Briefing Note: 30 April 2019 Learning Support Parliamentary Questions data errors

To: Hon Tracey Martin, Associate Minister of Education

Date: 27 May 2019  Priority: Medium

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Messaging seen by Communications team: No  Round Robin: No

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this paper is for you to:

Note that 2 errors were made in recent parliamentary questions in relation to Early Intervention Service data and that a third response may be ambiguous.

Agree that this Briefing will be proactively released.

Agree / Disagree

Summary

- It has been identified that responses for two parliamentary questions from 30 April contained errors in figures provided. A third response is ambiguous in the labelling of the data.

- The Ministry identified these errors during clarification of data for the Ministers office and a response for a later dated parliamentary question. The ambiguous response was identified through the rechecking of data as a result of these errors.
The errors were caused as a result of human error. The errors related to data collation or presentation, and were not errors in the automated reports and code used for generating responses to the relevant data queries. The corrected figures can be found in Annex 1.

Katrina Casey
Deputy Secretary
Sector Enablement and Support

Hon Tracey Martin
Associate Minister of Education

28/5/19
Background

1. On 30 April 2019 the Business Analysis team received 10 parliamentary questions relating to the Early Intervention Service. It has been identified that two sections of the figures provided in the responses had errors. In a third response, the data was labelled in such a way as to make its meaning ambiguous.

2. The Ministry identified these errors as they were asked to confirm the figures provided in one of the responses, during collation for another series of parliamentary questions on 23 May and as a result of checking all questions again.

3. The Ministry have reviewed all other PQs prepared and provided since 30 April that contain Learning Support data, and have confirmed there are no other errors.

Impact

4. The errors were misleading and would have created confusion. Corrected copies have been prepared for the two PQs containing incorrect figures and the one PQ requiring column headings to be amended to remove ambiguity in interpreting the data. These are confirmed as accurate for submission to the Clerk’s Office.

Next Steps

5. We have reviewed what has led to these errors and have identified a need to improve our quality assurance processes. Additional checks will come into effect immediately.

Data extraction checking

6. We have identified a need for better resourcing of parliamentary questions responses relating to the Learning Support data set. Our usual process of having extra staff available to quality assure a data check was not adequate in this instance. We will implement a more robust system to provide better certainty and clarity of responses.

7. In future, no peer review will be done by staff who have worked on the PQ. To build greater resilience in the process we will contract in additional support from an external provider for periods when there are significant time or resource pressures.

8. From today no Learning Support related PQ will be signed out of the Ministry that has not gone through this peer review process.

Quality assurance

9. From 4 June, a Manager for SE&S business analysis and systems will be responsible for data quality assurance for all parliamentary questions.

Other Relevant Information – Current Process

10. The Business Analysis team provide analytical support for systems in which data is populated by ministry staff. Every request for data that is received by the Business Analysis team is recorded in the teams request management system, which was upgraded this year to improve efficiency. Every request then goes through a process of being allocated, data provided then assigned for peer review. Once reviewed the data is provided for requests or responses.
11. The Business Analysis team have created a series of automated reports that are provided on a monthly basis. All of the calculations that are used in these reports were rigorously tested at the time of creation. One of these automated reports is for Learning Support data. The data in these reports is referred to for requests that contain data they require. However if the figures requested are not in these reports then new code has to be created in order to extract the information required.

12. Our checks have confirmed that the three errors related to human error in collating or presenting the data for the PQs. Our automated reports and code used for generating responses to the relevant data queries were not in error.

Proactive Release

13. We recommend that this Briefing is proactively released as per your expectation that information be released as soon as possible. Any information which may need to be withheld will be done so in line with the provisions of the Official Information Act 1982.

Annexes

Annex 1: Learning Support Parliamentary Question Error Resolution

Annex 2: Possible Questions and Answers
Annex 1: Learning Support Parliamentary Question Error Resolution

27/05/2019

Situation:
On 30 April 2019 the Business Analysis team received 10 parliamentary questions relating to the Early Intervention Service. It has been identified that 2 sections of the figures provided in the responses had errors. The response for a third question is ambiguous and may also create confusion.

- The Ministry identified the first error as they were asked to confirm the figures provided for PQ 16803 (2019): How many children were on the waiting list to receive Early Intervention support at the end of each of the past ten financial years, broken down by year and region?

  The 2012/13 waitlist figures that were provided were incorrect due to a cut and paste error from finalised reports; for all other years the figures were correct.

- The second error was identified during another series of parliamentary questions on 23 May. The original PQ 16748 asked “What is the longest a child has waited for early intervention support in the past year, broken down by region?” The Ministry provided a table in response with the longest wait times for each region.

  The figure for Tai Tokerau was identified as incorrect due to an error when filtering the data resulting in the incorrect number of days being provided. All other regional records were correct.

- The third response was to PQ 16745 “What is the average waiting time for an Early Intervention Services Appointment, today, and how does that compare with each of the following past financial years 2016/2017, 2015/16, 2014/15, 2013/14?”

  The data provided compares the average days for July – April each financial year. The original response did not contain the correct headings and could have been interpreted as the average days per region for the full year for previous years. In order to be comparing like with like the data included the Average days as at the same time for previous financial years.
Annex 2: Possible Questions and Answers

Questions

1. **What is the issue?**
   Errors were made in the responses for 2 parliamentary questions and a possible 3rd did not have the question definition clarified.

2. **Why is it a problem?**
   The responses were misleading.

3. **How/why did it originate?**
   The Ministry has confirmed that there were human errors made when collating the data for the responses.

4. **What are you doing about it?**
   The Ministry has provided updated data and has checked all data in other parliamentary questions provided at the same time.

   In order to prevent errors like these occurring in future, the Ministry is implementing the following changes:
   - A new Senior Manager starts in June with the team who provide the data. This role will now be responsible for sign off of the data.
   - An external provider will provide back up when there are significant time pressures.
   - From today no poor review will be done by staff who have worked on the PQ.

5. **How long will it take to fix?**
   Corrected responses to the parliamentary questions have been provided to the Minister's office.

6. **What is it going to cost to fix?**
   The only costs relate to extra time by staff to check the figures and to develop a more efficient structure to prevent mistakes occurring again.