

The Treasury

Budget 2021 Information Release

August 2021

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- [36] 9(2)(h) - to maintain legal professional privilege
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- [38] 9(2)(j) - to enable the Crown to negotiate without disadvantage or prejudice
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Treasury Report: Budget 2021 Bilateral Advice: Education and COVID-19 Response Portfolios

Date:	14 December 2020	Report No:	T2020/3762
		File Number:	SH-4-0

Action sought

	Action sought	Deadline
Hon Grant Robertson Minister of Finance	Note ahead of your Budget 2021 bilateral discussion with the Minister of Education	3pm Thursday 17 December
Hon Dr Megan Woods Associate Minister of Finance	Note ahead of your Budget 2021 bilateral discussion with the Minister of Education	3pm Thursday 17 December

Contact for telephone discussion (if required)

Name	Position	Telephone		1st Contact
Caitlin Andrews	Analyst, Education and Population Agencies	[39]	N/A	✓
Nicky Lynch	Manager, Education and Population Agencies		[35]	

Minister's Office actions (if required)

Return the signed report to Treasury.

Note any feedback on the quality of the report

Enclosure: Yes (attached)

[Budget 2021 - Education Invite letter draft](#)

[Hon Hipkins - Budget 21 letter \(Education and COVID-19\) - Annex A](#)

Treasury Report: Budget 2021 Bilateral Advice: Education and COVID-19 Response Portfolios

Executive Summary

Education Portfolio

For Budget 2021 we understand the Minister of Education has identified the following requests in the Education portfolio:

- [33] “critical cost pressure” bids, totalling [33] in operating funding and [33] in capital funding over the forecast period; and
- [33] Manifesto commitments, totalling [33] in operating funding over the forecast period.

While the Ministry has already prioritised its cost pressures, **significant further prioritisation will be required** to achieve a Budget envelope within allowances, given the likely pressures faced by other large portfolios. We suggest providing the Minister with a maximum total amount to be sought to encourage further prioritisation. We recommend inviting the Minister to submit up to [33] in operating funding across the forecast period ([33] per annum).

We do not consider there is a need to provide a maximum for the capital component of the invitation given the operating expenditure associated with any capital initiatives will need to be managed within the [33] operating package. However, you may wish to provide a general sense of your expectations in this area.

To ensure that this approach remains consistent with the overall Budget process, we recommend you make a number of other expectations clear as part of this invitation.

You may also wish to discuss progress on CRRF spending. A recent report back from the Ministry shows relatively slow spending. Given the CRRF was intended to be as a response to the COVID-19 outbreak, you may wish to discuss with the Minister whether the full amount of funding not yet spent is still needed.

Beyond this Budget, it will be important to enable the Ministry to prioritise its existing work programme to ensure effort and resources are able to be focused on where they will make the most difference. We recommend you discuss the Minister’s intentions for further prioritisation.

COVID-19 Response Funding

The Minister for COVID-19 Response has not submitted any requests through Budget 2021 as Cabinet recently agreed to fund MIQ and the Public Health response until June 2022. Given ongoing funding is in place, we recommend you focus any discussion with the Minister for COVID-19 Response on the importance of setting up regular monitoring of policy changes and funding needs over the next 18 months.

Recommended Action

We recommend that you:

- a) **note** that Education portfolio cost pressures and Manifesto initiatives will need to be prioritised and scaled to fit within Budget allowances;
- b) **indicate** to the Minister of Education your expectations for the set of initiatives to be submitted at the end of January 2021;
- c) **note** that the Minister for COVID-19 Response has not submitted Budget 2021 initiatives as there is ongoing funding for MIQ and the Public Health response until June 2022.

Nicky Lynch
Manager, Education and Population Agencies

Hon Grant Robertson
Minister of Finance

Treasury Report: Budget 2021 Bilateral Advice: Education and COVID-19 Response Portfolios

Purpose of Report

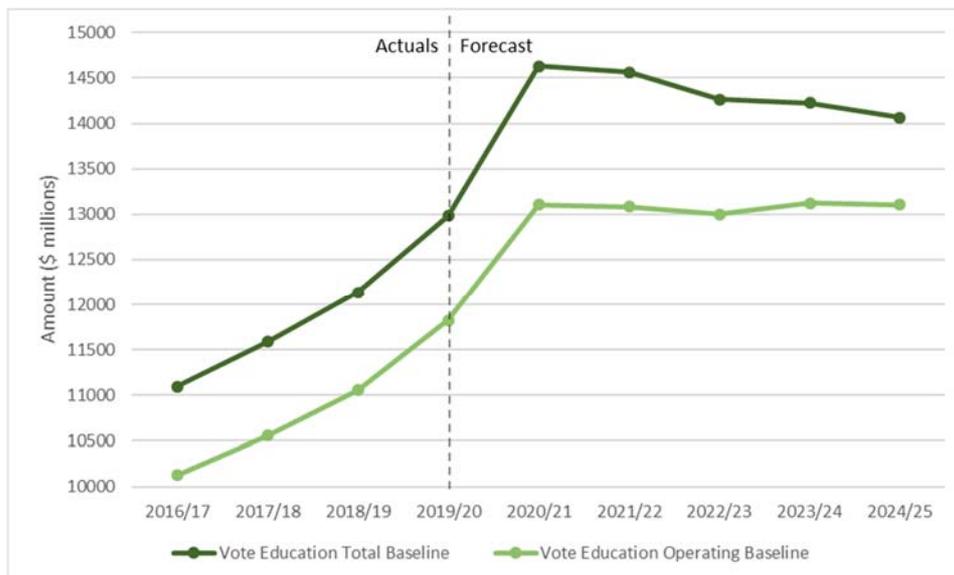
1. You are meeting Minister Hipkins at 3pm on Thursday 17 December to discuss the COVID-19 Response and Education portfolios.
2. This report provides advice on:
 - likely funding requests
 - a recommended approach to invitations, and
 - delivery of CRRF funding.
3. Suggested talking points and a draft invitation letter to the Minister for the Education portfolio are also attached.

Education Portfolio

Background and Context

4. The Education portfolio covers Vote Education, Vote Tertiary Education and Vote Education Review Office (ERO), which have 2020/21 baseline funding of \$14.6 billion, \$2.8 billion, and \$37 million, respectively.
5. Between 2018/19 and 2020/21, total Education portfolio annual baseline funding increased from around \$15.5 billion to around \$17.5 billion. The operating component of Vote Education's baseline has grown by 19% from around \$11 billion in 2018/19 to around \$13.1 billion in 2020/21. This increase continues into outyears.

Figure 1: Changes in the operating component of the Vote Education baseline



6. In 2020, The Education portfolio received:
 - around \$1.56 billion in operating funding across the forecast period at Budget (11.8% of the operating balance) and \$115 million in capital funding, and
 - \$2.8 billion¹ in operating funding through the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund (CRRF), including \$349 million in outyears.
7. There have historically also been several significant funding commitments made outside Budgets.[33]

Education funding requests for Budget 2021

8. In Budget 2021 there are minimal Education precommitments³ and no net upwards forecast revision for demand. This means there are fewer Education pressures to manage against the operating allowance or an Education Budget package at this stage of the Budget process compared to previous years.
9. Annex Three is the summary of initiatives that the Minister of Education attached to his Budget letter to you dated 10 December 2020. The initiatives total around [33] operating over the forecast period and around [33] total capital. However we understand not all of the manifesto commitment funding indicated in the fiscal plan is being sought this Budget. From the Minister's letter, it appears the amount being sought this year for manifesto commitments is around \$930 million of the [33] estimated cost. This means the total operating funding sought this year may be around [33]

Education manifesto commitments outlined in the fiscal plan total \$1.72 billion operating over the forecast period

10. Table 1 below sets out the major Education commitments included in your fiscal plan. Based on what you indicated in your manifesto and known funding cliffs, we suggest that the most time-critical manifesto initiatives for this Budget are:
 - Implementation of the Equity Index – for schools only [33]
 - Free and Healthy School Lunches (due to the funding cliff at the end of calendar year 2021)
 - ECE Pay Parity – to spread the fiscal cost of the initiative across multiple Budgets, and keep pace with upcoming increases to kindergarten pay rates.

¹ This excludes \$412 million in funding for the Apprenticeship Boost Initiative which is funded via Vote Social Development.

² Most notably, [33] for teacher and principal collective bargaining and [33] to establish the Teacher Aide Pay Equity contingency, both in 2019.

³ The only precommitment for Budget 2021 is \$36.390 million in operating funding to deliver the National Education Growth Plan

Table 1: Manifesto Commitments in the Education Portfolio

Initiative Title	Indicative cost from fiscal plan (Opex)	Time Sensitivity	Recommend for B21 (shaded)
1. ECE - Pay Parity <i>(funding to continue to work towards pay parity between teachers in education and care centres and their counterparts in schools and kindergartens)</i>	\$600m over four years (note the Minister's letter indicated \$840 million over four years (\$280m per Budget)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manifesto did not stipulate a timeframe, but further planned increase to kindergarten rates suggests some movement needed this year 	✓ (in part, to keep pace with kindergarten rates)
2.Reform of the Tomorrow's Schools system <i>(funding for a package of initiatives including establishment of the Education Service Agency, Network Planning for Māori Medium pathways and Early Learning)</i>	\$400m over four years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not critical to do this year, but certainty would support change management 	Consider trade-offs with cost pressures
3.Free and Healthy School Lunches <i>(funding the continuation of the programme; current funding ceases at the end of 2020/21)</i>	\$375m over four years (from 2022/23) (note the Minister's letter suggests funding a portion of this from the CRRF, which we would not recommend)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding cliff for the roll out of the expansion of the programme at the end of calendar 2021 Funding decision required this Budget 	✓
4.Implementation of the Equity Index <i>(funding for implementation in both schools and early learning services)</i>	\$320m over four years (note the Minister's letter indicates only [33] is needed this Budget)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cabinet agreed to implement by 2021 School year Long lead in time required to implement 	✓ (in part - schools only)
5.Digital Access <i>(funding to address the digital divide in New Zealand schools, building on the programmes rolled out during the 2020 COVID-19 response)</i>	\$15m over four years [33]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not critical to do this year Could become more critical if there is a large COVID-19 outbreak 	Consider trade-offs with cost pressures
6.Student achievement - curriculum progress and NCEA <i>(implementing changes to NCEA to strengthen literacy and numeracy requirements)</i>	\$10m over four years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not critical to do this year, though note our downward trajectory on key learning benchmarks 	Consider trade-offs with cost pressures
Total in manifesto Total sought by Minister	\$1.720 billion (\$430 million average per annum) [33] ([33] average per annum) <i>(note: this assumes that the first year of School Lunches is funded from the CRRF and the remainder from Budget 22, and has only [33] for digital access)</i>		

11. There are several other Education initiatives in the manifesto which were not specifically itemised in your fiscal plan, including:
 - Reform of Vocational Education (RoVE) (we are engaging with TEC to understand the extent to which this can be funded within baselines);
 - period products in schools (to be considered at Cabinet Committee this week); and
 - cost adjustments for all Education sectors.
12. Annex Three also includes the Ministry of Education’s costings of these initiatives.

The Minister has identified cost pressures totalling [33] operating and [33] capital

13. The Minister has identified potential cost pressures totalling [33] in operating (over the forecast period) and [33] in capital (over four years) for discussion, summarised in Figure 2 below.

[33]

Specific topics for discussion on cost pressures

14. Overall, we consider that most of the areas of cost pressure identified in the Minister’s letter are likely to warrant consideration through Budget 2021. However there are a number of initiatives that could be scaled or potentially managed through baseline reprioritisation. Some areas you may wish to touch on in your discussion are below:
 - **Vocational Education:** The Minister is likely to seek a substantial increase to real-terms Vocational Education and Training funding rates (in addition to an across-the-board increase linked to inflation). [34]
 - **the Wānanga Sector:** The Minister is seeking significant new funding to address long-standing tensions in the relationship between the Crown and

the three Wānanga. The details of the funding sought are unclear, but this would likely represent a new policy decision and so be out of scope of Budget 2021. [33]

- **Holidays Act:** The Minister of Education may want to defer submission of a cost pressure (estimated at \$275 million operating) related to the remediation of Holidays Act compliance issues in the schooling sector until Budget 2022. Payments are unlikely to be able to be made until the 2022/23 financial year. However, there is a risk the Ministry could incur unappropriated expenditure this year if the pressure is not funded, as the expense will need to be booked as soon as a reasonable estimate is reached. **Therefore, we recommend that you invite an initiative to be submitted to address this pressure in Budget 2021.**⁴
- **School Property:** The Ministry has indicated the total School Property works programme could total around [33] in capital over the next 4 years. We have been working with the Ministry and intend to provide further advice on a more structured and long-term funding approach that sets out the pipeline for investment in this area for future Budgets. In the meantime, **we recommend that you invite the Minister to submit a bid in Budget 2021 for only critical capital investment that will maintain the school property programme over the next 1-2 years.**

[38]

- **Māori and Pacific Learners:** The Minister has submitted several initiatives pertaining to Māori and Pacific Learners. These are new funding and do not appear to meet the scope of this Budget. We recommend you discuss in more depth with Māori Ministers in due course. We also recommend you discuss the progress of existing initiatives (through previous budgets and CRRF) intended for Māori and Pacific learners. See paragraph 31 for additional information regarding the Ministry's delivery to date.
- **Forecast changes:** The Minister may wish to discuss using \$1.06 billion of returned Education forecast changes⁵ to hypothetically offset Education package costs, which would significantly reduce the operating impact of the Education cost pressures package to around [33] operating over the forecast period. These revisions were agreed at OBU, **so have already been factored into our overall forecasts.** We consider that the forecast change result for Budget 2021 already places the portfolio in a better

⁴ Our view likely aligns with the view of the Auditor General, who has set a clear expectation that the Government should settle the liabilities as soon as possible to ensure the employees are paid what they are owed

⁵ Typically over the past ten years forecast changes have been upwards, and these costs have been counted against the education allocation in the following year's Budget package. This year forecast changes have trended downward due to several factors (notably lower estimates of births affecting ECE).

starting position than in recent Budgets. Given the current fiscal environment, **we do not recommend directly reallocating the forecast change savings back to the Education portfolio**, as this would have a negative impact on fiscal indicators. You have already set this expectation in your response letter to the Minister at OBU 2020.

Approach to initiative invitations

The initiatives put forward by the Minister will need to be prioritised further

15. The Education portfolio represents around 15% of Core Crown Expenditure. Vote Education typically receives 15-25% of the operating allowance each Budget, and Vote Tertiary Education 1-4%.
16. Based on a total sought this Budget of around [33], the initiatives in the Minister's letter total around 50% than the typical proportion for the portfolio. It is therefore clear that further prioritisation and scaling will be required. More generally, much more active prioritisation of policy initiatives and management of cost pressures will be needed on an ongoing basis if this level of spending increase is to be maintained over the medium term. Our engagements with the Ministry of Education indicate that this is well understood and the Ministry has actively prioritised, but the breadth of the Education Work Programme they are trying to advance is a constraint.

[38]

18. [38] we suggest you seek to make progress on your most important manifesto commitments and unavoidable cost pressures in Budget 2021 [33]

We recommend providing the Minister with a maximum total amount to be sought to encourage further prioritisation

[34]

20. The invite process in principle should help constrain this activity. However, given the size and complexity of the Votes, we see some risks of perverse behaviour or outcomes in inviting named initiatives only - for example, small but critical pressures could be missed, large package bids may be submitted, or opportunities to manage pressures through the wider flexibility available within the Education baseline could be missed.
21. We suggest you could manage these risks by providing the Minister with an indicative maximum total new funding amount for initiatives to be submitted. This approach would encourage prioritisation of bids by the Minister and Ministry of Education, reduce the volume of bids, generate more realistic initiative funding options much earlier on in the Budget process, and emphasise a stronger focus on prioritisation within the existing baseline.

We recommend inviting the Minister to submit up to [33] in operating funding across the forecast period ([33] per annum)

22. A total operating package of [33] (over four years) would be roughly [33] of the amount currently being requested for the portfolio, and around [33] of the operating allowance, in line with recent Budget allocations for Education.
23. A total package of this size would require the following trade-offs to be considered:
 - some significant manifesto commitments would need to be deferred or scaled
 - cost adjustments for operational funding of providers may not be able to be funded to the same extent as previously
 - the school property capital cost pressures will need to be significantly scaled to only the critical funding needed to maintain the programme for the next 1-2 years.
24. We do not see a need to provide a maximum to the capital component of the invitation given the operating expenditure associated with any capital initiatives will need to be managed within the [33] operating package.
25. To ensure that this approach remains consistent with the overall Budget process, we would recommend you caveat the invitation with the following:
 - The submission package is not a guaranteed allocation, given sizeable funding pressures across other large Votes, such as Health and Social Development. Initiatives would still be assessed and prioritised across all Votes.
 - The submission should include all costs that need to be managed over the coming year given the need to reduce out-of-cycle funding requests.
 - Time-limited funding is not a preferred scaling option: the Minister should not create room for more initiatives by time-limiting funding, as this creates pressures that will need to be met in future Budgets - or in the future from within baselines.
 - Initiatives must still be in scope of Budget 2021: the submission should only be made up of manifesto commitments and critical cost pressures.
 - A 'money in, money out' approach: If late initiatives need to be submitted after the 29 January cut-off date, the package of submitted initiatives needs to be adjusted to still meet the maximum.
26. We would suggest noting in the invitation the major areas where you expect initiatives, but providing the Minister some flexibility to include other smaller items, provided they are achievable within the overall quantum and meet the criteria for Budget 2021.

This approach has some risks

27. If you decide to adopt this process it will be important to reinforce your expectations with regard to totals, timing and scope. Hypothetical package allocations were used for Education in both Budgets 2019 and 2020. A key lesson from these experiences was that allocations are useful in identifying the Minister's priorities and more realistic funding options; but can become complicated and create substantially more work if process and expectations are changed multiple times throughout the Budget process.

Delivery of past initiatives and reprioritisation

[33,34]

32. The Ministry will be reporting again on this spending alongside the other Portfolios in January 2021. This will provide the Ministry with the opportunity to demonstrate further progress with the initiatives, as well as provide more in-depth information.
33. You have indicated your interest in underspends across the Education portfolio. While we can provide analysis at the appropriation level, this would not be rich information, due to the frequency at which underspends are transferred, and the breadth of the large appropriations. If you would like further analysis of underspends, you could request that programme level information be provided to you or the Treasury so that we can investigate further.

You may wish to indicate your expectations regarding tertiary underspends

[34]

[33,34]

Managing the longer term

36. Over the longer term, the Education sector will face a significant challenge in maintaining or improving outcomes through a sustained period of more constrained allowances. Quality education services have an important role to play in protecting young people from the potential effects of a recession, and supporting adjustment of the labour market.
37. There are signs overall performance may be declining in some areas, making this situation more challenging. Our outcomes in international benchmark studies at primary and secondary levels in literacy, maths and science are typically static or declining. Attainment of NCEA Level 2 has declined across all student groups in the past three years. Indicators linked to engagement and wellbeing also give cause for concern - our schools have one of the highest rates of bullying among OECD member countries and school attendance has declined since 2015.
38. Beyond this Budget, it will be important to enable the Ministry to prioritise its existing work programme to ensure effort and resources are able to be focused on where they will make the most difference. [34]

and prioritising would take pressure off both the Ministry and the wider sector. We would also suggest strengthening current evidence and evaluation efforts, to support more effective investment decisions three to four years from now.

39. We understand the Minister of Education intends to take a paper to Cabinet early next year on the Education Work Programme. This would be an opportunity to emphasise the need for further prioritisation and better evaluation.

COVID-19 Public Health and MIQ Response Funding

40. Given recent decisions, we do not expect significant requests for new funding for the Public Health or MIQ response to COVID-19 through Budget 2021. However, there are likely to be policy changes over the next 18 months so regular monitoring of the response and required funding will be important.

Recent Funding Decisions

Public Health Funding

41. On 2 December 2020, Cabinet agreed to \$1.134 billion to sustain the Public Health response until June 2022 [CBC-20-MIN-0101 refers].⁷ This included funding for testing and tracing, DHB COVID-related costs, personal protective equipment (PPE), and departmental funding for the Ministry of Health's COVID and policy directorates.
42. The Treasury supported funding for the Public Health response until June 2022 to provide the Ministry of Health with greater certainty and scope to take a longer-term approach to the response.
43. [33]

⁷ Note that this request included \$1.115 billion new funding from the CRRF and a \$19 million call on the tagged contingency for contact tracing (\$1.134 billion total).

[33]

MIQ Funding

44. On 7 December 2020, Cabinet agreed to \$1.697 billion to continue funding the current MIQ model until June 2022 [CAB-20-MIN-0511 refers]. This funding is subject to additional controls, monitoring and report-back requirements:
- MBIE funding is ring-fenced to MIQ and any underspends must be returned to the centre;
 - MBIE must report back to the Minister of Finance and the Minister for COVID-19 Response on progress making cost savings in accommodation (the single largest cost in the current MIQ approach) by early 2021;
 - The Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and the Minister for COVID-19 Response are authorised to further adjust MBIE's funding following further MBIE cost reduction advice;
 - MOH must report back to the Minister of Finance and the Minister for COVID-19 Response on MIQ health service costs and how these are tracking against funding by June 2021.

[33]

Next steps

[33]

Monitoring the ongoing response will be important

48. Now that long-term funding has been provided, the focus on funding for COVID-19 should shift towards monitoring. Ministers have the ability to re-calibrate policy settings and funding arrangements as circumstances change or if more information becomes available.
49. We previously advised you that we see value in establishing a regular forum for Ministers, such as a regularly scheduled Cabinet discussion or a senior Ministers meeting, to take a step back from the issues of the day, take stock of progress, and confirm or re-calibrate as appropriate [T2020/3452 refers]. A regular cycle of

strategy meetings could also be used as a lever to extract better information and reporting across the system. You may wish to discuss with the Minister for COVID-19 Response what decision-making arrangements might best facilitate these discussions.

Annex One: Talking Points

Education Portfolio

Manifesto commitments

- Given the constrained fiscal environment, it will not be possible to fund all manifesto commitments and cost pressures and further prioritisation will be required to develop a Budget envelope.
 - Which Education manifesto commitments are your top priority? Which ones are more time sensitive?

Cost Pressures

- **Tertiary Education** cost pressures make up a significant proportion of total cost pressures.
 - Which tertiary education bids do you consider most critical? Are there any options for deferring any elements of these bids? Any options to fund from baselines or underspends?
- I understand you would like to discuss whether you must submit a bid relating to the remediation of **Holidays Act compliance issues** in the schooling sector in Budget 2021.
 - How is the Ministry of Education progressing with its calculations of an estimate of the liability? What alternative options have you considered to manage the risk of incurring unappropriated expenditure if you do not seek funding in Budget 2021?
- Your letter indicates you would like to seek around [33] capital for **school property pressures** over the next 4 years. The multi-year capital allowance only has \$7.8 billion for allocation across the next four Budgets.
 - How much capital funding would be required in Budget 2021 to maintain the current school property programme for the next 1-2 years?
- I understand that a [38]
 - How have you taken this into consideration when determining phasing and deferring of initiatives across the next three Budgets?
- Your letter infers that you would like the \$1.06 billion of returned **Education forecast changes** to be considered against your submitted initiatives. Having a negative forecast change total already places your portfolio in a better starting position when compared to recent Budgets. I would like to use these savings to offset the pressure generated across all portfolios this Budget.

Suggested approach to initiative invitations

- Discuss and indicate your expectations for the total level of initiatives you would like to see submitted for the Education portfolio in Budget 2021.

Delivery and reprioritisation

[33]

Fees-free underspends

- There are usually significant underspends in fees-free – expenditure is always much lower than we had anticipated at the time the category of the appropriation was established.
- Given this, underspends here should be returned to the centre, and not be relied on to fund other initiatives.
 - Would the Ministry be able to re-forecast fees-free demand so we can lower the appropriation to a more suitable level?

COVID-19 Public Health response and MIQ funding

- Discuss with the Minister for COVID-19 Response that you expect him along with other key MBIE Ministers to deliver a reprioritisation proposal across MBIE's baseline in conjunction with bids for baseline funding.
- Ask the Minister for COVID-19 Response to ensure a detailed review of the non-frontline MIQ work programme is undertaken.
- Discuss with the Minister for COVID-19 Response, options for monitoring the ongoing response to COVID-19 e.g. regularly scheduled Cabinet discussions or senior Ministers meetings.