

AIDE MEMOIRE

Distance learning support for Auckland and further possible COVID-19 disruptions

Date:	17 August 2020	Priority:	High
To:	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education	METIS No:	1238365
From:	Ellen MacGregor-Reid	Security Level:	In Confidence

Purpose

- This aide memoire is to support you in bringing an oral item to Cabinet on Monday, 17 August seeking approval to a fiscally neutral adjustment of \$6.9 million to enhance the Government's distance learning support by **expanding provision of fit-for-education devices** to service unmet demand in Years 9-13+ nation-wide.
- While Aotearoa New Zealand was at COVID Alert Level 1 for an extended period of time and most learners returned to schools, kura and early learning settings, our support for distance learning needs to recognise the **ongoing changeability and uncertainty caused by COVID-19**.
- This need has been made evident by the recent Government announcement of ongoing Alert Level 3 conditions across the Auckland region. Our education response needs to account for both this **immediate** disruption and to support learners, whānau and education workforce through any further COVID related disruption to in-person teaching and learning.

Expanding provision of devices

- While the Ministry has supported a significant number of students by providing them with fit-for-education devices, the remaining unmet demand expressed by schools and kura is significant, at around **72,500 devices**.
- Through ongoing consultation with school and kura leaders and communities, the Ministry now have a clearer idea of the likely costs for meeting all device demand as expressed by schools and kura. This is as follows:

We get the job done Ka oti i a mātou ngā mahi

We are respectful, we listen, we learn He rōpū manaaki, he rōpū whakarongo, he rōpū ako mātou

We back ourselves and others to win Ka manawanui ki a mātou me ētahi ake kia wikitoria

We work together for maximum impact Ka mahi ngātahi mō te tukinga nui tonu

Great results are our bottom line Ko ngā huanga tino pai ā mātou whāinga mutunga

Table 1: Device demand across year groups		
Years	Devices required	Cost (\$m)
9-13+	8,100	5.500
7-8	10,100	4.500
1-6	54,300	28.000
Total	72,500	38.000

- Accordingly, it is proposed that the Ministry **pause development of a virtual learning environment (VLE)** as previously signalled [CAB-MIN-20-0136 refers], and instead reprioritise associated unspent funding to expand provision of devices to service unmet demand for fit-for-education devices in Years 9-13+, particularly across the Auckland education region.
- In particular, if agreed, this funding would prioritise supply of devices to service unmet demand for Years 9-13+ across all education regions, with immediate priority on meeting unmet demand across the Auckland education region (8,100 learners at a cost of \$6.5 million). Note that this includes a cost of \$1 million as a one-off grant to reimburse costs schools and kura for devices they purchased during the period 9 March to 8 April 2020 inclusive.
- There are some associated risks with pausing development on the VLE, particularly that, as the Ministry's provision of access to ClassroomNZ2020 to schools and kura expires in February 2021, if a VLE is not made available, after this date they will need to fund and set-up their own options for digital online learning, however residual funding from the fiscally neutral adjustment could be reprioritised towards extending our provision of ClassroomNZ2020 or similar capability to mitigate this. The exact amount of residual funding will depend on the exact cost to purchase and deliver 8,100 devices as prices are expected to fluctuate and some of the residual \$400,000 may be required as contingency in the near-term.
- It is critical that this work progress at-pace to meet to ensure as little disruption to learner progress and also because demand has surged for fit-for-education devices and limited available supply is a high risk to the successful servicing of unmet demand across the nation in a timely manner and delays will affect access to existing supply.

Financial implications

- A **fiscally neutral adjustment** of \$6.9 million is proposed to meet residual unmet demand for devices to service unmet demand for Years 9-13+ across all education regions, with immediate priority on meeting unmet demand across the Auckland education region (8,100 learners at a cost of \$6.5 million).
- Cabinet approval is required in line with CO (18) 2 which confirms that joint Ministers cannot authorise expense transfers and fiscally neutral adjustments simultaneously and that, accordingly, Cabinet approval is required in this instance.

- The Ministry of Education has also reprioritised existing Vote Education funding to help cover the costs of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic but cannot meet this demand for devices, as outlined above.

Recommendations for tabling

The Minister of Education recommends that the Committee:

1. **note** that Cabinet authorised the approval of immediate funding of \$36.440 million in 2019/20 and 2020/21 to ensure students can access teaching and learning online if their school is temporarily closed [CAB-MIN-20-0136 refers] and that, on 7 April 2020, a further \$51.340 million was authorised by the COVID-19 Ministerial Group to ensure "reach and equity";
2. **note** that \$10.502 million was not committed in 2019/20 because of the need to deliver work programmes over the balance of the school, rather than financial year;
3. **note** that further investment is required to ensure the Ministry can effectively support Auckland with distance learning during the current Alert Level 3 and be ready for possible further COVID-19 related disruptions to early learning services and schools;
4. **note** that, while the Ministry has supported a significant number of students through provision of devices with the original emergency funding allocation, there is significant remaining unmet demand expressed by schools and kura, at around 72,500 devices;
5. **agree** to the Ministry of Education expanding provision of devices to meet residual unmet demand for all secondary level learners (estimated at 8,100 learners in Years 9-13+) at a total cost of \$6.5 million;
6. **Note** that joint Ministers of Education and Finance have previously approved an in-principle expense transfer of up to \$10.502 million from 2019/20 to 2020/21 to facilitate key COVID-19 related distance learning activities in 2020/21;
7. **agree** to a fiscally neutral adjustment to give effect to this decision (refer recommendation 5) from Departmental Output Expense: Support and Resources for Teachers to Non-departmental Capital Expenditure: Schools Furniture and Equipment;

	\$m – increase/(decrease)				
Vote Education	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24 & Outyears
Minister of Education					
Multi-Category Expenses and Capital Expenditure:					
Improved Quality Teaching and Learning MCA					
Departmental Output Expense:					
Support and Resources for Teachers	-	(6.900)	-	-	-

Non-departmental Capital Expenditure					
Schools Furniture and Equipment	-	6.900	-	-	-
Operating	-	(6.900)	-	-	-
Capital	-	6.900	-	-	-

8. **agree** that the proposed change to appropriations for 2020/21 above be included in the 2020/21 Supplementary Estimates and that, in the interim, the increase be met from Imprest Supply;
9. **note** that this includes a cost of \$1 million as a one-off grant to reimburse costs schools and kura for devices they purchased during the period 9 March to 8 April 2020 inclusive;
10. **agree** that residual funding from the fiscally neutral adjustment (refer recommendation 5) be reprioritised towards extending our provision of ClassroomNZ2020 (or similar capability) to reduce the risk of pausing development on the virtual learning environment;
11. **note** that the Minister of Education will provide regular progress updates on implementation and uptake.

Proactive Release

- We recommend that this Briefing 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.

Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister of Education

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