



Briefing note: Meeting with New Zealand Union of Students' Associations on 12 June 2019

To:	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
Date:	11 June 2019	Priority:	Medium
Security Level:	In Confidence	METIS No:	1194663
Drafter:	Miriam Urlich	DDI:	04 4638708
Key Contact:	John Brooker	DDI:	04 4630912
Messaging seen by Communications team:	No	Round Robin:	No

Summary

You are meeting with the New Zealand Union of Students' Associations (NZUSA) National President, James Ranstead, on Wednesday 12 June at 5pm.

This note updates you on our engagement with NZUSA on our student voice work and what the further opportunities are to engage with students going forward.

Proactive release

Agree that this briefing will be proactively released.

Agree / Disagree



John Brooker
**Acting Group Manager, Tertiary Education
Graduate Achievement, Vocations and Careers**

11/06/2019

Background

1. You are to meet with NZUSA current National President is James Ranstead on 12 June 2019 at 5pm.
2. NZUSA is part of the Tertiary Consultative Group, which you established to help shape the Government's strategic direction for tertiary education.
3. Further background on NZUSA and their 2019 representatives are set out in Annex One.
4. Kieran Forde, Chief Policy Analyst, and Lauren Bell, our analyst who has been working with NZUSA on the student voice work, will be the Ministry officials attending the meeting.
5. NZUSA has indicated that it wishes to discuss:
 - Voluntary Student Membership
 - Postgraduate Student Allowance
 - Age Discrimination on Student Loans and Allowances
 - Period Poverty in Compulsory and Tertiary Education
 - Fees Free Campaign.

Student Voice: Voluntary Student Membership

Issue

6. NZUSA has previously expressed their concern that voluntary student membership (VSM), which took effect in 2012, has led to a loss of student-governed funding, and therefore a loss of independence in the student movement and of student voice in tertiary education. NZUSA previously discussed the possibility of you supporting a Bill to repeal VSM and re-introduce compulsory student membership, but you have indicated that this would not be possible.
7. NZUSA indicated that they are interested in exploring options other than VSM. These included funding arrangement changes and their suggestion for the Government to establish and fund a National Centre for Student Voice.

Initial advice and decisions on student voice

8. In April, we have provided you with advice that looks at the role and contribution student voice can make within the tertiary education system, stocktakes existing avenues for student voice within New Zealand and other relevant overseas jurisdictions, and provides options for how student voice could be further enhanced in New Zealand's system of tertiary education as informed by domestic and international best practice [METIS 1175744 refers; see Annex Two].
9. In response, you agreed that officials undertake further work in the following areas:
 - enhancing the status quo through changes to financial arrangements, increased guidance and support, and student voice audits
 - structural changes to strengthen student voice
 - establishing a National Centre for Student Voice.

10. Your feedback is that these options could form a coherent package that moves away from the notion of “membership” and instead fosters a democratic approach to student voice within institutions and across the sector.

Our engagement with NZUSA to date

11. We have worked closely with NZUSA in preparing our advice for you on student voice. We met with NZUSA on several occasions to talk about opportunities to work together and to explore ways to improve student voice in the tertiary system. These meetings included the following:

January

- An initial meeting between Ministry and NZUSA about our role, the NZUSA 2019 plan, and the opportunities to work together.

February

- NZUSA, Ako Aotearoa, the Academic Quality Agency (AQA), and the Ministry met to build connections. At this meeting the Ministry sounded out its initial high-level thoughts on student voice options.
- NZUSA, AQA and the Ministry met to talk about ideas for a Centre for Student Voice, including what could it look like and its role and function.
- NZUSA and Review of Vocational Education (RoVE) officials met to discuss student voice opportunities in the new vocational education system, including what student voice structures and governance could look like and how could it work best.

April

- NZUSA and the Ministry attended the ITP student voice summit where a RoVE workshop was held and where the Tertiary Education Strategy was discussed.

May

- James Ranstead (NZUSA) met with the Ministry to discuss Compulsory Student Services Fees (CSSF) and we provided an update on the paper sent to you on high-level options for enhancing student voice. At this meeting, officials:
 - informed NZUSA that you were keen for us to progress with work to give a strong democratic voice to students
 - encouraged NZUSA to continue contributing to the RoVE process
 - noted NZUSA’s request to see the initial advice provided to you on student voice options.

Request from NZUSA for the initial advice paper

12. During our May meeting we also talked to James Ranstead about his request for the initial advice paper on student voice. We indicated to him that it would be proactively released after RoVE decisions had been finalised (because of the strong links the paper has with this workstream). James seemed happy with this response. As the request came to us informally as we were setting the agenda for this meeting, we consulted your office, and did not process it as a formal Official Information Act request.

Opportunities for further engagement with NZUSA going forward

Wider work programme

13. There would be opportunities for students to voice their thoughts on key parts of the Education Work Programme through continued engagement, including on the proposed reform of vocational education.
14. NZUSA is also part of the Tertiary Consultative Group which has an important role in contributing and shaping the new Tertiary Education Strategy. The Ministry is preparing a public consultation document which is expected to be discussed at Cabinet on 24 July 2019. This provides a further opportunity for NZUSA other student groups, to have a say.

The next phase of work on student voice

15. The next phase of work will look at the cost, scope and timing implications of the agreed options.
16. Since receiving the paper back from the Minister's office, we have begun to develop a plan to progress the next phase of work, which will involve taking the high-level options from the paper and developing them further.
17. We propose to prepare a short options/discussions paper and engagement plan for your approval and use this to undertake more formal engagement with NZUSA and wider sector stakeholders (including providers). We see NZUSA as being a key player to help us link in with different student groups across New Zealand. We indicated to James in May that this was the likely next step.
18. Following feedback from this sector engagement, we would report back to you on final options for your approval. These are likely to lead into future Budgets (as establishing something like a National Centre for Student Voice would require new funding) and also the forward legislative programme (as a number of the changes are likely to have legislative implications).
19. Alongside this more generic work on student voice, the RoVE continues. This has significant implications for student voice in the polytechnic sector, and as you are aware current proposals focus mostly structural change within the Institute of Skills and Technology (i.e. Setting up a student sub-committee of the Council). These changes would be complementary to the ongoing work on student voice.

Other issues on the agenda

20. NZUSA have indicated that they would also like to talk about the following:

Postgraduate student allowances

21. NZUSA has called on the Government to implement the Labour Party manifesto commitment to restore student allowance eligibility for postgraduate students. On 11 April, NZUSA organised a rally at Parliament urging the Government to keep its promise and provide a commitment that it would be restored before the 2020 election. They have also organised a petition that has attracted 5,270 signatures to date.¹

¹ <https://our.actionstation.org.nz/petitions/restore-the-postgraduate-student-allowance-now>

22. You have reiterated that the Government remains committed to its pledge but that this needs to be considered alongside competing priorities in education and across wider government. For this reason, a commitment on timing is not possible at this stage.

Age Discrimination on student loans and allowances

23. NZUSA previously requested that the age limit for student loans and allowances eligibility and entitlements be removed and may be seeking a commitment from you to do so.

24. 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.

25. When Government makes changes to policies and practices it is required to consider whether the policies treat people differently on the grounds identified in the Human Rights Act 1993. If there is different treatment, the discrimination would need to be justified in terms of 'reasonable limits' under section 5 of the Bill of Rights Act 1990. These implications were carefully considered when the policies were developed and the policy is consistent with the Government's non-discrimination obligations.

26. You have indicated in ministerial correspondence that because of the constraints on Government funding, reversing these age-based changes is not one of the coalition Government's immediate fiscal priorities.

Period Poverty in Compulsory and Tertiary Education

27. There are calls in the media for New Zealand to follow Scotland's lead in making sanitary products available free to all students at schools, colleges and universities.² NZUSA may raise this issue as an example of how rising living costs can be a real issue for female students.

28. The Government recognises the increased costs of living for students and this is why student loan living costs and student allowances rates were increased by \$50 a week from 1 January 2018. This Government support will continue to increase over time as regular inflation adjustments are made.

Fees Free Campaign

29. Work is underway on future policy design choices. How and when to expand Fees Free support, and who will be eligible for extra Fees Free support, will be decided as part of future budgets and our ongoing Education Work Programme.

30. In the meantime, people should plan for their future tertiary education and training based on the current policy: one year's fees-free study at a tertiary provider, or two years' fees-free in an apprenticeship or other long industry training programme.

Annexes

Annex 1: Overview of NZUSA and Biographies

Annex 2: Previous advice on enhancing student voice in tertiary education [Metis 1175744 refers].

² <https://www.stuff.co.nz/life-style/106588081/kiwi-charities-spurred-on-by-worldfirst-scheme-to-fund-sanitary-items-at-schools>

Annex 1: Overview of NZUSA and Biographies

Overview of NZUSA

NZUSA is a membership body of local students' associations, advocating for students' common and collective concerns. They believe that tertiary education should be a right, not a privilege, and focuses strongly on access and opportunity.

NZUSA's member associations cover five of the eight universities, as well as four 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.

NZUSA is part of the Tertiary Consultative Group, which was established to help shape the Government's strategic direction for tertiary education.

NZUSA has a close partnership with Te Mana Ākonga (TMĀ; the national Māori student body). In October 2018, NZUSA and the New Zealand Tongan Tertiary Students' Association (NZTTSA) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) expressing their joint commitment to uplifting the Pacific student voice.

In July 2017, NZUSA and the Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities (AQA) formalised their partnership, by signing a MoU, to enhance student voice and the engagement of students in the academic audit process.

Biographies



NZUSA National President: James Ranstead

James is the 2019 National President of NZUSA. This is his first term in this position.

He is a Bachelor of Science graduate from Lincoln University. During his study he spent two years on the Lincoln University Student Association (LUSA), one year as a General Representative and the other as President.

He has also been awarded a 2019 Rhodes Scholarship to study at Oxford University.



NZUSA Vice President: Caitlin Barlow-Groome

Caitlin is the 2019 Vice President of NZUSA. This is her first term in this position.

Caitlin is a Bachelor of Commerce graduate from the University of Otago. During her study she spent two years on the Otago University Students' Association (OUSA), one year as Recreation Officer and the other as President.