

Cabinet Paper material

Proactive release

Minister & portfolio Hon Erica Stanford Minister of Education
Name of package Education and Training Act: System Monitoring and Reporting Improvements
Date considered 18 August 2025
Date of release 22 December 2025

These documents have been proactively released:

Education and Training Act: System Monitoring and Reporting Improvements

Date considered: 18 August 2025
Author: Office of the Minister of Education

Social Outcomes Committee Minute SOU-25-MIN-0099

Date considered: 13 August 2025
Author: Committee Secretary

Cabinet Minute CAB-25-MIN-0283

Date considered: 13 August 2025
Author: Secretary for the Cabinet

Material redacted

Some deletions have been made from the documents in line with withholding grounds under the Official Information Act 1982. Where information has been withheld, no public interest has been identified that would outweigh the reasons for withholding it.

The applicable withholding grounds under the Act are as follows:

Section 9(2)(f)(iv) to protect the confidentiality of advice tendered by Ministers of the Crown and officials

Some deletions have been made from the documents as the information withheld does not fall within scope of the Minister's portfolio responsibilities, and is not relevant to the proactive release of this material.

You can read the Official Information Act 1982 here:

<http://legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1982/0156/latest/DLM64785.html>

In Confidence

Office of the Minister of Education
Cabinet Social Outcomes Committee

Education and Training Act: System Monitoring and Reporting Improvements

Proposal

- 1 This paper seeks Cabinet agreement for policy proposals to amend the Education and Training Act 2020 (the Act) and approval to issue drafting instructions to:
 - 1.1 require schools to participate in studies that monitor the performance of our schooling system;
 - 1.2 include micro-credentials in the reporting requirements to the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA).
- 2 These changes will be progressed through the Education and Training (System Reform - ~~9(2)(f)~~ Amendment Bill (ERB1)) ~~9(2)(f)(iv)~~

Relation to government priorities

- 3 This Government has a relentless focus on student achievement. Assuring New Zealand's continued participation in system monitoring studies aligns with my education priority for better use of data. Ensuring that students are properly recognised for earning micro-credentials supports the system to drive achievement.

Executive Summary

- 4 I am committed to building an education system that enables every child to reach their full potential and make the most of their time at school. It is essential that students acquire the skills and qualifications that will support their transition into further education and meaningful employment.
- 5 Using high-performing data and evidence to inform decision-making is one of my priorities for the education portfolio [SOU-MIN-0026 refers]. Good data and evidence inform good decision-making. I am committed to laying the administrative foundations for a social investment approach to decision-making in Vote Education by improving the quality of data and evidence so that we can better meet the needs of students, maximise the value we create in their lives and make good decisions about actions and investments to lift student attendance and achievement.
- 6 To do this, we need to collect better system-level information through ongoing and consistent participation in international monitoring studies and the expansion of New Zealand's own Curriculum Insights and Progress study. These studies usually provide us with important and comprehensive system performance data to inform decision making. However, New Zealand schools have now failed to meet minimum participation rates in two of our four key system monitoring studies, and we are at risk

of missing out on the data and insights they provide. This trend looks set to continue despite the current incentives the Ministry provides schools to encourage their participation. To address this, I am proposing to mandate the participation of schools in system monitoring studies.

7 I have also been made aware that micro-credentials are not required to be reported to the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA), resulting in incomplete records of the qualifications that New Zealanders are gaining. Therefore, I propose an amendment to the Act to include these micro-credentials in credits reported on to NZQA. This change will better reflect the growing importance of flexible, modular learning.

Background

8 I have recently become aware of two small but significant issues within our education system that require prompt attention. Participation rates in system monitoring studies are at an all-time low, and we are missing out on robust data to inform policy and improve student outcomes. Additionally, micro-credentials are not being reported or formally recognised within the national qualifications framework. Addressing these gaps is essential to ensure comprehensive system oversight and to support the integrity and transparency of learner achievement.

Part 1: Participation in system monitoring studies

New Zealand participates in four system monitoring studies, but if schools continue to opt out of the studies, we will lose valuable system data

9 New Zealand participates in four large-scale sample-based studies that monitor the performance of our schooling system in delivering student outcomes:

- 9.1 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) – Assesses 15-year-olds every four years;
- 9.2 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) – Assesses Year 5 and 9 every four years;
- 9.3 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) – Assesses Year 5 every five years;
- 9.4 Curriculum Insights and Progress Study, formally known as NMSSA (Curriculum Insights) – Assesses Year 3, 6 and 8 annually.

10 System monitoring studies are critical, especially in New Zealand. At present, our portfolio of these studies, along with NCEA, are the only reliable and representative measurements of student performance in the schooling system. The studies include a strong focus on reading, writing, maths and science, but they also survey respondents on the drivers of student achievement¹ which allows us to better understand the context of learning over time.

¹ For example students' enjoyment of and confidence in subjects and their opinions on the culture of their schools.

11 The main benefits of participating in these studies are felt at a system and government level. They provide benchmarks against global standards, enabling comparisons across countries and over time,^{2,3} and helping us understand if we are delivering on our aspirations of being a world-leading and internationally comparable education system. They offer data that highlights both strengths and areas for improvement, supports a culture of transparency and continuous improvement, and enhances New Zealand's visibility in the global education landscape.

12 Each study has strict technical standards that New Zealand must meet to be included in the reports produced from the results of these studies. These standards differ slightly for each study, but they generally require 85% of the schools selected to agree to participate.

13 We have already failed to meet the minimum participation standards for the last rounds of both studies that target secondary aged students: PISA and TIMSS Year 9. This has led to a loss of valuable system performance data. I am concerned that based on current responses from schools who have been invited to participate, we will not meet the minimum participation requirements for PISA 2025. As of last month, only 51% of the PISA 2025 sample have agreed to participate – a record low. Without change, my officials expect that we will not meet TIMSS 2027 standards either.

14 Schools are declining the invites to participate due to concerns about the impact on school timetabling, staffing and resources. Schools must timetable a day or half-day to participate in these studies, with the students who are selected being excused from their regular classes during this time. Appropriate testing spaces with computers must be located and reserved, and teachers are required to complete administrative tasks.

15 The Ministry of Education encourages participation including through:

- 15.1 teacher release time
- 15.2 food for students who participate (a more recent incentive)
- 15.3 provision of devices when needed
- 15.4 flexible testing windows (e.g., a window of 8-10 weeks) so that schools don't need to fit with a strict date/timetable
- 15.5 the provision of reports to schools with information gleaned from the studies to help schools better understand and support their students.

16 At best, these incentives are slowing the decline in participation rates. I have directed the Ministry to undertake work on enhancing and expanding the range of incentives so that they deliver the best value for money and support increased participation. The Ministry will also explore support for schools to analyse and respond to the data and insights they receive in their school-level reports.

² In the case of PISA, TIMSS and PIRLS, the data spans 20-30 years which offers valuable insights for understanding shifts in student knowledge and competencies.

³ Johansson, Stefan. *International large-scale assessments: what uses, what consequences?* April 2016.

17 However, improved incentives are unlikely to sufficiently address the problem alone. I also have doubts that they would come into place quickly enough to guarantee acceptable levels of participation in the next round of system monitoring studies.

I propose that participation in system monitoring studies become mandatory

18 I am now seeking Cabinet's agreement to require registered schools to participate in system monitoring studies when they are selected to participate by the studies' governing bodies. Teachers and principals would also be required to complete study-related questionnaires, with the option to skip specific questions. This balances research ethics with the need to retain valuable insights from school leaders.

19 The mandate will be supported by the incentives work my officials are exploring to strengthen how data and insights from participation are used. Such an approach ensures representative and comprehensive data while fostering an appreciation of the benefits of, and supporting schools to meet, the new requirement.

20 The specific studies that schools would be required to participate in would be notified via a Gazette notice to be issued by the Minister of Education. When the studies' organising bodies select schools for the sample of each study, the Secretary for Education would notify school boards directly by email that they have been selected to participate in the upcoming study.

21 I recognise that there will be occasions when it may not be appropriate for a school to participate in a study. I, therefore, propose to specify in the Act that a school that does not provide instruction in the language of the study need not take part if selected. I also propose an exemption process for schools facing unavoidable circumstance. On application to the Minister of Education, a school may be exempted from participation in any one study where the Minister considers it is sensible to do so on the basis of:

- 21.1 participation would cause undue hardship on the teachers or students (hardship includes significant logistical impracticalities or assessments not being in the language of instruction);
- 21.2 an unforeseen event such as weather or a traumatic event has occurred; or
- 21.3 any other reason the Minister finds acceptable.

22 I wish to act quickly to avoid missing out on the data and insights these studies can provide. I would like to ensure we do not miss out on meeting the participation requirements for the TIMSS study in 2027, for which invites will be sent out later in 2026. This means acting now, to seek an amendment via the ERB1 that is currently being drafted for introduction later this year. Because I have only recently been made aware of this issue, I have not had time to consult schools or key stakeholder organisations.

23 However, I have asked my officials to informally discuss this proposal with peak bodies.⁴ Two peak bodies provided feedback on the proposal with one for and one against. The New Zealand Principals' Federation opposed the proposal on the grounds

⁴ Including Secondary Principals' Association of New Zealand, the New Zealand Principals' Federation, and Independent Schools New Zealand.

that international studies have limited ability to inform educational improvement for New Zealand students and that a mandate impacted on school autonomy and administrative burden. Independent Schools New Zealand has acknowledged the importance of independent and private schools being represented in system performance data, although also raised concerns about the administrative burden on schools.

24 Currently kaupapa Māori education and Māori medium education settings are not able to participate in PISA or TIMSS studies (which have the most concerning rates of participation) because the assessments are not offered in te reo Māori. When considering this, the lack of time for consultation, and my intention to first work through concerns about how kura Māori data is collected, stored and used, I propose excluding specified kura boards from the mandate for the time being. Specified kura board means the board of any of the following:

- 24.1 a Kura Kaupapa Māori;⁵
- 24.2 a designated character school with a character that is hapū- or iwi-based or that affiliates with Ngā Kura ā Iwi o Aotearoa;⁶
- 24.3 a state integrated school with a special character that is hapū- or iwi-based.

25 I intend to revisit the inclusion of these kura boards/schools in this requirement in the near future and to explore the possibility of making these studies available in te reo Māori. Excluding these schools from the mandate will not prevent them from being selected and invited to participate in PIRLS, which is available in te reo Māori. I will ask my officials to consult with Kaupapa Māori education representatives about their potential inclusion in the mandate in the near future.

Part 2: Inclusion of micro-credentials

26 NZQA maintains a ‘Record of Achievement’ for all learners that is added to whenever learners achieve qualifications listed on the New Zealand Qualifications and Credentials Framework (NZQCF), or standards listed on the Directory of Assessment and Skill Standards (DASS). All educational providers are required to report the completion of qualifications and standards to NZQA so that an individual’s achievements can be recorded.

27 NZQA has identified a gap in students’ Record of Achievement which means that those gaining micro-credentials are not having these formally recognised.

28 For the health of the education system and to ensure the completeness of a learner’s Record of Achievement, I propose amending the Act to include micro-credentials in the reporting requirements to NZQA.

⁵ Kura Kaupapa Māori use te reo Māori as the main language of instruction, and operate in accordance with Te Aho Matua. Te Rūnanga Nui o ngā Kura Kaupapa Māori o Aotearoa is the Kaitiaki of Te Aho Matua and the representative body for Kura Kaupapa Māori.

⁶ Ngā kura ā iwi operate according to the aims, purposes and objectives of their character which are set out in their strategic plan. These kura localise their curriculum to the aims of their iwi, hapū and whānau based on the values of Tihi o Angitu. Ngā Kura ā Iwi o Aotearoa is the representative body.

29 Section 452(1)(r) and (s) of the Act enable NZQA to create rules for the reporting of completions and reporting the credit value of those completions. Amending this section by adding the word “micro-credentials” will ensure the completeness of a student’s Record of Achievement and qualifications and reflects the growing importance of flexible, modular learning in the education system.

30 It would also enable NZQA to charge fees for reporting the achievement of micro-credentials, to align with the fees they already charge for reporting the achievement of qualifications and standards. The total fees revenue this would generate has been estimated at less than \$50,000 per annum, resulting in a minor financial impact on the sector.

Implementation

Part 1: Participation in system monitoring studies

31 After enactment of this new requirement, my officials will consult the sector and provide me with further advice on which studies should be included in the new requirements. I will issue a Gazette notice specifying the studies and dates so schools know in advance which studies will be required.

32 The Ministry will manage implementation, including advising me on any additional incentives or supports required for schools to participate fully and analyse and respond to the data and insights they receive through reports well.

Part 2: Inclusion of micro-credentials

33 Implementation will be managed by NZQA (in consultation with Tertiary Education Commission) which already has processes in place to ensure micro-credentials are reported to them.

Cost-of-living Implications

34 There are no direct cost-of-living implications associated with this paper, but the proposals could lead to improved educational outcomes and qualifications recognition and thus higher incomes.

Financial Implications

35 Neither proposal is expected to incur any additional costs to the Crown.

36 I have asked officials to explore additional or improved incentives for schools participating in the system monitoring studies, including an assessment of the effectiveness of current incentives. The intention is to reinvest the Ministry’s current spend on these studies, to achieve value for money. Any increase in investment would be subject to operational reprioritisation or future budget decisions and are not necessary or prerequisites for the proposed amendment to require school participation.

Legislative Implications

37 Legislative changes are required to implement these proposed changes which will be progressed through the ERB1. This bill is intended to be introduced in November 2025.

Impact Analysis

Regulatory Impact Statement

38 A Regulatory Impact Statement has been completed for Proposal 1.

39 The Ministry of Education's Quality Assurance Panel has reviewed the Regulatory Impact Statement produced by the Ministry of Education (dated 29 July 2025). The QA panel considered assessed it as partially meeting the Cabinet's quality assurance criteria for impact analysis. This assessment recognises the constraints imposed by the timeframe on the analysis of impacts, cost and benefits, and on obtaining stakeholder views. Within these constraints, the statement provides clear, concise, and complete information to support decisions.

40 The Ministry for Regulation has determined that Proposal 2 is exempt from the requirement to provide a Regulatory Impact Statement on the grounds that it has no or only minor economic, social, or environmental impacts.

Climate Implications of Policy Assessment for Proposal 1

41 The Climate Implications of Policy Assessment (CIPA) team has been consulted and confirms that the CIPA requirements do not apply to this policy proposal, as the threshold for significance is not met.

Population Implications

Part 1: Participation in system monitoring studies

'Certainty' schools

42 I am aware that our largest secondary schools are all but guaranteed to end up selected in each cycle of PISA and TIMSS. With only around 400 secondary schools nationwide and a slightly more than 200 selected per sample, these 'certainty' schools face a disproportionately high likelihood of repeated involvement.

43 I understand that by mandating participation in system monitoring studies, these certainty schools will experience a greater and more frequent administrative burden, particularly as large schools not initially selected are often designated as replacements, which further increases their chances of being called upon. This is in part why it will be very important to pair a mandate with strengthened incentives that add value for participating schools and support them to meet the new requirement.

Cultural relevance

44 I understand that there are concerns in parts of the sector that these studies are not culturally relevant to the New Zealand context, particularly Māori and Pacific contexts.⁷ Te Tīrewa Mātai, as an equivalent of Curriculum Insights for Māori language settings, is in development and will go some way to mitigate this criticism.

45 However, there are opportunity costs to declining participation in these studies, including losing out on valuable data to improve equitable outcomes across different population groups. Each system monitoring study provides insights into who is enjoying a subject, who is confident in it, and who is achieving well. When we have this data on hand, the Government is better enabled to target interventions and support for those that would most benefit.

46 While I expect to see an improvement in data quality overall from mandating participation, existing exemptions such as those based on language of instruction or certain disabilities may continue to limit the completeness and representativeness of the data.

Part 2: Inclusion of micro-credentials

47 All learners undertaking micro-credentials will benefit from the completion of their Record of Achievement.

Human Rights

48 These proposals appear to be consistent with the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 and the Human Rights Act 1993. A final determination of consistency will be possible when the Bill has been drafted.

Use of external Resources

49 No external resources were used in preparation of the policy advice in this paper.

Consultation

50 The Public Service Commission, Treasury, Education Review Office, Parliamentary Counsel Office, Ministry for Regulation, Stats NZ, Social Investment Agency, New Zealand Qualifications Authority, Tertiary Education Commission, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment, Oranga Tamariki – Ministry for Children, Department of Corrections, Ministry of Justice, New Zealand Police, Department of Internal Affairs, New Zealand Defence Force, and the Ministry of Defence were consulted. The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet was informed.

Communications

51 I will announce these proposals once Cabinet decisions have been made.

⁷ We've heard from peak bodies that some Kaupapa Māori education settings find that the studies do not align with their kaupapa on a philosophical level. *Ako: Pisa for Pacific parents and schools - Tama a le 'ele 'ele, Sa 'ili Malō* found that PISA does not give a full indication of Pacific learner achievement.

Proactive Release

52 I intend to proactively release this Cabinet paper once decisions have been made, subject to redactions as appropriate under the Official Information Act 1982.

Recommendations

The Minister of Education recommends that the Committee:

Participation in system monitoring studies

1 **agree** to amend the Education and Training Act 2020 to:

- 1.1 enable the Minister of Education to issue a Gazette notice detailing the names and dates of system monitoring studies that registered schools will be required to participate in;
- 1.2 require every registered school (apart from those excluded in 1.3) to participate in system monitoring studies named in a Gazette notice;
- 1.3 exclude specified kura boards as outlined in paragraph 22 from the new requirement referred to in 1.2 above;
- 1.4 explicitly provide that a school that does not provide instruction in the language of the study need not take part if selected;
- 1.5 provide the Minister of Education the power to exempt schools in circumstances of undue hardship, unforeseen events or any other reason the Secretary finds acceptable;
- 1.6 require all teachers and principals to participate in questionnaires attached to the system monitoring studies, but enable them to opt out of specific questions;

Inclusion of micro-credentials

2 **agree** that micro-credentials are included in the reporting requirements to NZQA set out in section 452(1)(s) of the Education and Training Act 2020 to ensure the completeness of a learner's Record of Achievement;

Regulatory Impact Statement

3 **note** that the Ministry of Education's Quality Assurance Panel has reviewed the Regulatory Impact Statement produced by the Ministry of Education (dated 29 July 2025). The QA panel considered assessed it as partially meeting the Cabinet's quality assurance criteria for impact analysis. This assessment recognises the constraints imposed by the timeframe on the analysis of impacts, cost and benefits, and on obtaining stakeholder views. Within these constraints, the statement provides clear, concise, and complete information to support decisions.

4 **note** that the Ministry for Regulation has determined that the proposal to include micro-credentials in reporting to NZQA is exempt from the requirement to provide a

Regulatory Impact Statement on the grounds that it has no or only minor economic, social, or environmental impacts;

Drafting

- 5 **note** that these proposals will be given effect through the Education and Training (System Reform ^{9(2)(f)} Amendment Bill ^{9(2)(f)(iv)} [REDACTED];
- 6 **invite** the Minister of Education to issue drafting instructions to Parliamentary Counsel Office to give effect to the decisions on these recommendations;
- 7 **agree** that the Minister of Education has authority to make minor and technical decisions which may arise during the drafting process, provided that they are consistent with the overall policy decisions made by Cabinet;
- 8 **note** that how the Bill is drafted is subject to Parliamentary Counsel's discretion as to how best to express these policy decisions in legislation.

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Erica Stanford

Minister for Education



Cabinet Social Outcomes Committee

Minute of Decision

This document contains information for the New Zealand Cabinet. It must be treated in confidence and handled in accordance with any security classification, or other endorsement. The information can only be released, including under the Official Information Act 1982, by persons with the appropriate authority.

Education and Training Act 2020: System Monitoring and Reporting Improvements

Portfolio Education

Education

On 13 August 2025, the Cabinet Social Outcomes Committee:

Participation in system monitoring studies

1 agreed to amend the Education and Training Act 2020 to:

- 1.1 enable the Minister of Education to issue a Gazette notice detailing the names and dates of system monitoring studies that registered schools will be required to participate in;
- 1.2 require every registered school (apart from those excluded in paragraph 1.3) to participate in system monitoring studies named in a Gazette notice;
- 1.3 exclude specified kura boards as outlined in paragraph 24 of the paper under SOU-25-SUB-0099 from the new requirement referred to in paragraph 1.2 above;
- 1.4 explicitly provide that a school that does not provide instruction in the language of the study need not take part if selected.
- 1.5 provide the Minister of Education with the power to exempt schools in circumstances of undue hardship, unforeseen events or any other reason the Minister finds acceptable;
- 1.6 require all teachers and principals to participate in questionnaires attached to the system monitoring studies, but enable them to opt out of specific questions;

Inclusion of micro-credentials

2 agreed that micro-credentials be included in the reporting requirements to NZQA set out in section 452(1)(s) of the Education and Training Act 2020 to ensure the completeness of a learner’s Record of Achievement;

Regulatory Impact Statement

- 3 **noted** that the Ministry of Education's Quality Assurance Panel considers that the Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS) *Making system monitoring studies compulsory for schools*, attached to the submission under SOU-25-SUB-0099, partially meets quality assurance criteria, and that the assessment recognises the constraints imposed by the timeframe on the analysis of impacts, cost and benefits, and on obtaining stakeholder views, and that, within those constraints, the statement provides clear, concise, and complete information to support decisions;
- 4 **noted** that the Ministry for Regulation has determined that the proposal to include micro-credentials in reporting to the New Zealand Qualifications Authority is exempt from the requirement to provide a RIS on the grounds that it has no or only minor economic, social, or environmental impacts;

Legislative implications

- 5 **noted** that the decisions under SOU-25-MIN-0099 will be given effect through the Education and Training (System Reform ^{9(2)(f)}) Amendment Bill, ^{9(2)(f)(iv)}
[REDACTED];
- 6 **invited** the Minister of Education to issue drafting instructions to the Parliamentary Counsel Office to give effect to the decisions under SOU-25-MIN-0099;
- 7 **authorised** the Minister of Education to make minor and technical decisions which may arise during the drafting process, provided that they are consistent with the overall policy decisions made by Cabinet;
- 8 **noted** that how the Bill is drafted is subject to Parliamentary Counsel's discretion as to how best to express these policy decisions in legislation.

Jenny Vickers
Committee Secretary

Present:

Hon David Seymour
Rt Hon Winston Peters
Hon Chris Bishop (Chair)
Hon Erica Stanford
Hon Paul Goldsmith
Hon Dr Shane Reti
Hon Mark Mitchell
Hon Tama Potaka
Hon Matt Doocey
Hon Nicole McKee
Hon Casey Costello
Hon Penny Simmonds
Hon Karen Chhour
Hon Nicola Grigg
Hon Scott Simpson

Officials present from:

Officials Committee for SOU
Office of the Prime Minister
Office of the Minister of Education



Cabinet

Minute of Decision

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Report of the Cabinet Social Outcomes Committee: Period Ended 15 August 2025

On 18 August 2025, Cabinet made the following decisions on the work of the Cabinet Social Outcomes Committee for the period ended 15 August 2025:

Out of scope

SOU-25-MIN-0099

Education and Training Act 2020: System Monitoring and Reporting Improvements

Portfolio: Education

CONFIRMED

Out of scope

Rachel Hayward
Secretary of the Cabinet