



Education Report: Enabling distance learning for all – Immediate next steps

To:	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
Date:	2 April 2020	Priority:	High
Security Level:	In Confidence	METIS No:	1225018
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Messaging seen by Communications team:	Yes	Round Robin:	No

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this paper is for you to:

- **Agree** the approach to prioritising allocation of resources (including Internet connections, fit-for-education devices and hard-copy packs).
- **Agree** to the Ministry of Education putting in place television broadcasting for the delivery of distance education from 15 April 2020 for at least three months.
- **Note** the draft media release which you may wish to use to support your communications about the education response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Summary

- 1 We estimate that there are 82,000 homes (covering 145,000 school age learners) without access to the Internet and/or any fit-for-education devices at home. This is a significant barrier to these learners' ongoing learning, particularly in a distance teaching and learning environment, and risks perpetuating or increasing existing inequities.
- 2 We are working hard to address these barriers to online learning, and intend to commence connecting households to the Internet and distributing devices within the next week. However, constraints on the current in-country supply of devices (both for connectivity and learning) and some of the infrastructural work that will need to be undertaken to connect some areas of the country, mean that we will not be able to connect all learners in need with online learning immediately. We will need to prioritise and reach learners and households in tranches over time.
- 3 We intend to focus first on connecting learners in senior secondary school working towards NCEA and those with greatest need due to disadvantage (for example ethnicity, learning support need and socio-economic status). This reflects the need to

minimise disruption to learning for learners working towards a qualification, and the effectiveness of online teaching and learning for this age group.

- 4 If there is capacity to do more immediately once these groups of learners are covered then we will move down the year levels from years 10 to 1, and continue to give priority to learners with greatest need due to disadvantage. To enable us to undertake this prioritisation exercise we will be seeking further information from schools this week.
- 5 Alongside this we are also distributing packs of physical and hard-copy resources across early learning (including Kōhanga Reo) and schooling (English medium and Māori medium). While we have a large number of packs ready to go, these will not be enough (particularly for children aged under 5), so we will be prioritising those with the greatest need first and, for school students, those without the ability to access online learning.
- 6 To ensure that all learners have access to at least one channel to support their learning from a distance, we recommend putting in place television broadcasting channels (one for English medium and one for Māori medium). This will enable us to reach our learners who have limited or no Internet connectivity, without a fit for education device and/or who miss out on a hard-pack in the first phase of distribution. Given the uncertainty about the ongoing impact of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic on education, we recommend that television broadcasting channels are in place for at least three months.
- 7 We have explored the options and consider that Television New Zealand (TVNZ) is the best provider for English medium provision. We need to sign a contract with some urgency to ensure broadcasting is in place from 15 April, but need your agreement first to proceed with television broadcasting channels for distance education as one part of our overall package. We will be providing advice shortly to Hon Kelvin Davis and yourself on the approach to broadcasting for Māori medium provision.
- 8 We will be providing you with a further briefing tomorrow canvassing more fully our programme for work for distance learning, including work on additional learning supports.
- 9 Public interest in how education from a distance is going to be supported during the response to the COVID-19 pandemic is high. It is possible that our work with schools and kura to identify learners to receive connectivity and/or devices or hard-packs will generate media interest. A draft media release is provided in Annex 1. You may wish to use this to support your communications.

Recommended Actions

The Ministry of Education recommends you:

- a. **Agree** that allocation of Internet connections and/or fit-for-education devices will prioritise learners with greatest need due to disadvantage focussing first on those studying towards an NCEA qualification (level 2, then 3, then 1), then working down the year levels from years 10 to 1.
Agree / Disagree
- b. **Agree** that allocation of hard-copy packs will prioritise learners with the greatest need first and, for school students, those without the ability to access online learning.
Agree / Disagree
- c. **Note** that we are surveying schools and kura to collect the information needed to enable us to enable us more accurately understand demand and prioritise allocation based on learner needs.
- d. **Agree** to a television broadcasting channel being established with TVNZ for the delivery of distance education in English medium from 15 April 2020 for at least three months, as one part of an overall package of supports.
Agree / Disagree
- e. **Note** that the total cost of television broadcasting for English medium through to 30 June 2020 is s 9(2)(b)(ii).
- f. **Note** that the television broadcasting channels will be funded through reprioritisation of existing Vote Education investment for the first three weeks, but extending it to three months will require new funding.
- g. **Note** that we are advising yourself and Hon Grant Robertson on the need for emergency funding to support distance education during the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including for sustaining the broadcasting channels [METIS 1225079 refers].
- h. **Agree** to forward this briefing to Hon Grant Robertson to support your discussions with him about the need for emergency funding.
Agree / Disagree
- i. **Agree** to forward this briefing to Hon Kelvin Davis, Hon Tracey Martin and Hon Jenny Sales for their visibility.
Agree / Disagree

- j. **Agree** to proactively release this report with appropriate redactions for commercial sensitivity.

☒ Agree ☐ Disagree

Ellen MacGregor-Reid
Deputy Secretary
Early Learning and Student Achievement

2/04/2020

Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister of Education

02/04/2020

Proactively Released

Background

1. Early learning services, schools and kura are temporarily closed as part of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and teachers are shifting to leading learning from a distance from 15 April 2020. Disruption to the education of early learners and school students can be mitigated if learners are able to access suitable teaching and learning from home.
2. For school students access to online teaching and learning is the most sustainable option, particularly for older year groups. Through data matching with telecommunication providers we estimate that there are 82,000 homes (covering 145,000 school age learners) without access to the Internet and/or any fit-for-education devices at home. This is a significant barrier to these learners' ongoing learning, and risks perpetuating or increasing existing inequities.
3. We are working hard to address these barriers to online learning, and intend to commence connecting households to the Internet and distributing devices within the next week. However, constraints on the current in-country supply of devices (both for connectivity and learning) and some of the infrastructural work that will need to be undertaken to connect some areas of the country, mean that we will not be able to connect all learners in need with online learning immediately. We will need to prioritise and reach learners and households in tranches over time.
4. We want to ensure that every learner has at least one channel for accessing education from 15 April, and expect that many will be able to access more than one. We are distributing packs with physical and/or hard copy resources to those households without connectivity and/or which need additional learning resources in their homes. We also propose launching television broadcast channels delivering educational content from 15 April 2020, to reach learners who have limited or no Internet connectivity. Over time, we will move to more learners having access to more than one channel as we roll out Internet connections and/or devices.
5. This briefing sets out:
 - a. Our approach to prioritising allocation of Internet connections and devices, and the process we are using to gather the information needed to enable that prioritisation to occur.
 - b. Our approach to provision of hard-packs in early learning, and in schooling. We intend to provide you with a separate briefing on 3 April setting out our overall programme for enabling and supporting teaching and learning from a distance.
 - c. The next steps towards launching television broadcast channels, if you wish for us to proceed with that option.
 - d. The need for proactive communications about the work underway to support distance learning for all learners from 15 April 2020.
6. We will be providing you with a further briefing tomorrow canvassing more fully our programme for work for distance learning, including work on additional learning supports.

Approach to prioritisation of connections and devices

7. The number of connections and devices available for allocation initially is significantly less than demand. This means the practicalities of putting in place a nuanced approach to targeting distribution are likely to be out of balance with the immediate benefits possible.

8. Our initial approach for allocating connections and devices is to work through learners studying towards an NCEA qualification giving priority to:
 - a. Learners studying NCEA level 2, then 3, then 1. This reflects the relative importance of the different levels to learner pathways into work and tertiary study.
 - b. Learners with greatest need due to disadvantage, including ethnicity, learning support need and socio-economic status. This reflects the need to avoid perpetuating or increasing existing inequities in education.
9. The initial focus on senior secondary reflects the need to minimise disruption to learning for learners working towards a qualification, and the effectiveness of online teaching and learning for this age group. If there are connections and/or devices remaining after these criterion are applied, we move down the year levels from years 10 to 1 and continue to give priority to learners with greatest need due to disadvantage. As learners get younger, more scaffolding and support can be required to enable them to engage with online material effectively.
10. Once we have better sense of the nature and size of learner needs, and have secured more connections and devices we may need to move to a more nuanced approach to allocation. This may include the capability of the school or kura to fully deliver teaching and learning online, and whether or not learners are having to share devices with siblings and/or adults using them for work or study.

Process for gathering information needed to allocate devices to learners

11. We do not currently know exact numbers of learners who will need a device to enable them to access online learning. We need further information to more accurately understand the size and nature of the need and to help us prioritise allocation to learners with the highest need. We know that learners in need are everywhere, although the concentration varies by school. Relying solely on a school-based measure, such as decile, risks some learners in need missing out because of the school they attend rather than their individual circumstances.
12. We will be collecting this information to enable us to allocate based on learner needs via a form sent to schools and kura. This will be prepopulated with as much information as we have, by school or kura, and will ask schools and kura to:
 - a. check the details of the learners listed to make sure they're up to date, including name, address and year level
 - b. tick the relevant boxes about whether the learner needs to receive a device and/or hard copy learning pack
 - c. answer two questions about any specific technology their school uses and whether they need their own ICT service provider to be involved in any set-up process remotely.
13. A trial of the approach was undertaken with a small number of schools and kura on 1 April 2020, and we intend to roll out to all schools and kura on 3 April 2020. If we do not commence this week it will restrict what we are able to ship out to homes by 15 April. Schools and kura will be given 48 hours over their working days to complete the form. Our regional office staff will be following up with schools and kura to support completion of the form, and technical support will also be available if needed.

14. While we could stage roll out by focussing on those schools and kura most likely to have learners who may receive a device in the initial allocation, this would mean we would be continuing to operate and plan without a detailed understanding of the total need out there. It also risks learners in need in higher decile schools and kura missing out longer than would be appropriate on an individual needs basis.
15. There are risks that the release of the survey to schools and kura to gather the necessary information will raise concerns about the work required of schools and kura, privacy considerations, and/or the impact of many learners not having access to online teaching and learning from 15 April.
16. This work is a necessary step towards maintaining access to education for learners during the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our communications plan is mitigating these risks, with the following high level messages:
- a. This is a challenging and complex exercise and the Ministry is working as fast as possible to prepare a package of supports and resources that will supplement material schools and kura are providing and enable learning to continue at home.
 - b. The Ministry is working with suppliers to develop the supports and resources which will include: more online resources through our websites; access to devices and hard copy materials for those most in need; PLD to support teachers to work remotely with their learners; and, potentially, broadcast options.
 - c. This is a big job that is being delivered very quickly, so the roll-out won't be perfect. Not all learners will get Internet access, digital devices or hard packs at the same time and resources that are limited will need to be prioritised.
 - d. We will initially prioritise learners studying for NCEA, to ensure there is minimal disruption to their studies, and learners who are disadvantaged, for example because they need additional support or their families can't afford to buy equipment.
 - e. Once more connections and devices become available we will reassess our approach. The Ministry is reaching out to schools and kura to gather more detailed information about learner needs, in particular those learners who do not have access to devices or the Internet and will therefore need devices or hard packs.
 - f. The Ministry is also supporting parents through advice and guidance on two Ministry websites, Learning from Home and Ki te Ao Marama. Schools and kura are the main educational connection for learners and whanau and parents are not expected to replace teachers. The aim of the websites is to encourage parents to work with the school or kura to support learning at home.
 - g. Information collected through the Data Collection Portal will be used to identify the learners who require IT devices and hard copy learning materials to undertake online learning and to ensure that the devices and materials are delivered to the right learners and the right location. The information may also be used for research and statistical purposes.

Provision of home and hard packs

Early learning home packs

17. We are intending to provide these packs to all children in services that receive targeted funding (around 73,000 children) starting with those who are most disadvantaged to best use limited stock available in NZ at this time.
18. Early Learning home packs provide some support on learning at home with young children. There will be two different packs depending on the age of the child:
 - a. Pack A for children aged 3 to 5 years of age.
 - b. Pack B for children aged under 3 years of age.
19. These will include physical resources (such as books, crayons, paper and puzzles), safety information, play ideas, tips on supporting play, and things to consider for the wellbeing of both parents and children. They will be accompanied by guidance on hand-washing following the receipt of packs.
20. Due to difficulties in immediately sourcing enough materials for all children during the COVID-19 lockdown, we will be providing the packs to children using a staged delivery approach. The first stage of 12,000 kits will involve contacting all services (except kōhanga reo and puna reo) who receive Targeted Funding for Disadvantage (TFFD) within the 50-100% Risk Bands (representing the most disadvantaged groups).
21. Each child will be able to receive a pack with packs will be addressed to the children. Children's addresses will be sought through ECE services.
22. 20,000 Māori Medium kits with books available for all children in kōhanga reo and puna reo have been developed and are being distributed to whānau. These children will not be included in the distribution for the first stage of kits.
23. Depending on sourcing capacity we plan to then provide kits to the remaining 64,000 children (including those in kōhanga reo) when we are able to source the items for these kits (anticipated to be late in April). We may deliver kits in stages, depending on what our suppliers (Office Max and Ashton Scholastic) can source.
24. A further round of home packs is planned for these same children to be distributed May-June.

Schooling hard packs

25. Hard packs of resources will be made available in a phased approach starting with those who do not have devices in their homes and are more in need of resources within their home (for example due to socio-economic disadvantage). This will be informed by information gathered through the form sent to schools to understand learner needs for devices.
26. Where appropriate, our intention is that packs will also be allocated to learners with learning support needs as a priority. We are conscious however that this group has diverse needs, and are working through the approach to best identifying their needs and supporting them with hard packs.
27. Due to the limited availability of some stock not all packs of each year group will be the same but where possible they will be similar and include items such as reading books,

maths and science activities and some stationery. There will be guidance sheets available for those parents and whānau at home that includes information on how to use the resources in the packs that have been sent. There will also be guidance on hand-washing following the receipt of packs.

28. There is a total of 150,000 hard packs for learners in English medium education. We are hopeful that packs will start to leave the warehouse from 9 April until 17 April for delivery into homes. The current schedule is for packing and distribution to be completed in 20,000 and 10,000 lots.
29. 20,000 hard packs have also been made available for kura and Māori medium. Alongside schools and kura being asked to identify priority learners we will also offer opportunities for whānau to register interest in receiving a pack to support what they are doing with their tamariki and mokopuna at home.
30. For learners studying NCEA, we have 500 packs printed and ready for distribution now for Māori medium kura. 5,000 packs are underway for English medium education and will be ready for distribution next week. This includes Instant Education Unit Standard resources and field Māori unit standards for Māori medium settings. We are also working to make available a wider range of resources based on Achievement Standards in individual subjects, which will respond to the diverse needs of learners' individual pathways; these will be available to secondary schools and wharekura.
31. Following this first stage, we will consider the need for further hard packs. This will be influenced by the pace at which we expect to be able to meet demand for Internet connections and/or devices for online learning.

Television broadcasting channels for distance education

32. To ensure that all learners have access to at least one channel to support their learning from a distance, we recommend putting in place television broadcasting channels (one for English medium and one for Māori medium). This will enable us to reach learners who have limited or no Internet connectivity, without a fit-for-education device, and/or which miss out on a home pack in the first phase of distribution.
33. Given the uncertainty about the ongoing impact of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic on education, we recommend that this channel is in place for at least three months. Broadcasting has high upfront costs, but the longer we broadcast the more economical it becomes.
34. There are many rich video based resources that are offered on Internet platforms and the broadcasting option is an opportunity for non-connected learners to engage with this content. We are working with experts, educators, Radio New Zealand and others on our curriculum offering. For English medium provision, we intend to have six hours of content which includes:
 - a. Content accessible by early learners every morning.
 - b. A parent education offering every morning.
 - c. One hour of Te Reo Māori content every day.
 - d. A broad curriculum offering that includes movement, music, physical education, wellbeing, numeracy, literacy and science through an integrated approach to curriculum.

35. We have explored the options and consider that Television New Zealand (TVNZ) is the best provider for English medium provision. This provides an end-to-end solution, including hosting of the channel, the studio, the production, producers, and directors. We need to sign a contract with urgency to ensure broadcasting is in place from 15 April, but need your agreement first to proceed with this channel for distance education as one part of our overall package.
36. We will be providing advice shortly to Hon Kelvin Davis on the approach to broadcasting for Māori medium provision.

37. s 9(2)(g)(i) OIA

[REDACTED]

Financial implications

38. The initial cost for the broadcasting channel is s 9(2)(b)(ii) OIA through to 30 June 2020. This can be partially funded through reprioritisation of existing Vote Education investment for the first three weeks, but sustaining it for three months or longer will require new funding.
39. The television broadcasting channels will be funded through reprioritisation of existing Vote Education investment for the first three weeks, but extending it to three months will require new funding.
40. We are preparing separate advice to yourself and Hon Grant Robertson on the need for emergency funding to support distance education during the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including for sustaining the broadcasting channel [METIS 1225079 refers].

Communications

41. Public interest in how education from a distance is going to be supported during the response to the COVID-19 pandemic is high. A draft media release is provided in Annex 1. You may wish to use this to support your communications.
42. We are working on an overarching communications plan for the education response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and will provide you with separate advice on this.

Proactive Release

43. 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.

Annexes

Annex 1: Draft media release on the education response to the COVID-19 pandemic