



## Information Update: Queenstown Lakes school bus review update

|                        |   |                  |                    |
|------------------------|---|------------------|--------------------|
| <b>To:</b>             | Hon Erica Stanford, Minister of Education       |                  |                    |
| <b>Date:</b>           | 22 August 2025                                  | <b>Priority:</b> | Low                |
| <b>Security Level:</b> | Unclassified                                    | <b>METIS No:</b> | 1352466            |
| <b>From:</b>           | James Meffan<br>Group Manager, School Transport | <b>Phone:</b>    | 9(2)(a) [REDACTED] |

### Request

This paper updates you on the Queenstown Lakes school bus review. We are at the stage where we will begin engaging with schools on proposed changes to Ministry school bus routes.

### Information

#### *Background and interface with public transport*

- The Ministry regularly reviews its daily school bus routes to reflect changes in the numbers and locations of eligible students. Route reviews are the main way we deliver school transport services that:
  - are fit for purpose and reflect the current numbers and locations of eligible students
  - respond to demographic shifts, population growth, or changes in local schooling networks
  - do not duplicate public transport services delivered by regional councils
  - are optimised for efficiency and represent value for money.
- From time to time the Ministry undertakes a comprehensive review of all school bus routes within a defined geographical area. This approach allows us to identify efficiencies across the network and optimise routes to better serve eligible students.

#### *We needed to review school bus services in Queenstown Lakes due to changes in public transport and the local schooling networks*

- The Ministry is the provider of last resort for school bus services. Where there is public transport available, we do not provide a duplicate service. However, Ministry-funded school bus services sometimes overlap with public transport services provided by regional councils, especially in areas with significant urban growth where public transport networks have developed over time.
- There have been significant changes to the public transport network in the Queenstown Lakes district, the latest being in July 2025, making many students in the area ineligible for school transport assistance. Changes in the local school network have also led to changes in student eligibility over the same period. Many students who currently use

Ministry services in the area are not eligible either because they do not attend their closest school or there is public transport available.

*There has been significant engagement with local councils since 2021*

5. The Ministry has worked with Otago Regional Council (ORC) extensively since 2021 [METIS 1350910 refers].
6. The Ministry continues to work with ORC to align changes to school bus services with changes to public transport services

*Proposed changes to Ministry school bus routes*

7. The Queenstown Lakes review covers 17 Ministry school bus routes. An audit of usage undertaken by the bus operator in February 2025 showed 682 students were using these services. However, it is likely a high number of the students using these services are ineligible for school transport assistance. The high school students tend to be ineligible due to the availability of public transport. Primary students are more likely to be ineligible because they are not attending their closest school.
8. The review proposes 10 routes for cancellation. Redesign is proposed for seven existing routes, and one new route is proposed. These eight routes have been designed to support 271 eligible students.
9. The earliest date for implementation of any changes would be from the start of Term 1, 2026, and changes may be phased in.

*Engagement with affected schools underway*

10. Face-to-face engagement meetings with the affected schools on the preliminary results of the review and proposed route designs will begin in the week of 25 August 2025. ORC staff are accompanying Ministry officials to these meeting, as they are better placed to answer questions relating to public transport and local roading matters.
11. Follow-up online meetings are planned for the following week as the schools may have further questions once they have had some time to review the proposed changes and are considering what to include in their feedback.
12. We will also be reaching out to the local MP, Joseph Mooney, to offer to meet with him to brief him on the preliminary result.
13. Schools have until 18 September 2025 to provide the Ministry with their feedback on the proposed changes. We anticipate that by the end of Week 1, Term 4 2025 (10 October 2025), we will provide schools with the final outcome of the review, including any route changes, and the expected start date of any changes.
14. We anticipate that your office will receive correspondence from members of the community, local schools, local councils and MPs about the proposed changes. Reactive messages are provided in **Annex 1**.

## **Annex 1: Key messages on Queenstown Lakes school bus review**

*Route reviews are necessary to deliver fit-for-purpose transport services for eligible students*

- The Ministry routinely reviews existing school transport services (including funding agreements and daily bus routes) to reflect changes in the numbers and locations of eligible students.
- Route reviews ensure school transport services are fit for purpose, efficient and meet the needs of eligible students. They also allow the Ministry to respond to demographic changes, changes in local schooling networks, and the expansion of local public transport networks.
- Planning and delivery of school bus services, including reviewing existing routes, are operational matters for the Ministry of Education.
- The current programme of route reviews across the country has not been directed by the Government, and route reviews are not undertaken with the specific intention of identifying savings or reducing costs.
- There have been significant changes to the public transport and school networks in the Queenstown Lakes area in recent years, which have led to changes in the number and location of eligible students. As a result, the Ministry is currently reviewing all school transport services in the Queenstown Lakes area.

*Queenstown Lakes school bus review*

*How many routes are being reviewed and what is the proposed outcome? How many students will be affected?*

- There have been changes in the local school network and significant changes to the public transport network in the Queenstown Lakes district, the latest public transport changes being in July 2025.
- These changes have led to many students in the area being identified as ineligible for school transport assistance.
- Officials have advised that they are reviewing 17 bus routes in the Queenstown Lakes area. There are approximately 682 students using these services.
- The Ministry is currently engaging with affected schools on the proposed changes and seeking their feedback.
- The review is proposing that 10 routes be cancelled, due to students not being eligible for a Ministry school bus service. Seven existing routes are proposed to be redesigned and one new route proposed to be implemented. These eight routes would serve 271 eligible students.
- Many students who currently use Ministry services in the area are not eligible either because they do not attend their closest school or there is public transport available.

- Caregivers are in the best position to decide the safest and most convenient way to meet their responsibility to get students to school. This decision will depend on a range of factors.
- I trust that where the Ministry is not able to assist with transport, caregivers will make the right choices for students to get to their chosen school safely every day.
- Other options schools and communities may consider include carpooling or investigating whether a local bus operator would consider running a commercial school bus service.

Released under the Official Information Act 1982



## Information Update: Influence of Student Characteristics, Experiences and Outcomes on Income at Age 30

|   |  |                     |                    |
|---|--|---------------------|--------------------|
| <b>To:</b>                              | Hon Erica Stanford, Minister of Education                  |                     |                    |
| <b>Date:</b>                            | 11 August 2025   | <b>Priority:</b>    | Medium             |
| <b>Security Level:</b>                  | In-Confidence  | <b>METIS No:</b>    | 1350376            |
| <b>From:</b>                            | Sam Jolly<br>Manager, Analysis,<br>Research and Evaluation | <b>Phone:</b>       | 9(2)(a) [REDACTED] |
| <b>Seen by the Communications Team:</b> | No   | <b>Round Robin:</b> | No                 |

### Request

At an interagency meeting on 15 January 2024, while discussing NCEA attainment, you asked the Ministry to identify the cohort of students who started NCEA Level 1 or Level 2 in 2023, did not finish and are now not enrolled in school.

We responded by identifying the 20,327 students in upper secondary education in 2023 who did not attain NCEA Level 2 and have left school (METIS 1325171 refers).

We then:

- developed a model to predict who was at risk of not completing NCEA Level 1 (METIS 1330963 refers);
- derived a measure of individual Socio-Economic Status (SES) based on variables from the Equity Index shown to have strong predictive power for educational outcomes; and
- created a dashboard<sup>1</sup> of student characteristics and outcomes for school leaver cohorts from 2009 to 2023 that we would be happy to demonstrate to you (METIS 1341598 refers).

We continue this work under the Priority Six workstream *Student Characteristics, Experiences and Outcomes Modelling*.

### Alignment with Government priorities

- 1 The analysis in this Information Update aligns with Priority Six of the Government's Education Work Programme - using high-performing data and evidence to inform decision-making.

<sup>1</sup> Since then, we have added more ways to view the data, new types of outcomes and improved the visualisations. The dashboard has been socialised within the Ministry. There is potential to include long-term NEET status and/or focus on cohorts that have received specific interventions.

## Modelling Influences on Income at Age 30

- 2 Our earlier analysis had focused on immediate post-school destinations (tertiary education / employment / NEET) in the year after leaving secondary school. Aware that this can be a transitory year for some young people and may not be a reliable indicator of longer-term outcomes, we wanted to explore the sustainability of impacts of factors such as SES and educational qualification.
- 3 This IU highlights insights from a model created to examine income<sup>2</sup> differences at age 30. Age 30 is far enough from school-leaving age to largely avoid distortions from delayed entry into tertiary education or employment, and frequent changes in income during career commencement and early progression, yet still early enough to capture the influence of education and training decisions. It helps assess how educational pathways translate into real-world earnings.

## Methodology

- 4 We added an earnings analysis to the dashboard. For children born in 1993, we gather income data of those who were fully employed in 2023. Those who were fully employed were selected as the study population to avoid the impact of part-time employment and unemployment on earnings – which could be considerable, and temporary effects of periods out of the workforce – for example, for parental leave – as these effects could be sensitive to the age of the study population and are known to differ by gender and SES group. A potential extension of the analysis could involve adding an employment variable.
- 5 The analysis looks at the relationship between SES<sup>3</sup>, demographic characteristics, educational attainment and income as the dependent or outcome variable. We analyse earnings using four models of differences in income at age 30, starting first with just SES at the time the student left school, then adding layers of demographic (gender and ethnicity) and education (school and tertiary) qualification factors.
- 6 By the fourth model, all factors are included as independent variables.

## Results

- 7 The key findings from this analysis are that socio-economic background has a strong correlation with earnings at age 30, and that educational qualifications can make a significant difference without completely alleviating the impacts of SES.
- 8 We find that:
  - each successive independent variable accounts for some of the difference in earnings, and
  - the SES gradient remains visible, even after accounting for demographics, school qualifications, and tertiary qualification level, indicating a non-trivial SES effect.

---

<sup>2</sup> Pre-tax, annual earnings.

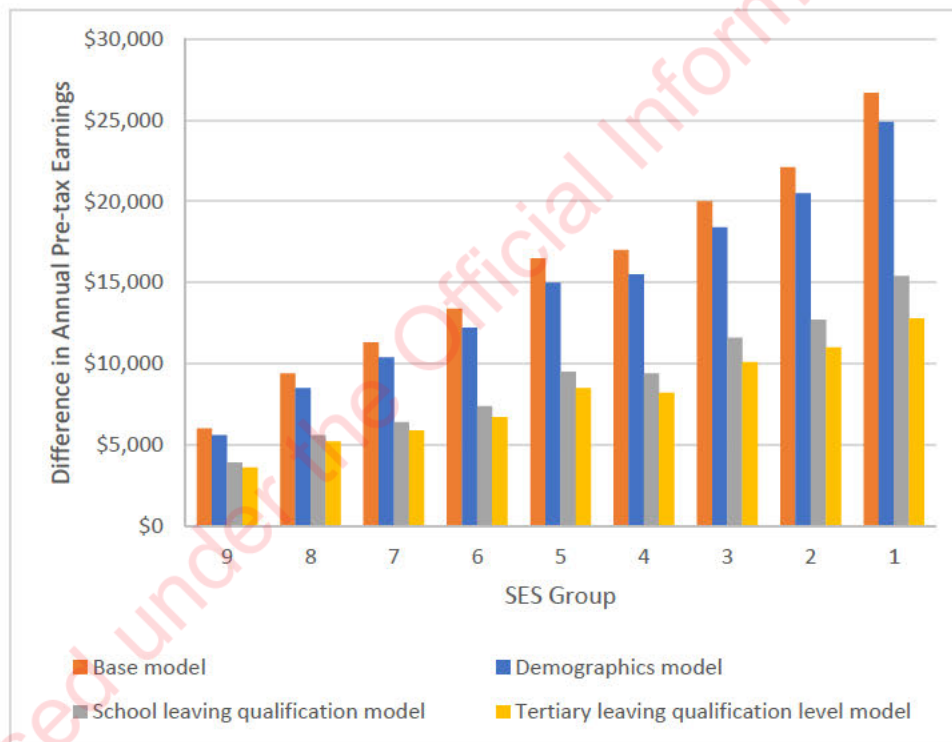
<sup>3</sup> SES is assigned at the time of leaving school. The specific factors for calculating SES are those shown by our earlier analysis to be significant socio-economic predictors of educational under-achievement: Mother's age at first birth; Highest interaction with Oranga Tamariki; Highest parental interaction with Justice system; Number of home changes; Parental benefit income; Parental highest qualification; Parental income; Number of elder siblings.

9 The following sections discuss the impacts of each set of variables.

### Socio-economic factors

10 Our earlier analysis demonstrated that several socio-economic risk indicators have an ordinarily consistent relationship with educational outcomes and post-school destinations. This new analysis extends this to show that these same factors – when bundled to create ten socio-economic groupings based on a person’s characteristics at the point at which they leave school – have a strong and consistent relationship with earnings at age 30. For example, Figure 1 shows that someone in the most socio-economically advantaged category (group 1) earns \$26,700 per annum more than someone in the most disadvantaged category (group 10). This effect dissipates when demographic, school leaving qualification and tertiary level qualifications are added; however, we find that a significant impact remains that cannot be explained by any of the other (non-SES) factors in our model. Someone from SES risk group 1, of the same ethnicity and gender, and with the same secondary and tertiary educational qualifications as someone in SES risk group 10, will still earn \$12,800 per annum more at age 30.

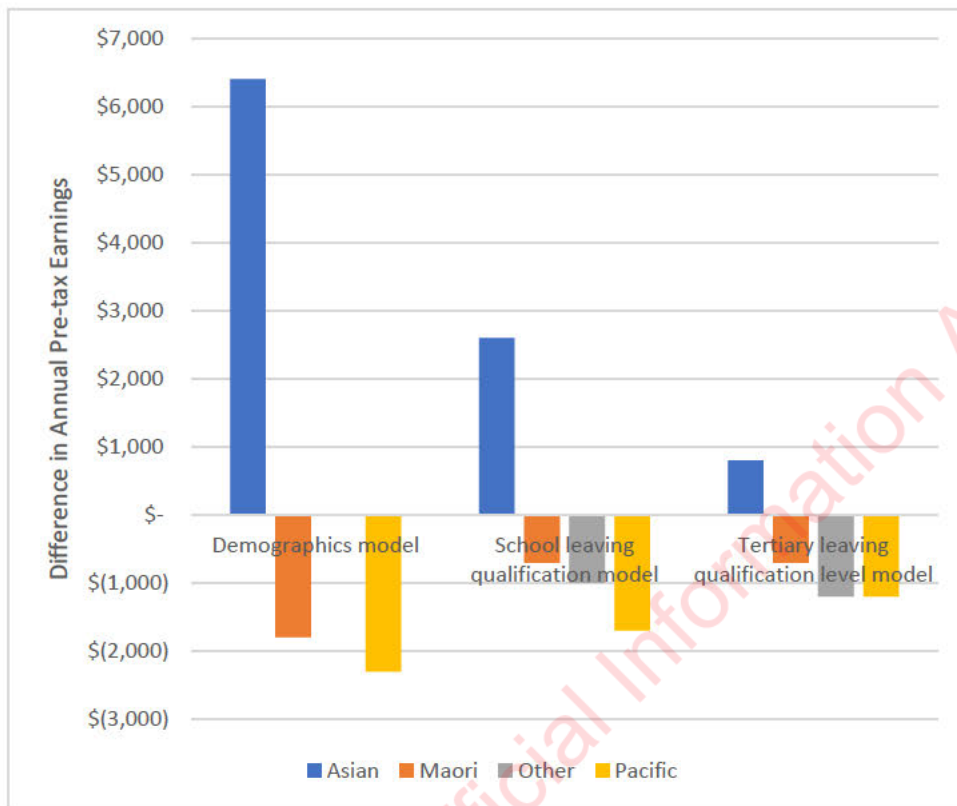
Figure 1: SES (comparison is the most disadvantaged SES group 10)



### Demographics

11 There are observed differences in earnings for different ethnic groups, with Māori and Pacific people earning slightly less than Europeans. However, these differences are not statistically significant after controlling for school and tertiary leaving qualifications (the difference remains significant for Pacific people if only school qualifications are considered). Asian people earn almost \$6,500 per annum more than European people once SES is controlled for; however, almost all of the difference can be explained by qualifications.

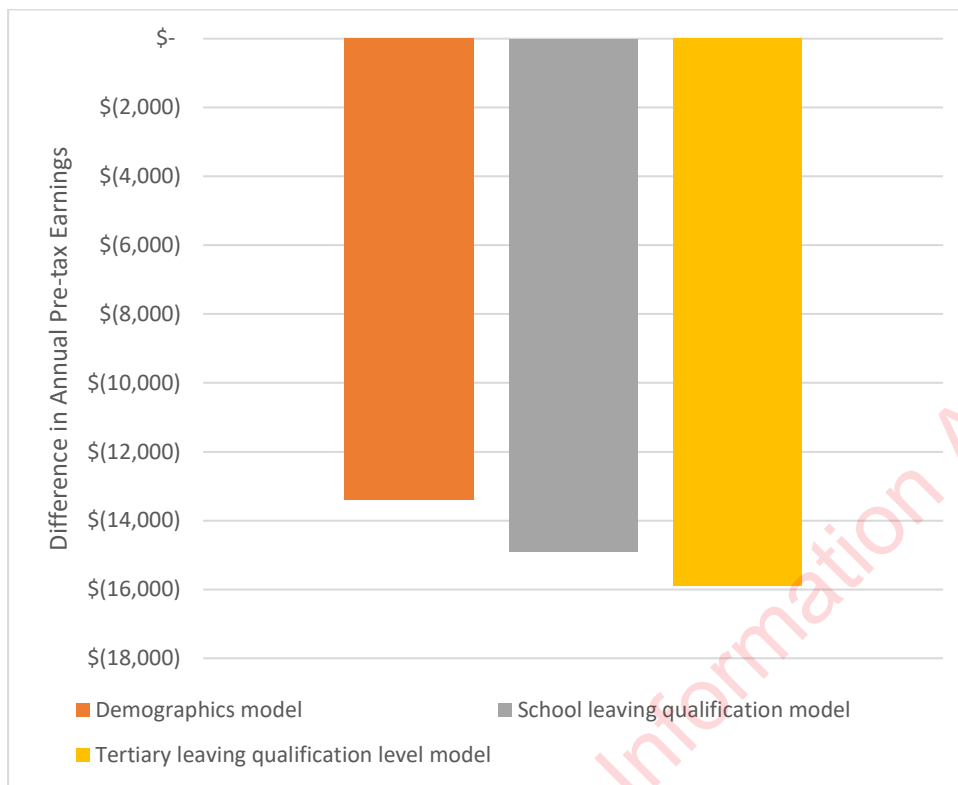
Figure 2: Ethnicity (comparison is European ethnicity)



12 Females earn less than males. Rather than being explained in part by differences in qualifications as is the case for SES and ethnicity, the differential is exacerbated further when we control for qualifications. On average, a female in full-time employment at age 30 will earn around \$16,000 per annum less than a male of the same SES group and ethnicity, with the same level of school and tertiary qualifications.

Released under the Official Information Act 1982

Figure 3: Gender (comparison is Male)



13 Our models are not causal, and the widening gap shown in gender suggests there are other things responsible for the difference. Explanations from wider labour market literature include:

- historical norms in place at the time this cohort entered the workforce,
- segregation of occupations,
- discriminatory practices, and
- interruptions to career progression.

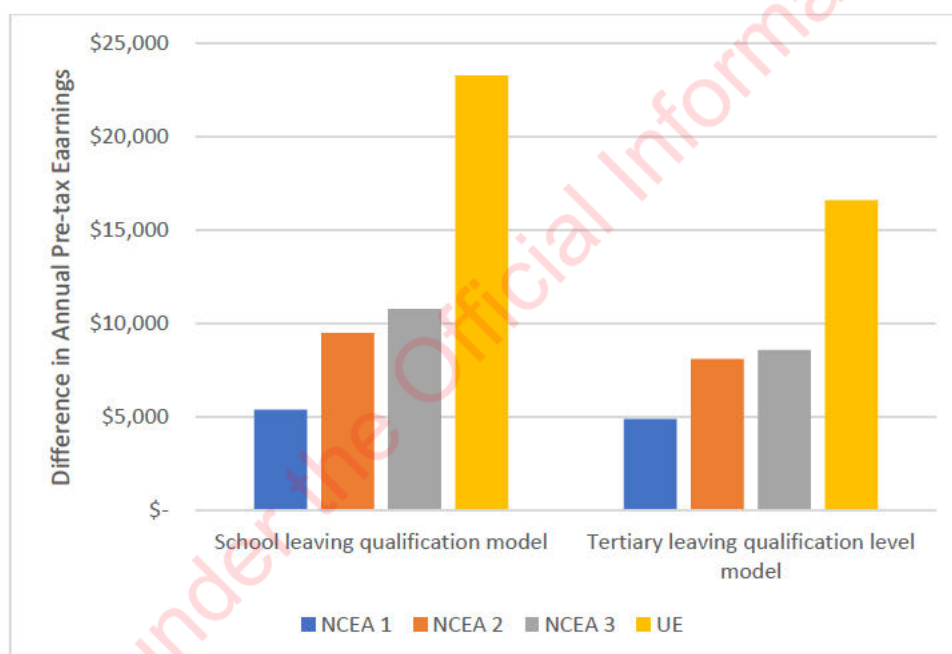
14 This is one example of where a potential extension to our analysis might shed further light. We could investigate the impacts of different areas of study to potentially explain why some groups appear to obtain a higher payoff from qualifications of a given level.

*School leaving qualifications*

15 Higher school qualification levels are related to higher income. This is not surprising, but the importance of University Entrance as a gateway to higher earnings is interesting. There is almost no earnings difference between NCEA Levels 2 and 3 as a highest school leaving qualification; however, the additional earnings premium associated with University Entrance in comparison to NCEA Level 3 is stark.

- 16 Someone who leaves school with NCEA Level 3 will earn, on average, more than \$8,000 per annum more at age 30 than someone without a secondary school qualification, even when SES, ethnicity, gender and tertiary qualifications are controlled for. This income premium doubles if the highest school qualification is University Entrance.
- 17 This may have policy implications in terms of promoting the importance of structuring programmes of study and credit attainment to ensure that students studying at Level 3 achieve University Entrance. This could be a valuable area for further analysis to understand the profile, experiences and obstacles faced by the cohort that fail to achieve UE by small margins. Insights from such analysis could contribute to the design of the new assessment system.
- 18 Figure 4 suggests that variation in tertiary qualifications makes a greater difference to earnings for those who leave school with NCEA Level 3, and particularly University Entrance. This is perhaps unsurprising given the wider range of tertiary options available to these students and the related pathways to higher earnings.

Figure 4: School leaving qualification (comparison is No School qualification)

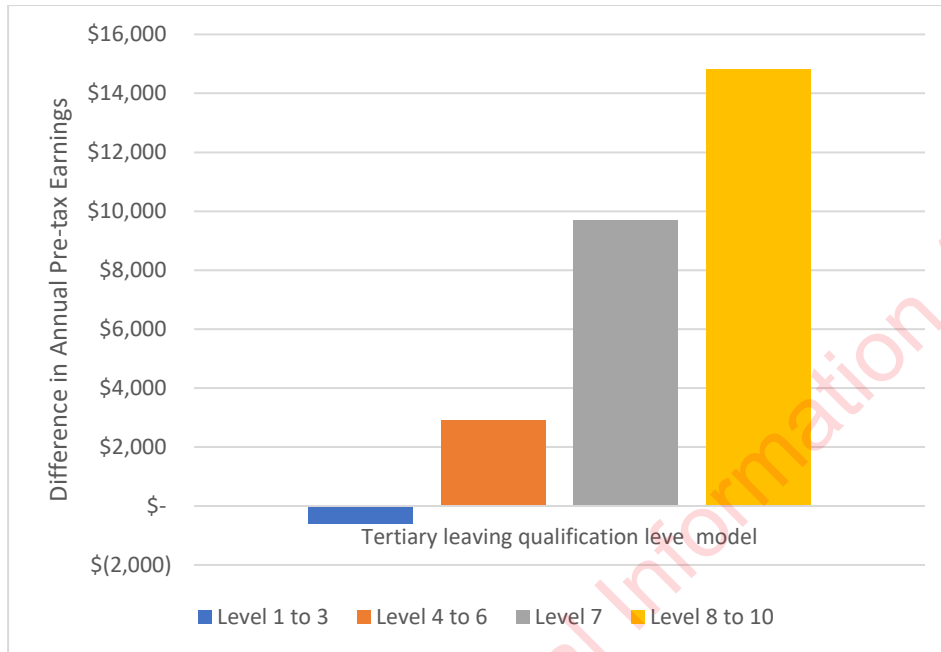


#### Tertiary qualifications

- 19 As expected, and as seen with schooling qualifications, higher tertiary qualification levels are related to higher income. Someone with a level 8 – 10 qualification earns on average \$14,800 per annum more at age 30 than someone without a tertiary qualification.

20 Interestingly, the earnings impact of a level 1 – 3 qualification is negative, compared with someone with no tertiary qualification. Potential explanations are offered in previous Ministry research<sup>i</sup> which points to low labour market returns, the opportunity costs of study, and low demand for, and a mismatch of, skills.

Figure 5: Tertiary leaving qualifications (comparison is no Tertiary qualification)



*Full results*

21 The complete results of this analysis are shown in Table 1. Each monetary amount can be read as the impact on earnings aged 30 of the characteristics in the left-hand columns, compared with the baseline group, in each of our four models. The impacts of any given variable typically, although not always, diminish as more explanatory variables are added to the model.

Released under the Official Information Act 1982

Table 1: Income at age 30

|  |         | SES model | Demographics model | School leaving qualification model | Tertiary leaving qualification level model |
|--|---------|-----------|--------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| <b>SES (Group 10)</b>                                  |         |           |                    |                                    |  |
| <i>Disadvantage</i>                                    | 9       | \$6,000   | \$5,600            | \$3,900                            | \$3,600                                    |
|  | 8       | \$9,400   | \$8,500            | \$5,600                            | \$5,200                                    |
|  | 7       | \$11,300  | \$10,400           | \$6,400                            | \$5,900                                    |
|  | 6       | \$13,400  | \$12,200           | \$7,400                            | \$6,700                                    |
|  | 5       | \$16,500  | \$15,000           | \$9,500                            | \$8,500                                    |
|  | 4       | \$17,000  | \$15,500           | \$9,400                            | \$8,200                                    |
|  | 3       | \$20,000  | \$18,400           | \$11,600                           | \$10,100                                   |
|  | 2       | \$22,100  | \$20,500           | \$12,700                           | \$11,000                                   |
| <i>Advantage</i>                                       | 1       | \$26,700  | \$24,900           | \$15,400                           | \$12,800                                   |
| <b>Gender (Male)</b>                                   |         |           |                    |                                    |  |
|  | Female  |           | -\$13,400          | -\$14,900                          | -\$15,900                                  |
| <b>Ethnicity (European)</b>                            |         |           |                    |                                    |  |
|  | Asian   |           | \$6,400            | \$2,600                            | \$800                                      |
|  | Māori   |           | -\$1,800           | -\$700*                            | -\$700*                                    |
|  | Other   |           | \$ -               | -\$1,000*                          | -\$1,200*                                  |
|  | Pacific |           | -\$2,300           | -\$1,700                           | -\$1,200*                                  |
| <b>School qualification level (No Qualification)</b>   |         |           |                    |                                    |  |
|  | NCEA 1  |           |                    | \$5,400                            | \$4,900                                    |
|  | NCEA 2  |           |                    | \$9,500                            | \$8,100                                    |
|  | NCEA 3  |           |                    | \$10,800                           | \$8,600                                    |
|  | UE      |           |                    | \$23,300                           | \$16,600                                   |
| <b>Tertiary qualification level (No Qualification)</b> |         |           |                    |                                    |  |
|  | 1 to 3  |           |                    |                                    | -\$600                                     |
|  | 4 to 6  |           |                    |                                    | \$2,900                                    |
|  | 7       |           |                    |                                    | \$9,700                                    |
|  | 8 to 10 |           |                    |                                    | \$14,800                                   |

\* Indicates earnings are not significantly different

*Illustrative examples*

- 22 To aid the interpretation of the results of the models, we can compare the earnings of two illustrative individuals:
- Person A, who faces high socio-economic barriers (SES 10), is a woman of Pacific ethnicity, and who left school without a qualification and has a tertiary level 1 certificate as her highest qualification, and
  - Person B, who has an SES advantage (SES 1), is a man of Asian ethnicity, and who has UE and Tertiary level 9 as his highest school and tertiary qualifications.
- 23 Taking these independent variables into account the total difference in earnings is significant for this example:

Table 2: Hypothetical comparison

|   | SES model       | Demographics model | School leaving qualification model | Tertiary leaving qualification level model |
|---|-----------------|--------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Person A</b>                                       |                 |                    |                                    |  |
| SES   | \$0             | \$0                | \$0                                | \$0  |
| Gender  |                 | -\$13,400          | -\$14,900                          | -\$15,900                                  |
| Ethnicity   |                 | -\$2,300           | -\$1,700                           | -\$1,200                                   |
| School quals  |                 |                    | \$0                                | \$0  |
| Tertiary quals  |                 |                    |                                    | -\$600                                     |
| <i>Total impact relative to baseline comparators</i>  | \$0             | -\$15,700          | -\$16,600                          | -\$17,700                                  |
| <b>Person B</b>                                       |                 |                    |                                    |  |
| SES   | \$26,700        | \$24,900           | \$15,400                           | \$12,800                                   |
| Gender  |                 | \$0                | \$0                                | \$0  |
| Ethnicity   |                 | \$6,400            | \$2,600                            | \$800                                      |
| School quals  |                 |                    | \$23,000                           | \$16,600                                   |
| Tertiary quals  |                 |                    |                                    | \$14,800                                   |
| <i>Total impact relative to baseline comparators</i>  | \$26,700        | \$31,300           | \$41,000                           | \$45,000                                   |
| <b>Total difference between Person A and Person B</b> | <b>\$26,700</b> | <b>\$47,000</b>    | <b>\$57,600</b>                    | <b>\$62,700</b>                            |

**Consistency with other research**

- 24 While our models are descriptive, the findings are consistent with other research that shows SES has a persistent moderate to strong effect on academic success<sup>ii</sup> that in turn can limit career choice and progress. Within education, other contributors that can limit qualification attainment are:
- access to quality early childhood education<sup>iii</sup>
  - levels of school resourcing<sup>iv</sup> and quality<sup>v</sup>

- development of early literacy and numeracy skills<sup>vi</sup>
- impact of special education needs and disability<sup>vii</sup>, and
- distinct levels of parental and family involvement and expectations.<sup>viii</sup>

25 Our findings are broadly consistent with previous Ministry research<sup>ix</sup> that shows:

- Education level correlates strongly with income.
- Adults with no qualifications earned almost 20% less in weekly income and around 12% less in hourly earnings than those with school qualifications.
- The relative income benefit of gaining further qualifications was higher for men than for women.
- Māori with no or low-level qualifications earned 3–4% less than European/Pākehā with similar qualifications. With Level 4+ qualifications, the gap widened to 8–10%.

### Limitations and extensions

26 We did not look at structural and social elements that can impact earnings such as occupational, seniority or leadership differences, career interruptions, difference in bargaining power, or discriminatory practices.

27 Our model is descriptive, not explanatory. It controls for differences between groups but does not account for cause.

28 Possible extensions or complements to our analysis that could be considered in our forward work programme include:

- Looking at full-time and part time employment rates as either outcomes or explanatory variables
- Researching evidence of the capacity of labour markets to absorb increases in qualified graduates without compromising the relationship between qualifications and earnings
- Exploring the impacts of educational qualifications and other factors such as SES on a wider range of later outcomes
- Analysing the impact of fields of study or occupational industry classifications in explaining observed earnings differences, for example, between SES groups
- An examination of outliers – people whose earnings (and other outcomes) diverge significantly from expectations based on factors such as SES and qualifications
- A deep dive into students who achieve NCEA Level 3, but not University Entrance, and
- Using new and strengthened data sources to analyse the robustness of earlier measures of progress and achievement in predicting future outcomes.

29 Our current analytical work programme is fully subscribed and hence we do not have concrete plans to pursue these extensions in the short term. However, we will continue to consider prioritising them over time and welcome any direction as to areas of greatest interest to you.

### Conclusions

30 Education is a vehicle for social mobility. Completing a qualification, particularly UE and a higher-level tertiary qualification, is strongly associated with earnings at age 30. This relationship holds for people of all socio-economic backgrounds. For example, a

student from the most disadvantaged background (SES group 10) who achieves UE can be expected, on average, to earn more than a student from the least disadvantaged background (SES group 1) who leaves school without a qualification.

- 31 However, the effects of childhood socio-economic characteristics are pervasive. Even the highest levels of educational achievement offer only a partial offset in terms of earnings. Within our model, SES explains around half of the differences in earnings at age 30; as much as tertiary qualifications, school qualifications, gender and ethnicity combined. A student from an advantaged background, with no tertiary qualification, can still be expected, on average, to earn more than a disadvantaged student with a Bachelor's degree (assuming no difference in gender, ethnicity and school qualifications).
- 32 This is a descriptive analytical model, and caution must be exercised in attributing causality. It is also not a project that seeks to offer a policy prescription to change or offset the observed relationships. However, the results could support at least three broad policy directions:
- Increasing educational attainment should be a key plank of labour market strategies, particularly those with equity objectives
  - Labour market participants from disadvantaged backgrounds require additional or different forms of support to gain the same returns from educational qualifications as those from advantaged backgrounds, and
  - Both labour market and educational outcomes will benefit from strategies that address the underlying drivers and consequences of socio-economic disadvantage, including effective cross-agency collaboration in areas such as housing and children at risk of harm

#### **Next steps**

- 33 Socialisation of these insights, and discussion of potential extensions and applications, will continue across the Ministry.
- 34 As you directed us to with previous analysis of NCEA non-completion risk factors (METIS 1330963 refers), we plan to share these findings with Labour Market CEs and DCEs groups, and potentially the Labour Market Ministers Group, over the next few months.
- 35 We intend to proactively release this Information Update on the Ministry website as part of a future regular information release.

## Endnotes

- 
- <sup>i</sup> Ministry of Education. Education and Earnings: a New Zealand update. Wellington, NZ: Education Counts; 2018. Accessed July 14, 2025. [https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0006/198987/Education-and-Earnings-a-New-Zealand-update.pdf](https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/data/assets/pdf_file/0006/198987/Education-and-Earnings-a-New-Zealand-update.pdf)
- <sup>ii</sup> Sirin, S. R. (2005). Socioeconomic status and academic achievement: A meta-analytic review of research. *Review of Educational Research*, 75(3), 417–453.
- <sup>iii</sup> von Suchodoletz, A., Lee, D. S., Henry, J., Tamang, S., Premachandra, B., & Yoshikawa, H. (2023). Early childhood education and care quality and associations with child outcomes: A meta-analysis. *PLoS ONE*, 18(5), e0285985. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0285985>.
- <sup>iv</sup> Greenwald, R., Hedges, L. V., & Laine, R. D. (1996). The effect of school resources on student achievement. *Review of Educational Research*, 66(3), 361–396.
- <sup>v</sup> Deming, D. J., Hastings, J. S., Kane, T. J., & Staiger, D. O. (2014). School Choice, School Quality, and Postsecondary Attainment. *The American Economic Review*, 104(3), 991–1013. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42920726>.
- <sup>vi</sup> Charitaki et al. (2021) – A Meta-Analytic Synthesis of Early Numeracy Interventions for Low-Performing Young Children.
- <sup>vii</sup> Nuffield Foundation. (2022–2024). Raising educational outcomes for pupils with SEN and disabilities. <https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/project/raising-educational-outcomes-for-pupils-with-sen-and-disabilities>.
- <sup>viii</sup> Ma, X., Shen, J., Krenn, H. Y., Hu, S., & Yuan, J. (2016). A meta-analysis of the relationship between learning outcomes and parental involvement during early childhood education and early elementary education. *Educational Psychology Review*, 28(4), 771–801. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-015-9351-1>.
- <sup>ix</sup> Scott, D. (2021). Education, income and earnings – with updates for 2020. Ministry of Education.

## Rapid Response: Kupu Māori in ready to read phonics plus books

|   |   |                     |                    |
|---|---|---------------------|--------------------|
| <b>To:</b>                              | Hon Erica Stanford, Minister of Education                           |                     |                    |
| <b>Date:</b>                            | 13 August 2025  | <b>Priority:</b>    | High               |
| <b>Security Level:</b>                  | In-Confidence   | <b>METIS No:</b>    | 1352297            |
| <b>From:</b>                            | Campbell Birch – Chief Adviser, New Zealand Curriculum & Te Whāriki | <b>Phone:</b>       | 9(2)(a) [REDACTED] |
| <b>Seen by the Communications Team:</b> | No  | <b>Round Robin:</b> | No                 |

### Request and Ministry Response

#### 1. Timeline & Rationale

- a. A clear timeline for the release of the remaining phonics books (7 later this year and a final 12 next year – 19 total).
  - b. The rationale for the sequencing and production schedule.
- As of August 2025, the Ministry has released 78 books as part of the Ready to Read Phonics Plus series.
  - There are seven books currently in development, and these are planned to be released in Term 4, 2025.
  - To complete the series and ensure the scope and sequence for beginner readers is covered, 12 further books are planned to be released in Term 2 and Term 4, 2026.
  - Once students have mastered decoding, te reo Māori continues to be supported through the Junior Journal series for Year 3 students and the School Journal series for Years 4–8 students.
  - As with all new Ready to Read Phonics Plus books, the Ministry sends physical copies straight to schools and kura using *The New Zealand Curriculum*. Digital versions are also available on the Ministry's curriculum website, Tāhūrangi.
  - Schools can order reprints of any book in the series from Down the Back of the Chair, the Ministry's online catalogue of teaching and learning resources.

#### 2. Scope and Sequence

- a. A concise explanation and one-liner definition of “scope and sequence” in the context of the phonics programme.
- A scope and sequence provides a pathway for teaching and learning the written code.
  - ‘Scope’ refers to the concepts or skills that need to be taught. ‘Sequence’ refers to the order in which the concepts and skills are introduced.

- This ensures that foundational knowledge is built before introducing more complex concepts. This structured approach helps students make connections, facilitating deeper understanding and retention of information.
- The scope and sequence for the Ready to Read Phonics Plus series is available at: <https://newzealandcurriculum.tahurangi.education.govt.nz/ready-to-read-phonics-plus---series-introduction/5637201615.p>

### 3. Current Māori Content

- a. Confirmation that there are currently 26 RRP+ containing kupu Māori in circulation, each with up to 4 Māori words.
  - b. Confirmation that there will be no further reduction in student RRP+ printed books that include kupu Māori.
- Of the 78 books currently available in the series, approximately 30 books include kupu Māori (excluding the names of characters).
  - Of the approximately 30 books, most include 2–4 kupu Māori
  - The Ministry has provided additional support for these words, sending packs of te reo Māori Kete Cards to all schools. These resources introduce the origins of the words, support correct pronunciation, and explain the sound-letter relationships of te reo Māori.
  - Digital copies of the Kete Cards are available on the Ministry’s website: <https://newzealandcurriculum.tahurangi.education.govt.nz/te-reo-m-ori-kete-cards/5637190440.p/>. Schools can also order physical copies from Down the Back of the Chair.
  - There is no further reduction in Ready to Read Phonics Plus books that currently include kupu Māori.
  - The Ministry will not be including kupu Māori in any new Ready to Read Phonics Plus books (except for character names).

### 4. Reasoning for Changes

- a. The Ministry’s clear reasoning for:
  - b. removing the ‘at the Marae’ student reader
  - c. excluding Māori words from future phonics books.
- The decision to re-size *At the Marae* into a big book was guided by phonics sequencing and decoding suitability.
  - Unlike other titles in the *Ready to Read Phonics Plus* series, *At the Marae* includes a higher number of kupu Māori which contain multiple syllables. This presents decoding challenges within the phonics sequence used in the series.
  - The primary challenge lies in the multisyllabic nature of the kupu Māori in this particular book (e.g., *karakia*, *wharenuī*). Multisyllabic words are not introduced until later in the series.
  - Additionally, vowel sounds in te reo Māori are different than English, and different from those specifically taught at this point in the decodable series. This makes those words

difficult for early readers to decode, especially those students with dyslexia and other literacy learning needs.

- Given the high proportion of non-decodable words, *At the Marae* is best suited for shared reading.
- The teaching notes in the back of *At the Marae* have been updated so that teachers can confidently use the new big book format to support structured approaches to literacy.
- We've sent physical copies of the new *At the Marae* big book straight to primary schools and kura using The New Zealand Curriculum, and a digital version is available on our website, Tāhūrangi.
- This is consistent with the approach to supporting ākonga learning to read through te reo Māori. Titles in the Ministry's te reo Māori decodable series, *Ngā Kete Kōrero*, do not include English-language words.

## 5. Policy Context

- a. Any broader policy commitments or initiatives that demonstrate continued support for te reo Māori in education – Māori crown relations
- The Māori Education Action Plan is framed against the Minister of Education's six education priorities and contributes to Government Targets set for Attendance (Target 6) and Achievement (Target 7). The Action Plan brings together over 50 early actions from across the Ministry of Education that focus on lifting achievement and closing the equity gap for Māori learners and all learners of te reo Māori within English medium and Māori medium education settings. The Māori Education Action Plan will:
    - Provide more up-to-date progress by aligning the actions with reporting on Attendance and Achievement targets and other education reports
    - Refresh the actions that support further development of the Action Plan
    - Provide an evidence-base upon which the Ministry of Education can draw from on what works for Māori learners.
  - In September 2024, the Māori Education Ministerial Advisory Group was established to provide you with independent advice on all matters related to Māori education in both English medium and Māori medium settings.
  - The MAG is focussed on the most impactful ways to lift achievement for Māori learners.
  - This was followed in December 2024, by the release of the Māori Education Action plan, which sets out the Government's approach to deliver better outcomes in the classroom for Māori students – delivering tangible actions across the Government's education priorities.
  - Whilst the Action plan sets out early actions to support the achievement of Māori students in English medium settings, you continue to work closely with Te Matakāhuki, leaders and representative groups of Kaupapa Māori education, to build work programmes that reflects shared priorities.
  - In May, Budget 2025 continued the Government's support for te reo Māori and tikanga through a specific Māori Education package, consisting of the following investments:

- \$14.7m for up to 51,000 teachers and Kaiako to develop skills in te reo Māori and tikanga levels
  - \$10.0m to establish a Virtual Learning Network to deliver online STEM subjects in Kaupapa Māori and Māori Medium education for up to 5,000 ākonga in Years 9 to 13
  - \$4.5m to provide (five) te reo matatini texts, five STEM texts and associated teaching materials, per year, to 105 Wharekura, supporting up to 5,000 ākonga.
  - \$4.8m to establish (seven) new Curriculum Advisor roles ring fenced for Kaupapa Māori and Māori medium education settings, benefiting up to 21,548 ākonga.
  - \$2.1m to develop a Māori Studies subject area for years 11 – 13, and
  - \$50m of additional capital to delivery an additional 50 new classrooms across Māori medium education and Kaupapa Māori network, expected to benefit up to 1,100 ākonga Māori.
- The budget package was in addition to curriculum and assessment interventions to lift achievement across the schooling system which are expected to have positive and measurable impacts for ākonga Māori.
  - In a broader context, the Ministry of Education, through its internal Māori language action plan, Te Aka Maurea, expresses an ongoing commitment towards te reo Māori revitalisation and the Maihi Karauna. Te Aka Maurea continues to build te reo Māori capability within the Ministry and is aligned to the education sector's wider Māori Language in Education strategy, Tau Mai Te Reo.

## 6. Consultation

- a. Which experts, educators, or advisory groups were consulted on the decision to remove this book and adjust Māori word inclusion.
  - b. Any feedback (from schools, parents, literacy experts) that informed this decision.
  - c. The literacy goals the Ministry is seeking to achieve with this change, and how success will be measured.
- The Ministry works with trusted external partners and internal literacy experts to develop the Ready to Read Phonics Plus series. This has included Māori educators and language specialists.
  - The Ministry has had feedback from structured literacy experts, who are often PLD providers, regarding the use of kupu Māori in a series designed for children to learn to read English.
  - While not every decision involves consultation with all experts, the overall development process is collaborative and inclusive.
  - We acknowledge that not all experts will agree with every decision, and we welcome ongoing conversations from the sector.
  - The feedback and focus this has brought to the value of structured literacy — and its role in supporting all children to learn to read — is important and appreciated.

- We want all students to learn to decode accurately and fluently. Phonics progress and achievement can be monitored using the new Phonics Checks as well as information the Ministry receives from PLD providers as part of reporting requirements.

## **7. Māori**

- a. Rationale for supporting Minister commissioned work on a scope and sequence for Māori vowel sounds in the NZC (see briefing). Please provide lines and update on how that work is going? At what year level does this start.
- We are looking to include appropriate information and guidance about te reo Māori vowel sounds and pronunciation in the English learning area of The New Zealand Curriculum from Year 2.
  - This aligns with when te reo Māori increasingly appears in the Ministry's literacy resources, such as the Junior Journal and School Journal series.

Released under the Official Information Act 1982

## Rapid Response: Conifer Grove School

|   |   |                     |         |
|---|---|---------------------|---------|
| <b>To:</b>                              | Hon Erica Stanford, Minister of Education |                     |         |
| <b>Date:</b>                            | 15 August 2025                            | <b>Priority:</b>    | High    |
| <b>Security Level:</b>                  | In-Confidence                             | <b>METIS No:</b>    | 1352382 |
| <b>From:</b>                            | Leisa Maddix<br>Acting Hautū, Te Tai Raro | <b>Phone:</b>       | 9(2)(a) |
| <b>Seen by the Communications Team:</b> | No  | <b>Round Robin:</b> | No      |

### Request

Your office has requested an overview of Conifer Grove School.

### Response

- Conifer Grove School is a Year 1 to 8 Primary School on the eastern shores of Pahurehure Inlet on the Manukau Harbour in Takanini, South Auckland. The school values are Whakamiha (respect), Mana Motuhake (responsibility) and. Manaaki (caring).
- Lee-Anne Maxwell is currently the Acting Principal. The Presiding Member is Warren Rakena.
- The school has a roll of 547 students with the following ethnicities:
  - Māori 21.8%
  - Pasifika 14.3%
  - Asian 46.3%
  - European 14.3%
  - Other 3.5%
- ERO last visited the school in June 2019 and made recommendations around targeted planning, continuing to grow the quality and consistency of teaching practice as well as increasing teachers understanding and use of achievement information.

### Attendance

- Term 2 2025 (provisional) Attendance Overview:
  - Regular Attendance: 67.3%
  - Irregular Attendance: 20.25%
  - Moderate Absence: 7.23%
  - Chronic Absence: 5.2%
- Attendance Trend:
  - From Term 1, 2024 to Term 2, 2025, the average rate of regular attendance was 63.3%, with chronic absence averaging 7%.

- The lowest point in regular attendance was recorded in Term 3, 2024, at 58.5%.
7. Top Reason for Absence in Term 2 2025:
    - Illness accounted for over 57% of total absence time, making it the leading cause of student absences.
  8. Latest Daily Attendance:
    - Daily Attendance (Aug 14, 2025): 91%
    - Average Attendance (Past Week): 86.98%

## **Curriculum**

9. The school is engaged in Science of Learning and has a deep understanding of this and the new curriculum implementation.
10. The school is developing a local curriculum grounded in conceptual curriculum principles, which focus on broad, transferable ideas to deepen understanding and promote critical thinking. This approach brings coherence across teams and strengthens community engagement.
11. The school is on a Structured Literacy journey with classes from Years 0-3 working on the Science of Reading, supplemented by the CODE spelling programme for Years 4-6. There is a systematic approach to spelling across the school.
12. Conifer Grove has accessed Ministry-funded PLD with provider GEM Literacy to undertake the Little Learners Love Literacy programme supporting the school to embed the curriculum through evidence-based practices.
13. The school utilises NUMICON resources in Years 0-3 and Maths No Problem resources for Years 4-8 resources. They are engaging in professional learning opportunities through the resources that NUMICON provide and are leveraging the expertise of teachers in the sharing of best practice.
14. The focus of mathematics programmes is on incorporating practical applications of maths concepts into lessons to support engagement and learning.
15. Data is utilised to target interventions to support learner progress and to regular monitor and track progress.