvement in attendance, strengthening engagement with learning, and safeguarding and promoting wellbeing. The funding is for supports that will make a tangible, lasting and positive impact for children and young people.

The funding must be directed towards increasing attendance, strengthening engagement with learning and safeguarding and promoting wellbeing of the children and young people in our region. Requests for URF must relate to improving outcomes for specified individual or groups of children and young people.

Eligibility

The funding is available to support:

- **Centre-based early learning services:** Licensed nga Kōhanga Reo, Playcentre, Kindergarten and Education & Care services (including casual); and
- **Schools:** State schools, state integrated schools, Māori medium kura, Special Schools

Please note:

- To avoid double-funding Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu students who are dual-enrolled would be eligible for URF support through their local school, not Te Kura.

What the URF can and can't be used for

The URF funding can be used for individual, group, class or school, kura or early learning service wide responses to learner wellbeing needs. Responses across clusters of early learning services, schools and kura are also eligible.

Some examples of the kinds of support that can be funded by the URF:

- Support for individuals, a group, a class or early learning service or school- or cluster-wide responses that have a wellbeing focus
- Resources or materials for improving children and young people's wellbeing/reducing stress, anxiety, depression, grief

- Community support which is child-focused and can be delivered by the early learning service/school, such as before or after school care
- Additional support for learners with mild to moderate, to high and complex needs including those who are neurodiverse and gifted
- Catch-up access, small group tutoring
- Mentors, counsellors, behaviour support workers
- Professional advice (psychologists, counsellors etc.) or individual or whole of-class responses to children or young people's needs
- Support for clusters to work together to identify and respond to the changing service needs of individual learners and groups of learners to enable sustained improvements in attendance and engagement with learning
- Additional teacher aide time
- Additional teacher time or teacher release to directly support sustainable increases in children and young people's attendance, engagement with learning, and wellbeing.

The URF cannot be used for:

- Professional Learning and Development
- Leadership support or staff wellbeing
- Grants to support a shortfall in funding or supporting ongoing activities of a school or early learning services that would be reasonably expected to be covered through existing funding
- Support that the Ministry is supposed to provide
- Fund additional ORS places
- Capital expenses, including maintaining or improving school or centre infrastructure
- Welfare supports, for example food or clothing
- Support that is provided or funded by other government agencies
- Ongoing funding of projects for more than a year
- The cost of trips or excursions that have had to be cancelled as an outcome of COVID-19
- Payment of parent fees contribution to early learning services.

Operating and accountability requirements

URF processes and documentation need to meet the required standards for:

- decision-making
- probity
- procurement and value-for-money
- performance and reporting.

The Ministry's regional office will provide administrative and process support to the regional group/s. A standard application form for URF requests will ensure consistency and make sure that the information, documentation and processes uphold accountability and probity. This form is available through <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/PT33R5W>

Decision-making

The regional group will make recommendations about the use of the funds. The final decision about allocation of the funding sits with the Director of Education as the delegation holder.

The controls required over the use of the funds include:

- Use for intended purpose - meets the agreed criteria/purpose of the funding, including not for prohibited purposes.
- Clarity about what is expected for the specific funding – responding to what need, for whom, how much will be sourced, amount of the funding/price etc.
- Clarity about the individual or group of children or young people the application relates to and the expected outcome benefit
- This information will be captured in the application form, so it is clear what need the application is responding to, what will be funded and the result expected from the funding.

Probity

Regional groups will provide probity assurance including:

- Funding is going to suitable suppliers.
- Ability to demonstrate openness, transparency and fairness of any decisions regarding the allocation of funds.

The process and decision-making will be transparent to all, and accountability to local communities will be important. The uses of the funding and outcomes achieved will be reported locally and nationally.

Conflicts of interest will be identified and managed in accordance with the draft URF Regional Groups Terms of Reference.

Procurement and Value for Money

The URF funding is subject to government procurement guidelines:

- If the Ministry is procuring, a competitive process will be required over \$100,000, and a selected quotes process over \$50,000.
- If the Ministry is the funder and an early learning service, school or kura is the procurer the government procurement guidelines also apply.

Regional groups will consider value for money as part of their role – what process and information is used to ensure the right price is paid for the support.

The Ministry of Education through Directors of Education will provide regular update information to regional groups about types of support and their costs approved for the URF to enable moderation across different regions (e.g. for a particular type of support.)

Performance and Reporting

The Ministry of Education will track and report on the use of the funds: how much, where, for what and make reporting information available to regional groups through Directors of Education. This ensures we can track the allocation of the funding.

The Ministry will ask URF recipient schools and early learning services to provide report back information about the impact of the funding, for example what changes have been achieved in attendance and engagement with learning for individual children, or groups, as well at the school level.

Early learning services and schools in receipt of funding will be advised that the Ministry of Education may use the information provided in the form to contact their school or service about whether the funding or staffing provided achieved the intended outcomes.

Urgent Response Fund

[Draft] Terms of Reference for Regional Group(s)

Purpose

The Government has provided a \$50m Urgent Response Fund (URF) to support schools and early learning services to get children and young people back on track after the COVID-19 lockdown. This includes supporting sustainable increases in attendance, strengthening engagement with learning, and safeguarding and promoting wellbeing. The URF is available from July 2020 to June 2021.

Local knowledge and priorities will underpin decisions about the use of URF funding. One or more regional groups will work with the Ministry Director of Education to determine how the funding can best support the attendance and engagement of the children and young people in learning in their role arising from the impact of COVID-19 on their wellbeing.

This document outlines the role and arrangements for URF regional groups. It is subject to amendment by the Group(s) at its/their first meetings and is produced as a guide only.

Role

The role of the URF regional group(s) is/are to:

- Ensure urgent needs are met in a timely manner
- Work with the Director of Education to design the approach to identifying and addressing emerging needs and priorities
- Determine the best use of the funding to respond to those needs and priorities in a way that makes a real difference for children and young people
- Make recommendations to the Director of Education about the allocation of the URF in the region
- Provide local intelligence, knowledge and perspectives to ensure the regional priorities for support are connected and coherent
- Support effective communications about the URF within the region
- Review reporting and outcomes data and information and apply to further identification of needs and priorities, and funding recommendations.

The Director of Education in each region has delegated authority for the expenditure of the funding and delivery oversight.

The regional group will always be guided by the rights and obligations under the Tiriti o Waitangi.

Media Coverage

Any communication with media personnel about the URF will obtain prior clearance from the Secretary for Education or their delegate.

Membership

The regional group membership will comprise a representative of primary schools, intermediate schools, secondary schools, area schools, Māori medium, Early Learning Services, representation of mana whenua in the region, and the Director of Education. The URF regional group will be chaired by one of the members that is not the Director of Education. The group will select its Chair.

The Chair is responsible for the overall direction of the meeting. The Chair is also responsible for determining and confirming the agenda, which may include the Chair requesting a paper(s) be supplied where appropriate. Delegates may only attend at the discretion of the Chair.

There may be more than one group established, for example groups may be established for different parts of the region or for different sectors.

Meeting Logistics

The group will determine the meeting arrangements that best support how the group wants to work together to achieve its purpose. These could be a combination of face to face and zoom meetings and timing will depend on the need for fast decision-making.

As a guide, it is expected that meetings will be held monthly up to June 2021, if and as required, taking into account that much of the group's work will be technology enabled and conducted remotely. URF regional group members will be advised of the meeting dates for the year. Urgent meetings may be convened with the agreement of the Chair.

The draft minutes of all meetings are circulated to members within 3 working days of the meeting. Information provided to the URF regional group is confidential and must be held in confidence by members of the Group.

The URF regional group(s) will report quarterly via the monthly Director's report to the Deputy Secretary, Sector Enablement and Support. These reports will be about the outcomes achieved for children and young people as a result of the expenditure and will be used to inform future decisions.

Conflict of Interest

A conflict of interest register will be actively maintained and monitored.

Tenure

The URF regional group will end on 30 June 2021. A final report on the activity of the group will be provided to the Deputy Secretary Sector Enablement and Support, via the Director of Education.

Urgent Response Fund

What is the purpose of the Urgent Response Fund?

The Urgent Response Fund is designed to help children and young people, who may have been affected by Covid-19 and the lockdown, to re-engage in their learning.

The aim of the fund is for a sustained improvement in attendance, to strengthen engagement with learning, and safeguard and promote wellbeing for individuals, or groups of children and young people.

Some learners have experienced an increase in family tension during and since lockdown, and many learners are stressed about their education, and the future of their families.

The URF provides schools and early learning centres with immediate support to help overcome any learning, social and emotional, mental, behavioural, or other wellbeing issues.

Who can apply for the URF?

The following schools and early learning services are eligible to apply for the URF:

- Centre-based Early Learning Services: Licensed nga kōhanga reo, playcentre, kindergarten, and education & care services (including casual); and
- Schools: State schools, state integrated schools, Māori medium kura, special schools.

What support can we apply for?

Applications for the URF can be made for support for individuals, a group, a class or early learning service, school-wide or cluster responses that have a wellbeing focus.

Applications can be made for a wide range of responses to need. Some examples are:

- Resources or materials
- Community support which is child-focused and can be delivered by the early learning service/school, such as before or after school care
- Additional support for learners with mild to moderate, to high and complex needs, including those who are neurodiverse and gifted
- Catch-up access, small group tutoring, additional teacher time, teacher aide time, or teacher release to directly support sustainable increases in children and young people's attendance, engagement with learning, and wellbeing
- Mentors, counsellors, behaviour support workers, professional advice (psychologists, counsellors etc.) on individual or whole of-class responses to children or young people's needs.

Are there supports that the URF can't be used for?

Yes. The URF cannot be used for professional learning and development, leadership support or staff wellbeing. It cannot be used to fund supports already funded by the Ministry (e.g. ORS places) or the responsibility of another agency (e.g. welfare costs such as food or clothing).

The URF cannot be used to cover a shortfall in funding, or supporting ongoing activities of a school or early learning services that would be reasonably expected to be covered through existing funding. This includes capital expenses, including maintenance and improvements for school or centre infrastructure.

How do we apply?

Eligible schools and Early Learning Services can apply by completing the form at:
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/PT33R5W>.

Who will make the decisions about the URF?

Regional groups of leaders are being convened, working with the Director of Education, to identify priority needs in each region. These regional groups will decide how the local allocation of the \$50 million fund is best distributed, to make a difference to attendance and engagement in learning for children and young people in their area.

How will we find out if our application has been approved?

Your local Ministry of Education office will advise you as to the outcome of your application.

How long will it take to get a decision?

As the Ministry is working with regional groups to decide on local priorities, there is no fixed timeframe for applications to be considered. Directors of Education are setting up processes to ensure applications are considered as promptly as possible, including fast track processes for emergency supports required.

When and how will we receive URF payments?

URF funds will be received in a one-off payment made through the usual payment channels to schools and early learning services. For early learning services which are part of a larger provider, the usual payment channel may be the provider.

The Ministry will process URF payments monthly.

For Early Learning Services, there will be a line in the "extra payments" section of the funding notice which will state "COVID-19 Urgent Response Fund – Region".

For schools, once the payment has been processed, an automated email will be sent by ERS to the general school email address based on CSIS. Schools can log in to ERS to see the payment request. The reference will be COVID-19 Urgent Response Fund.

Can we make more than one application?

Yes. If needs change, or new needs arise, you can submit a new application.

Can we make a joint application with other schools or early learning services in our community?

Yes. Some clusters of schools and early learning services may want to put in a joint application. One of the schools or early learning services will need to take the lead on the application on behalf of all. All schools or early learning services, that are part of the application, must be identified in the application, and must each be eligible.

How will we know how the funding has been used in our area?

The URF decisions will be made public so that everyone can see where the region's funding has been applied to support sustainable attendance, engagement and wellbeing for the children and young people in that region.

How will taxpayers know what the Fund is being spent on?

The use of the Urgent Response Fund will be reported to Ministers. This will include the number and value of applications, how funds were used, type of response (i.e. cluster, whole school, targeted, individual) and the numbers of children who benefited. Information about the use of the funds will be publicly available after the funding period ends in June 2021.

What happens at the end of 12 months – what if additional support is still needed?

The type of applications, and how the fund is used, will provide valuable information about any ongoing needs. This will inform advice to Government about any arrangements needed after the URF has ended.

Released Under the Official Information Act 1982