



## Education Report: Further regional changes to NCEA in 2020 to respond to COVID-19 resurgence

<b>To:</b>	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
<b>Date:</b>	8 September 2020	<b>Priority:</b>	Urgent
<b>Security Level:</b>	In Confidence	<b>METIS No:</b>	1239965
<b>Drafter:</b>	Rebecca Frankum James Gavey	<b>DDI:</b>	s 9(2)(a)
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<b>Messaging seen by Communications team:</b>	No	<b>Round Robin:</b>	No

### Purpose of Report

To provide you with a range of possible responses as a result of COVID-19 disruptions to support senior secondary students in Auckland to reach their NCEA goals this year.

### Background

- COVID-19 disruption has made it more difficult for some senior secondary students to earn the credits they need to attain an NCEA qualification this year, particularly in Auckland where students have faced additional disruption.
- At your agency meeting we discussed options for supporting students with additional learning opportunities and you asked for further advice. This report provides our further analysis, including how a Te Kura model could connect to a range of services such as tertiary and the wider community, and also how further qualification responses could support students facing disruption.
- Students are facing a range of different challenges. Some may have functionally disengaged from schooling and/or will be significantly behind and at risk of disengaging. Some will have missed teaching and learning this year and may fall short of an NCEA qualification. Other students will only need a few additional credits, without which they may struggle to gain NCEA Level 3 or University Entrance to continue with their pathway.
- Some Auckland principals have informed the Ministry that the changes to NCEA that you previously agreed to on 24 May following the first lockdown may not be enough to manage the additional disruption from Auckland's recent Alert Level 3 status to teaching, assessment and exam preparation, in part due to the proximity of the most recent lockdown to examinations.
- This paper presents a range of possible response options that aim to ensure that students who are disengaging are supported to re-engage with the education system, and that students can still reach their NCEA goals this year, particularly if they're planning to transition from school to further study or employment. The range of

responses that we have prepared include additional tuition responses, qualification responses (building on the changes to NCEA from earlier in the year), and also communications to the University Vice Chancellors to encourage using the full range of their discretionary powers.

- 6 If you choose to progress any or all of these possible responses, these would be applied to Auckland in the first instance. If there are further lockdowns in other parts of the country, the proposed response in this paper could be applied accordingly.
- 7 The range of possible responses that we have prepared have been informed by discussions with various sector representatives. The groups we have engaged with include your NCEA Professional Advisory Group (PAG), Auckland principals and principals across the country (including Claire Amos and Maurie Abraham at the request of your Office), PPTA, SPC, SPANZ, Ngā Kura ā Iwi, and Te Rūnanga Nui.

### Summary of possible responses

- 8 We want to support schools and kura to provide additional learning opportunities, where they can, to meet their students' needs this year. We will share good practice cases studies with schools and kura on how they can do this themselves.
- 9 As not all schools will have the capability or capacity to deliver additional opportunities, we have identified the option of expanding and enhancing Te Kura's existing programmes in the Auckland region.
- 10 Te Kura's full time enrolment offering (Big Picture Programme) and dual enrolment offering provide a model for students who have already left school or are still enrolled in school, but who need additional support this year, including educational support and wellbeing support. s 9(2)(f)(iv)
- 11 Te Kura's Summer School is a model for students who just need a few additional credits (up to 10 credits) in order to continue with their pathway. s 9(2)(f)(iv)
- 12 If you are interested in making further changes to NCEA for Auckland, we have identified that it would be possible to extend the Learning Recognition Credit policy. Students could gain one additional credit per four credits attained (rather than five), to a total of 16 Learning Recognition Credits (rather than 10) for Level 1 and a total of 12 (rather than 8) for Level 2 and 3.
- 13 We have also identified that it would be possible to further reduce the requirements to Certificate Endorsements by two credits to 44 credits. These two qualification responses would be applied to Auckland in the first instance, but could be applied to other regions if there are further lockdowns.
- 14 In addition to automatically making this available to all students in the Auckland region, NZQA and the Ministry would work in partnership on a tightly prescribed process to allow schools and kura to apply for the same treatment to reflect unique local and individual circumstances. This would be either for their entire cohort (if, for example, onsite instruction is disrupted by a COVID-19 case), or to student(s) affected on an individual basis by COVID-19 (e.g., immune compromised, or due to concerns about family and whānau health).
- 15 From our discussions with the sector, we believe that they would support these NCEA changes, however, we have identified some risks with this approach, as outlined below in paragraphs 46-51.

## Proposal to support additional learning opportunities

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16 Our primary focus is on keeping students in schooling, as evidence shows this is the best learning environment for most students, and re-engaging students where they have already disengaged or are disengaging. While we are hearing from some schools that some cohorts of students may stay at school longer in a limited employment market, we are also hearing from the sector that particularly at-risk cohorts of students are functionally disengaging (even where they are still on school rolls), and that the data picture on student retention and engagement is incomplete. We expect that, even if nationally there is an increase in student engagement and retention, there will be particular cohorts of students who are at risk of disengaging or leaving school early.

17 Firstly, we want to support schools themselves to provide additional learning opportunities this year to meet their students' needs, in the way that some secondary schools have already started to do, including after school, weekend, and school holiday tuition provided by teachers and external tutors. We will share good practice case studies to all schools on how they can do this themselves.

18 **s 9(2)(f)(iv)**

19 Additionally, as we are hearing there is increasing disengagement from school among some students, and some schools may not have the capacity or capability to deliver additional programmes, we see a need for a response that goes beyond individual schools.

20 We have analysed a range of options that could potentially be expanded or scaled up from Term 4 and going into summer to support learners to stay engaged in education, or re-engage, and gain additional credits where needed. **s 9(2)(f)(iv)**

a. Te Kura has programmes that could be effectively expanded, and Te Kura is best-placed to act as a hub for connecting with a wider range of services. This could include connections with TEOs and ACE.

b. **s 9(2)(f)(iv)**

c.

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## **Te Kura-led additional learning opportunities**

- 23 We have identified existing Te Kura programmes that can be expanded and enhanced to provide additional learning opportunities to a range of students. This would involve building on the full range of Te Kura's services, including:
- a. Te Kura's Big Picture Programme (to support students who have already left school this year to re-engage with learning and plan a pathway)
  - b. Te Kura's dual enrolment offering (to support students who are still enrolled in school to receive additional support with Te Kura teachers)
  - c. Te Kura's existing Summer School (to support students who need to gain less than 10 additional credits to gain an NCEA or University Entrance).
- 24 If you choose to progress either the Te Kura Big Picture Programme and Dual Enrolment Offering (as per paragraphs 24 to 34) or the Summer School Option (as per paragraphs 35 to 37), the Education Review Office will provide ongoing evaluation of its impact. This will provide us with a clear picture of the benefits of any chosen approach, and inform future programme design decisions.

### **Te Kura Big Picture Programme and Dual Enrolment Offering**

- 25 For students who have had significant disruption to their learning this year, who are at risk of disengaging, or who have already disengaged, we will look to build on the Big Picture Programme and dual enrolment offering (options A and B) to deliver an expanded service offering by the start of Term 4. This would include:
- a. The establishment of 'pop-up' sites for wrap-around educational support, to ensure students have access to key face-to-face learning and support
  - b. Learning opportunities for students to build on what they know already and fill gaps in their learning, including foundational skills, important National Curriculum learning, and specialised education opportunities as appropriate
  - c. Hiring additional teachers to ensure a low teacher-student ratio (Te Kura is scheduled to put out an EOI for teachers in the coming weeks, as a part of their business as usual)
  - d. Working with Iwi and providers with specialised Māori and Pacific capabilities to ensure sound Culturally Responsive and Relational Pedagogy
  - e. Activating local networks of providers (e.g., TEOs) to partner with them to provide a fuller range of pathways and to support transitions
  - f. An Individual Learning Plan for each student, that acknowledges their prior learning and their next steps, including transition plans to full time education (secondary or, if appropriate tertiary) or meaningful employment in 2021
  - g. Pastoral support and mentoring
  - h. Transport to the sites, and access to digital devices as required.
- 26 We anticipate that students would be involved in this programme up to five days a week, and that this would focus on a mixture of learning and wellbeing support, as most appropriate to the student. There would be flexibility built in so that students working part-time are still able to engage.

- 27 To identify students who would best benefit from participating in this programme, we will work with Iwi, churches, schools, and Whānau Ora. We would also work with youth workers in the Auckland region, MSD, and other government agencies to ensure a joined up approach, and that the students most in need of support are accurately identified. s 9(2)(f)(iv)
- 28 In early September, Te Kura is scheduled to put out an Expression of Interest for teachers for their upcoming programmes. We would work with Te Kura to expand this recruitment EOI. Recruitment would target qualified teachers, particularly those who are currently working as relieving teachers or part-time teachers.
- 29 s 9(2)(f)(iv)
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- 31 Te Kura have indicated that they would be able to provide some digital devices to students (where they already have these devices in-stock), but that students who are dual-enrolled in school should bring their own devices from school.
- 32 We estimate that up to 400 students would likely participate in this programme from October to mid-January (0.25 EFTS). s 9(2)(f)(iv)
- 33 s 9(2)(f)(iv)
- We intend to do further work to confirm whether the estimate of up to 400 students is likely to be accurate.
- 34 We will work with Auckland schools, the attendance service, Iwi, churches, Whānau Ora, and other community groups and other government agencies in the next two to three weeks to ascertain how many students might participate.
- 35 A risk that we will need to manage is supporting students who benefit from this approach in the long-term, as students who remain enrolled may put pressure on Te Kura's capacity, including to enrol new students, in 2021.

### Summer School

- 36 For students who only need a few additional credits (up to 10 credits) to gain an NCEA or University Entrance and continue with their planned pathway, we recommend expanding the Summer School (Option C). To do this, we would need to temporarily lift the cap on the number of students (currently limited to 1,000) through amending the Te Kura Enrolment and Dual Tuition Policy.

- 37 A student enrolled in two subjects over the summer period (two months) would generate 0.03 EFTS, equating to around \$280 in funding. s 9(2)(f)(iv)
- 38 Currently, Te Kura's Summer School is predominantly used by students in Decile 8-10 schools. This also has the potential to support students who come from schools that don't have the capability or resourcing to deliver their own additional tuition programmes e.g. students from low decile schools who aspire to go to University. Without this option, these students are at risk of not proceeding with their planned pathway. We would recommend deliberately marketing Te Kura's Summer School option at lower decile schools if you choose to lift the cap on Summer School places.

#### Further qualification responses to regional and local circumstances

- 39 Since the recent resurgence of COVID-19 in Auckland and publicly voiced concern for students sitting NCEA this year, the Ministry and NZQA met with the PPTA, SPC, and SPANZ, along with further Auckland principals to hear the sector's concerns regarding the NCEA qualification.
- 40 A range of different responses were discussed at those meetings. Due to the widespread support of the previously implemented NCEA changes, the sector representatives broadly supported making further changes, particularly to recognise the recent period of Alert Level 3 in Auckland.
- 41 Two key concerns are providing support for students who had missed teaching, learning, and assessment opportunities – particularly those at risk of not achieving a qualification, and maintaining the credibility of the qualifications. We worked through a number of ideas for possible qualification responses with NZQA, trading off equity, student wellbeing, and the credibility of the quality. We then tested these ideas with your PAG to support our development of a possible response.
- 42 The response proposed would form a framework that would apply to regions, schools, or New Zealand, if there are further physical school closures. In the first instance, these changes would apply to Auckland, as they have been in Alert Level 3 for 13 additional school days as at Friday 28 August.

#### Learning Recognition Credits

- 43 Under the framework, additional Learning Recognition Credits would be available for students to earn as they attain credits at each level, increasing the total that can be attained through this policy to 16 at Level 1 and 12 at Levels 2 and 3. The earnings ratio would also be decreased to one additional credit provided per four credits attained rather than five, which will apply immediate relief (as it will apply retroactively) and ensure the intended effect of supporting qualification attainment. The cap on credits would be raised so that students could gain Level 1 with 64 credits from assessed standards, and Level 2 and 3 with 48 credits, equivalent to 80% of current requirements.

#### Certificate Endorsements

- 44 The requirements for Certificate Endorsements would be further reduced by two credits to 44 credits for students in a school or region where the framework applies. This change would be intended to support those who particularly value Merit and Excellence Certificate endorsement i.e. for gaining university scholarships.

## University Entrance

- 45 Further changes to University Entrance were proposed by a few stakeholders, however, we and NZQA have determined that we shouldn't progress further changes with Universities New Zealand due to the risk of students transitioning to university if they are not ready. The PAG support this advice, and instead suggested that NZQA work with universities to encourage them to use the full range of their discretionary powers. Attached in Annex 2 is a draft letter to the University Vice Chancellors regarding pro-actively helping students understand what will be needed to access limited-entry programmes, to be sent either by you, or by NZQA.

## Benefits and risks with proposed regional response

- 46 The changes to the Learning Recognition Credit policy would most impact those on the margins of achieving an NCEA, and support qualification attainment for those students. This would likely have a positive impact on retention and would support some students' pathways. We have also heard from principals that gaining Learning Recognition Credits is a significant motivational boost for some. Equally, the certificate recognition changes would support students who are seeking to gain an endorsement, either as an education goal or to support their pathway. While this would not support qualification attainment, it is widely valued by students. We believe such a change would be broadly supported, particularly by teachers and school leaders in Auckland.
- 47 However, as with previous changes, NZQA and the Ministry are unable to accurately predict the likely final distribution of NCEA results. If the proposed certificate endorsement rule changes (from 46 to 44 credits required) had been applied to last year's results in Auckland, we would have seen up to 250 students additionally receiving each certificate endorsement level of NCEA (an increase of up to 1.9 percentage points per level in endorsement percentage attainment). This can only be used for indicative purposes as it is difficult to predict the final impact, given this year's unique disruption to students learning and assessment programmes. We believe this represents the risk, noting that this policy is designed to counteract the likely negative impacts of disruption to learning.
- 48 As with any changes to NCEA, we have some concerns about the impact on the credibility of the qualifications. The proposed qualification changes would functionally mean students only have to gain 64 credits from assessment standards in 2021 for Level 1, and 48 for Levels 2 and 3, which is a 20 percent reduction on the usual requirements. The PAG's advice is that such a change would be accepted, and would not negatively impact on the credibility of NCEA.
- 49 There is also a risk that the differentiated response causes a negative reaction from some school communities, who believe they have been disrupted to an equivalent extent due to their local circumstances, but do not qualify for the reduction due to lack of a physical school closure. Some students who are not in a school or region receiving these additional supports may raise a challenge, particularly if they narrowly missed out on a qualification or certificate endorsement following the release of results. For example, a student outside of Auckland who is immune-compromised and who has been unable to attend school physically may find this unfair and lay a complaint.
- 50 If you choose to adopt such a response framework, NZQA and the Ministry would work in partnership on a tightly prescribed process to allow schools and kura to apply for application of these changed requirements, either at the school- or individual student(s)-level.
- 51 NZQA also note that while they will work to minimise risk to results release, these changes could delay the NCEA results release to late January 2021, which places significant pressure on school planning as well as the tertiary sector.

- 52 Following consultation with the Professional Advisory Group we believe these changes are worth your consideration, but require a careful balancing of the benefit to the students, teachers and schools who have been impacted by physical school closures, against the risks to the credibility of the qualifications, the uncertainty of the impact, and the risk of perceived unfairness of the policy.

### Risks around examinations

- 53 s 9(2)(g)(i)
- 54 As we approach the examination period, a further lockdown may disrupt students' exam preparation to the point where their ability to fairly access and sit examinations is compromised. At this point we would urgently consult with the sector prior to invoking an Unexpected Event. Under an Unexpected Event, students have the opportunity to sit the examination but will receive the better of the Unexpected Event Grade or the examination result. Our first preference is to apply the above regional response framework, but we recognise that, particularly close to examination period, a stronger response may be required.
- 55 This, combined with the importance of derived grades for individual students who are unable to sit an examination, is why we will continue to strongly advise schools to collect evidence against externally assessed standards.

- 56 s 9(2)(g)(i)

### Next Steps

- 57 Annex 1 of this Report is a media release to support the proposed qualification response framework outlined in this paper. A draft letter to the Vice Chancellors is at Annex 2. We will work with your Office to arrange these communications if you agree to the recommendations in this paper.
- 58 Pending your support for the proposals in this Report, we will partner with Te Kura and continue to engage Auckland stakeholders on any required design details, including reaching out to Auckland-based TEOs, with support from the TEC, and other relevant agencies. As a part of this, we intend to further investigate the likely scale and scope of services required. We will brief your office as appropriate on the implementation and design of this.



## Recommended Actions

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The Ministry of Education recommends you:

1. **Agree** to the establishment of Te Kura-led short-term education provision beginning in term 4 to provide personalised learning opportunities to the students most at risk of not achieving their NCEA goals in 2020

**Agree / Disagree**

2. **Agree** to increase the number of students who can enrol in Te Kura's Summer School

**Agree / Disagree**

3. s 9(2)(f)(iv)

**Noted**

4. **Agree** to fund the package of initiatives s 9(2)(f)(iv) including Te Kura-led education provision and increasing the number of students who can enrol in Te Kura's Summer School, as outlined in paragraphs 23 to 38

**Agree / Disagree**

5. **Note** that funding these initiatives from the Operating Contingency: Targeted Support for At-Risk Ākonga will require a corresponding reduction in the amount of funding for the package of initiatives you agreed to in METIS 1235061

**Noted**

6. **Note** that peak bodies and your PAG have expressed support for further changes to NCEA in response to the increased disruption faced in Auckland

**Noted**

7. **Agree** to NZQA and the Ministry extending the Learning Recognition Credit policy for Auckland, as per paragraph 43

**Agree / Disagree**

8. **Agree** to NZQA and the Ministry further reducing the Certificate Endorsement requirements for Auckland, as per paragraph 44

**Agree / Disagree**

9. **Agree** to NZQA and the Ministry developing a controlled process to allow schools and kura to apply for application of these changed requirements, either at the school- or individual student(s)-level, as per paragraph 50

**Agree / Disagree**

10. **Note** that NZQA has drafted a letter to the University Vice Chancellors to be sent by either you or NZQA, and that NZQA will co-ordinate with your Office on sending this, as per paragraph 45

**Noted**

11. **Agree** to proactively release this report following public announcements of the changes to NCEA described within

**Agree / Disagree**

*Pauline*

Pauline Cleaver  
Acting Deputy Secretary  
**Early Learning and Student Achievement**

08/09/2020

*Chris Hipkins*

Hon Chris Hipkins  
**Minister of Education**

8 / 9 / 2020