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Briefing note: 2018 New Zealand Union of Students' Associations Congress

To:	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
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Summary

- You are attending the 2018 New Zealand Union of Students' Associations (NZUSA) annual congress in Wellington on Saturday 17 November 2018. You have been asked to give a ten minute speech at 11.00am. This will be followed by 30 minutes for questions and answers from the congress attendees.
- We have provided a speech to your office alongside this briefing note. Potential questions and suggested answers are provided in Annex 2.
- The theme of the 2018 NZUSA congress is 'A New Chapter'. NZUSA has suggested you speak about your vision for the future of tertiary education.

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Graduate Achievement, Vocations and Careers

Noted - Hon Hipkins
17/11/18 KU

02/11/2018

Background on NZUSA and the NZUSA 2018 congress

Overview of NZUSA

1. NZUSA is a membership body of local students' associations, advocating for students' common and collective concerns. It believes that tertiary education should be a right, not a privilege, and focuses strongly on access and opportunity.
2. NZUSA's member associations cover five of the eight universities, as well as several institutes of technology and polytechnics (ITPs). However, member associations can change, with some associations periodically withdrawing and re-entering from NZUSA. Each President from local students' associations is a member of the National Executive.
3. NZUSA has a close partnership with Te Mana Akonga (TMA), the national Māori student body. In October, NZUSA and the New Zealand Tongan Tertiary Students' Association (NZTTSA) also signed a memorandum of understanding expressing their joint commitment to uplifting the Pacific student voice.
4. NZUSA's National President, Jonathan Gee, is based in Wellington and is accountable to all students NZUSA represents through the local student Presidents. NZUSA's Vice-President, Nikita Skipper, was elected in May 2018. Biographies are attached in Annex 1.

NZUSA engagement with Government

5. NZUSA is part of the Tertiary Consultative Group, which you have established to help shape the Government's strategic direction for tertiary education.
6. John Brooker, Senior Policy Manager within the Tertiary Policy Group, has met twice with Jonathon Gee this year, to discuss tertiary education issues, including student voice in the tertiary education system.
7. You also met with NZUSA on Wednesday 27 June 2018. NZUSA had asked to discuss Voluntary Student Membership (VSM), student representation on Tertiary Education Organisation (TEO) Councils, student financial support and funding mechanisms.

The 2018 NZUSA congress

8. The 2018 NZUSA will be held in Wellington from Saturday 17 November 2018 to Sunday 18 November 2018. You are scheduled to speak on Saturday 17 November at 11.00am.
9. The congress is also formally NZUSA's Annual General Meeting (AGM) and is where attendees chart the future of the national student movement through electing national representative, agreeing their policy positions and planning their campaigns.
10. The overall theme of the congress is 'A New Chapter'. The congress will include discussions around NZUSA's vision for tertiary education, as well as the future of the student movement in a post-VSM era.
11. The congress will bring together representatives from students' associations across New Zealand's universities and polytechnics.

12. NZUSA has suggested you speak about your vision for the future of tertiary education (in this parliamentary term and beyond), including:
 - a. the role of students' associations/councils and independent student voice in the era of VSM
 - b. the future of tertiary funding in light of ongoing cuts to humanities-based programmes
 - c. advancing free tertiary education and what this means
 - d. student welfare, including financial support and mental health services, and
 - e. the future of ITPs and their financial sustainability.

Enhancing student voice: A key area of interest for NZUSA

13. NZUSA is strongly interested in ensuring that students' associations and student voice throughout the tertiary system thrive in the future. They have previously stated that a more learner-centred system begins with learners themselves through giving voice to their experiences and aspirations in education, and the subsequent development of systematic and wide-ranging opportunities for learners.
14. NZUSA has campaigned for several years on student voice with Ako Aotearoa (the National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence). In the past, Ako Aotearoa and NZUSA have also collaborated on research relating to best practice in using student voice in tertiary institutions to improve teaching quality.

The future of student voice and students' associations

15. In June this year, NZUSA wrote to you on VSM. Their primary concerns are that VSM has led to a loss of student-governed funding, and therefore a loss of independence in the student movement. In particular, it is concerned about students' ability to commit to social and political causes and the representational capacity of students' associations.
16. The Education (Freedom of Association) Amendment Act 2011 removed the legislative requirement for students to join a students' association. This means that students have to actively choose to join their students' association. VSM came into effect for students enrolling at tertiary education providers on or after 1 January 2012.

As a result of VSM, many students' associations will have seen a reduction in student membership and revenue through membership fees

17. When students' association membership was compulsory, membership fees could be borrowed through the compulsory fees component of the Student Loan Scheme. As these fees are no longer compulsory, students have the ability to use the course-related costs component of the Student Loan Scheme to meet them.
18. However, the course-related costs component is capped at \$1,000 per annum, and even before VSM most students were borrowing the full amount. Therefore, one impact of VSM was a reduced membership base and less income certainty for students' associations.
19. Any policy change to VSM will likely lead to an increase in borrowing to allow students to meet the cost, and as such would need to be considered as a cost pressure within regular Budget processes.

There was also a concern that VSM would affect the provision of core pastoral care services that students' associations deliver

20. VSM still allows for students' associations to offer such services as a contract of service with providers.
21. Regulation around Compulsory Student Services Fees (CSSF) charged by providers for such services has been tightened. Tertiary providers now need to be transparent about what CSSF covers, and need to include students in the process for setting what it is and what it is for.
22. A key concern for NZUSA is that while a student association can act as a service contractor for an institution, which means it can provide services to students, this can compromise the association's independence on holding the institution to account.

NZUSA has suggested to establish a National Centre for Student Voice

23. NZUSA has previously suggested Government establish and fund a National Centre for Student Voice, modelled on Student Partnership for Quality Scotland (Sparqs).
24. According to NZUSA, this would both shift New Zealand towards international best practice, enhance the ability of students to contribute meaningfully and usefully to existing decision-making systems, and link in with student partnership initiatives internationally.

Student Partnership for Quality Scotland

25. Sparqs is a national development service for students that was founded in 2003 to support student engagement. It is provided by the National Union of Students with government funding through the Scottish Funding Council (currently around £306,850 [equivalent of around \$622,760 NZD]).¹
26. Sparqs has a mission to "ensure that students are able to engage as partners at all levels of tertiary education quality assurance and enhancement activities." It provides training and resources for student representatives and students' associations to develop the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in their roles. It also supports institutions to have effective mechanisms in place to facilitate student engagement, and provides links to support students to engage with providers and in national policy discussions.
27. Sparqs has spawned a variety of initiatives focused on enhanced student engagement, such as the National Student Engagement Project (NStEP) in Ireland or The Student Engagement Partnership (TSEP) in the rest of the United Kingdom.

NZUSA does not receive direct financial support for its representative role

28. In New Zealand, Government does not provide direct financial support to NZUSA, to support its role in representing students. NZUSA receives funding from its member organisations for this purpose.
29. NZUSA has previously approached the Ministry of Education for funding, but the Ministry does not hold discretionary funding pools to support such purposes.

¹ Sparqs, Annual Report 2014-2015.

Governance changes under the Education Amendment Act 2018

30. The Education Amendment Act 2018 introduced a requirement for universities and polytechnics to appoint to their councils, at least one student and one staff member elected by their peers. This helps reaffirm the role of learners in institutional decision-making.
31. Student presidents of eight universities and a number of polytechnics wrote an [open letter](#) to Parliament on 16 October 2018 calling on MPs to strengthen learner representation on tertiary education councils by guaranteeing at least two learner places. The signatories included student presidents from all eight universities and numerous polytechnics.

Other topics of interest to NZUSA

Student support system

32. NZUSA has previously expressed concerns about rising costs of being a student and inequities in the student support system. They welcomed the extension of the student loan borrowing cap for long undergraduate courses, but also called on Government's commitment to restore postgraduate allowances.
33. NZUSA previously requested that ending the age limit be included in that commitment, and expressed an interest in working with you to further improve the student support system.

Learner mental health and wellbeing

34. In July, NZUSA released a report, entitled *Kei te pai?*, on a new study on mental health of New Zealand tertiary students. The study surveyed almost 1,800 learners on their lived experiences in relation to mental health, and according to NZUSA, is the first of its kind on tertiary learners' mental health in New Zealand.
35. In a related [press release](#), NZUSA highlighted the need for a 'culture change within our communities so that discussing mental health, accessing support services, and practicing self-care is a normalised part of everyday conversations'.
36. NZUSA noted that the Inquiry into Mental Health and Addiction is a prime opportunity to have a national conversation around mental health. They also called for action on Government's commitment to free counselling for under-25s, referenced in the Labour-Greens Confidence and Supply Agreement.
37. In July this year, Health Minister Dr David Clark and Associate Health Minister Julie Anne Genter announced the start of a procurement process to encourage mental health providers to put forward innovative bids to run a pilot programme to provide free counselling for 18 to 25 year olds.

Proactive release

38. We recommend this briefing note 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.

Release / Not release

Annexes

Annex 1: Biographies of the NZUSA President and Vice-President

Annex 2: Potential questions and suggested answers

Proactively Released

Annex 1: Biographies of the NZUSA President and Vice-President

National President – Jonathan Gee



Jonathan is the 2018 National President of NZUSA. This is his second, consecutive term in this position.

He is a recent graduate of Victoria University of Wellington where he studied public policy and political science. During his time at Victoria, he served two terms on the Executive of the Victoria University of Wellington Students' Association (VUWSA), including as President in his last term.

Prior to his time in students' associations, he was actively involved in the education charity United Nations Youth New Zealand. During his high school years in Auckland, Jonathan was a youth representative on the Devonport-Takapuna Local Board of Auckland Council, and also served as Co-Chair of his local youth council.

Jonathan also sits on the boards of Student Job Search and the Academic Quality Agency.

Vice President – Nikita Skipper



Nikita studies at Massey University, where she is working towards a Bachelor of Business Studies and Bachelor of Arts conjoint.

She is currently NZUSA's National Women's Rights Officer, and before that served two terms as President of the Massey University Students' Association (MUSA). As National Women's Rights Officer, she has also been helping to manage the Thursdays in Black campaign against rape and violence.

Nikita's term runs until 31 December 2018.

Annex 2: Potential questions and suggested answers

Student voice and learner engagement

What is Government doing to increase student voice throughout the tertiary sector?

Government is committed to reaffirming the important role of learners in institutional decision-making, including on governing councils, and the vital role of students' associations as advocates, representatives, and champions of student culture.

We are committed to work in partnership with students, and all those with an interest in tertiary education, to deliver quality education for all New Zealanders.

Why only one elected student member (as introduced through the Education Amendment Act 2018)?

The Act introduces a minimum requirement. Universities and polytechnics are able to appoint further student and staff members to their councils should they wish, for example student association presidents. Government will work to ensure that student council members are well supported to carry out their role effectively and have a strong voice.

There is a balance to be struck in ensuring good representation on councils, and ensuring they are of a size that supports effective decision-making.

Why are wānanga exempt?

The Government is in discussions with wānanga about the relationship they seek with the Crown. Wānanga expressed concern that using two places for staff and student members would affect their ability to include council members competent in tikanga and te reo Māori or who represented groups, such as the founding iwi of a wānanga.

Will councils have any say over who is elected by staff and students?

No – Councils will not be able to control the candidate selection process or veto the appointment of the successful candidate.

When do these changes take effect and how long do Tertiary Education Institution councils have to make changes?

These provisions are now in effect. Councils have 12 months to update their constitutions following Royal Assent. Councils then have another six months to run an election and appoint student and staff council members.

Student support system

Why has Government not yet restored postgraduate allowances and when will it do so?

In our first year, we have focussed on access to and affordability of tertiary education below postgraduate level to remove barriers to initial participation in tertiary education. For example, we have introduced fees-free tertiary education and training, and boosted student allowances and loans for living costs by \$50 per week.

I can assure you that improving access to, and affordability of, postgraduate study remains a key priority for us. Delivering on our commitment to restore postgraduate students' eligibility for student allowances is something we are considering alongside other competing budget priorities in education, and across wider government work programmes. Not everything we want to do is able to be funded in our first year or at the same time. Unfortunately, I am unable to give a commitment on timing at this stage.

Which programmes will benefit from the extended limit on student loan borrowing?

We recognise that learners in long undergraduate programmes are affected by the limits on borrowing disproportionately compared with students in other programmes. Long undergraduate programmes are single undergraduate qualifications of five EFTS or more in medicine, dentistry, optometry or veterinary science.

To remove this barrier to completion, learners in such programmes will be eligible to borrow through the loan scheme for up to a maximum ten EFTS of study from 1 January 2019.

Will the Government be reversing the student support restrictions placed on older students by the previous Government?

As you know, the previous Government limited student allowances to 120 weeks for students aged 40 and over and removed student loan living cost and course-related cost entitlements for students aged 55 years and older. The students affected by these policy changes may be eligible for the Accommodation Supplement depending on their individual circumstances.

Given the constraints on Government funding, reversing these age-based changes is not one of the coalition Government's immediate fiscal priorities.

What is the Government doing to help students struggling to meet their study costs?

The Government is aware the cost of study can be a real issue for students and their families. This is why we introduced one year of fees-free tertiary education for those starting study for the first time in 2018, and increased student allowances and loans for living costs by \$50 per week, as you know.

Making study more accessible and affordable is a key priority for us. We will continue to consider opportunities to do this over our term.

Fees free tertiary education and training

What are the objectives of the changes to the Fees-Free policy for 2019?

We have worked closely with the tertiary sector and – based on your feedback – made some minor changes to the Fees-Free policy for 2019. These changes seek to improve student and provider experience, and the fairness and effectiveness of the policy. They will speed up confirmation of eligibility and ensure consistent rules for people in industry training programmes and provider-based study.

What exactly are the changes to the Fees-Free policy for 2019?

First, credits, achieved as part of industry training programmes of fewer than 120 credits and reported after 1 January 2018, will be excluded from measures of prior study when determining people's eligibility for fees-free support from 1 January 2019. This responds directly to feedback from industry training organisations (ITOs) and the Industry Training Federation. As a result of this change, people will no longer be discouraged from undertaking shorter training programmes due to uncertainty about how this may influence their future Fees-Free eligibility.

Second, the Tertiary Education Commission will have discretion to fully or partially reinstate consumed Fees-Free entitlements due to exceptional cases of personal circumstances.

Third, the rule, that people are not eligible for Fees-Free while at school, will be replaced with a rule that tertiary courses undertaken as part of schooling or a secondary-tertiary programme will be ineligible for Fees-Free. This will remove the requirement to complete a declaration for an estimated 6,000 learners who have not completed year 13 at school, speeding up confirmation of their eligibility for Fees-Free support.

What will the Fees-Free policy look like in the long term?

Work is currently underway on the longer-term model for Fees-Free. The future design may look quite different once we have considered how different elements of the funding system operate together. This longer-term work will progress as we meet our commitment to make three years of tertiary education and training fees-free for New Zealanders in future terms.

We will continue to engage with stakeholders, including learners, on any future design changes to the Fees-Free policy.

Institutes of technology and polytechnic (ITP) roadmap and VET system review

When will the reforms take place?

Officials have provided me with advice on options for a sustainable way forward for the ITP network. We are working through the options to create institutions that are focussed on what students and regions need rather than worried about their financial position. Reforms will play out over several years because it is important to get this right so the sector can contribute strongly to New Zealand into the future.

Will students be involved in the next stages?

Yes – the contribution from students so far has been really valuable and we definitely want to continue to involve them in the work. We expect to publically consult on the options in the first part of next year, and input from this consultation is really important too. Once government has decided the high-level direction, lots of detailed work will be needed to design and implement change, and students will have a unique perspective on that which we want to make sure we hear.

Will changes to the ITP network include any other parts of the system?

The focus is on finding a solution for the ITP network rather than optimising the system as a whole. Having said that, some options for change to ITPs might have flow-on effects to other parts of the system. We will consider those impacts on a case by case basis and do what makes sense to make the most of opportunities and to manage any risks.

In addition, we are increasingly thinking about ITP changes and VET system changes as a single broad project, although the VET system extends beyond the ITPs.

What kinds of change are you hoping to come out of the VET system review?

It has been a long time since we looked across the system of VET in this way. This is a real opportunity to come up with a system that supports, and is supported by, industry. The review has a particular focus on work-based learning that adapts to different needs – from broad, first qualifications up to flexible, just-in-time training. I also want to ensure that we have a strong network of provision in the regions.

It is important VET meets the needs of students – particularly Māori and Pacific peoples, and people with disabilities – so that learners from every background can access, participate and achieve in VET.

When will Government consult students on the direction of travel for VET?

I am currently considering advice on the next steps for the review of VET, in conjunction with the advice on ITPs. Any further engagement on this review, including engagement with students, will occur once Cabinet has had the opportunity to consider the findings of the review. It is my hope that we will be able to engage the sector in the first half of 2019. It is possible that this consultation will be in co-ordination with the consultation about ITPs.

Careers information

Which government agencies are co-designing the Careers Systems Strategy?

The TEC is working alongside their colleagues at the Ministry of Education (MoE), the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE), the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA).

How will the Careers Systems Strategy help learners to become careers resilient?

By strengthening the information available, all New Zealanders will be able to find the right pathway for their career progression. Enhancing literacy and numeracy skills across all New Zealanders will further enable careers resilience and highlight career opportunities that may not have been visible previously.

Whose responsibility is it to guide people's careers?

It is all of our responsibility – government, education organisations (including schools), parents, employers, community, advisors... The list is endless.

We know that the greatest influence in a younger person's pathway choices in education are parents. By the time learners are making choices around subjects for year 11, parents still represent 60-70 percent of the influence. The next greatest influence is their peers, with schools representing 10-15 percent.

The change we are focusing on is moving from a system that has previously seen learners get advice at school, to one in which people can access tools, information and support throughout their lives, enabling them to manage their own careers. Not just once, but continually throughout their lives.

What results will be published on MyQ and when?

The TEC has received over 12,000 survey responses, with 7,700 verified enabling MyQ results to be published. Results are displayed at both a national and detailed level. Publication is voluntary and any TEO may opt out of publication at any stage. At this stage, all universities have opted out. We will be publishing results in 2018.

Who can take part in MyQ and who benefits from the results?

All recent graduates who have completed a qualification, degree or certificate within the past three years can fill in the MyQ survey – eligibility is verified through their student identification number.

The feedback gathered through this survey gives prospective learners a unique insight into a qualification experience. MyQ complements other learner information tools, such as the Key Information for Students (KIS) to support informed study choices.

Students and their whānau will be able to use these results to make informed decisions about future tertiary study choices.

Mental health and well-being - Integrated Psychological Therapies for 18 to 25 year olds Pilot

What is the status of the Integrated Psychological Therapies for 18 to 25 year olds Pilot?

The Pilot announced as part of Budget 2018 is currently in the procurement phase of its implementation.

What will the pilot address?

The Pilot seeks to address the needs and probable unmet needs of the 18-25 year old population with mild to moderate mental health problems and who are not accessing existing services in the chosen location and further develop this for a New Zealand context. It aims to test improving access to psychological therapies (IAPT) for this age group in a New Zealand context. The pilot will be implemented over a two to three year period.

What will the pilot provide?

The Pilot will provide free evidence-informed psychological therapies for 18 to 25 year olds with mild to moderate mental health needs with a focus on increasing health equity for its target population. The Pilot will develop and deliver services in one location.

Other

Who will be involved in developing the Tertiary Education Strategy?

The current Strategy expires in 2019. I will be developing a new Strategy in consultation with the tertiary sector, learners and those with a broader stake in tertiary education. I will consult with NZUSA on the development of the Strategy. I also expect the Tertiary Consultative Group, of which NZUSA is a member, to play an important role in contributing to shaping the new Strategy.

How will the Government raise achievement for Māori and Pacific learners?

Raising achievement for Māori and Pacific learners is a key priority for this Government. We are committed to refreshing Ka Hikitia, Government's Māori education strategy, with professional development to support its implementation. We will also be working on the Pacific Education strategy and policy to improve outcomes for Pacific learners.

Within our Education Work Programme it will be important to apply Māori and Pacific lenses across our policy. It will also be important to design policy with Māori and Pacific learners in mind, in addition to considering the impacts different work streams and policy settings might have on these learners.

The Tertiary Education Strategy (TES) is a key lever for Government to set its expectations for institutions. We expect to see a strong direction for how we expect tertiary institutions to be strengthening outcomes for Māori and Pacific learners in the new TES.

What is Government doing to meet current and future labour market needs?

A key priority for this Government is to ensure our education system to the needs of the modern world and the challenges of the 21st century. We have a number of reviews and Ministerial Groups looking at how we can be better prepared to meet the current and future labour market needs. In particular, looking across Government to link up the programmes of work we have underway.

Government, business and unions are also joining together to help prepare for the rapid changes ahead to the way we work. This forward thinking tripartite forum will examine key challenges facing the economy, such as technological change. It will also help us shape the policies we will need so that workers and businesses are equipped to adapt to, and learners are equipped and supported to deal with the rapidly changing nature of work.

More importantly, the forum will help support the reviews currently underway, including my VET system review, to ensure the voices of employers and employees are heard and reflected.