# Special Session of APEC EDNET Meeting

**Summary Note**

The Special Session of APEC EDNET Meeting was held from 9 AM to 12 PM on 27 January 2021. 52 delegates from 14 economies – Australia, Brunei, Chile, China, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Peru, the Philippines, Russia, Singapore, Thailand and USA. The Meeting was chaired by Ms. Tara Thurlow-Rae, Senior Manager International Co-operation and Engagement at the Ministry of Education of New Zealand, New Zealand’s EDNET Co-Chair for 2021 and EDNET Coordinator, Dr. Wang Yan.

## 1. Welcome and Opening Remarks

Welcome and opening remarks by New Zealand and the EDNET Coordinator.

The EDNET Coordinator gave a brief review of EDNET’s achievement in 2020 despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, and encouraged member economies to continue to work closely to usher in a productive and innovative APEC year.

Delegates of each member economy introduced themselves and expressed gratitude to New Zealand and EDNET Coordinator for organizing the meeting, as well as expectation towards the discussion.

## 2. Synthesis Report on Impact of COVID-19 on Education in Asia Pacific Region: Challenges and Solution

The EDNET Coordinator and *Malaysia* jointly gave a presentation on the Synthesis Report on Impact of COVID-19 on Education in Asia Pacific Region. The EDNET Coordinator first explained on the report preparation process, then Malaysia highlighted on the key recommendations and way forward. The delegates then discussed the following questions:

* + *What do the findings of the report mean for the future work of EDNET?*
  + *How can the recommendations of the report be taken forward to inform priorities in 2021 and beyond?*

*New Zealand* acknowledged usefulness and relevance of the report, believed that ensuring equitable access to online and digital learning for students across all levels of education is still challenging yet critical, and would like to advance the discussion on equal access to digital learning, professional learning and development of teachers, capacity building for teachers and parents and well-being of teachers and students, and ensure to have an opportunity to share thinking on these issues virtually as education systems and labor markets are getting increasingly interconnected in Asia Pacific Region. New Zealand also emphasized the importance of agile and innovative action to respond to changing circumstances in support of student learning.

*Chile* raised the issue of education equity, learning loss, student dropout, suggested to document and research these issues and emphasized that student’s learning is the first and most important aspect.

*USA* suggested the significance of learning recovery and called for attention to different types of responses at different levels.

*Australia* noted the range of perspectives in terms of education response to COVID-19 from economies including similarities and differences, pointed out the shared challenges faced by economies to different degrees across the region, reiterated that members economies are in a transition from crisis response to COVID normal, hence supported the recommendations focusing on the work going forward, with particular emphasis on effective online learning and qualification recognition incorporating online learning.

*China* acknowledged the usefulness of the survey and the report and suggested to produce a shorter summary and a collection of best practices and have it formally published for mutual learning and sustainable efforts of education response to COVID-19.

*Singapore* reiterated the changes in circumstances and member economies’ new ways of doing things, and suggested to develop a repository to keep members’ sharing live, which can reflect not only challenges, but also how education looks like moving forward.

*Russia* reiterated the changes in circumstance, suggested to show the progress through updating the report, highlighted the futures of education transformed through digital technologies, supported Australia’s proposed foci on quality online learning and qualification recognition.

*New Zealand* suggested to identify ways to share the updated information utilizing the virtual year in the following discussion.

*The Philippines* acknowledged the usefulness of the report which mapped member economies’ education response to COVID, agreed to a shorter version of the report that could be more digestible to everyone, suggested a good knowledge platform of best practices to help shape education sector in member economies, and a shorter updated survey on post-pandemic era/beyond COVID-19 and new normal.

*Singapore* suggested, instead of surveys, hosting a live repository of thoughts so that member economies can concurrently contribute their best practices, framed by broad topics that member economies can agree on.

*EDNET Coordinator* suggested to utilize the existing webpage of EDNET which is part of the APEC official website for the repository.

*USA* expressed appreciation for the survey, analysis and recommendation, suggested, instead of surveys, to focus on what is happening as things have evolved, introduced two things put forward under new administration of the USA – data collection of learning losses of populations with inequity issues, and creation of a clearing house of what works, and suggested that such kind of clearing house in the international arena like APEC would be enormously helpful.

## 3. Virtual APEC 2021

*New Zealand* presented on “Engaging Virtually for Enhanced Cooperation in Education in 2021”, and the delegates discussed the following questions:

* *What do the findings of the report mean for the future work of EDNET?*
* *How can the recommendations of the report be taken forward to inform priorities in 2021 and beyond?*

*Thailand* acknowledged the difficulty of conducting virtual meetings and suggested to use familiar platforms such as Zoom, which has a user-friendly interface to structure the meetings in a way to avoid productivity delays. In terms of substance, Thailand suggested to keep agenda and schedules clear, use breakout sessions in order to engage participants, and have intersessional meetings to allow certain time for the participants to discuss necessary matters, ideas, and agendas.

*Malaysia* expressed appreciation to *New Zealand* for setting priorities for 2021 with a continued focus on innovation and inclusivity, which complements Malaysia’s APEC 2020 priorities. *Malaysia* suggested an additional focus on education such as improving capacity building for distance learning and remote learning especially for the vulnerable, on crisis preparedness and inclusivity in the perspective of education. In terms of EDNET focus for 2021 by New Zealand, Malaysia acknowledged the timely focus on student’s wellbeing in a digital era and emphasized on the need for total wellbeing, including mental and psychosocial wellbeing of students and teachers. In terms of formats and implementation of meetings for 2021, *Malaysia* suggested that meetings, workshops, webinars, and policy dialogues could be held virtually, albeit more frequently, in a shorter duration and to be more focused on specific issues, with more inter-sessional discussions. *Malaysia* also suggested that in the face of the current pandemic, virtual platforms could also be utilized to assist economies to re-align existing priorities and strategies to achieve the objective of APEC Education Strategy 2016-2030 and its action plan, if needed be.

*Chile* suggested to consider several factors such as different time zones which might result in fatigue for participants in certain economies as well as disturbance of working from home, and suggested shorter sessions i.e. participants meet to discuss important issues, to take decisions and reach consensus, and make sure to have background papers circulated prior to the virtual meetings.

*Australia* supported the approach proposed by prior speakers, to have shorter meetings for productive and focused discussions, handling related matters such as reviewing concept notes and project updates inter-sessionally, and emphasized the value of virtual forum is to make the most use of shared expertise of 21 economies given the said challenges.

*The Philippines* suggested to group the economies in the same/close time zones, and share COVID-19 strategies beyond COVID-19 for next normal.

*USA* supported the idea of shorter meetings so participants stay engaged, and proposed sharing presentations either through documents or recorded video earlier. *USA* supported *Thailand* in the suggestion about using breakout rooms in virtual meetings so that participants can share their expertise and more people can be engaged.

*China* emphasized that the key to success in virtual meetings is to be result-oriented and to plan ahead with clear objectives, and supported shorter and more focused virtual meetings to accommodate participants in different time zones.

## 4. EDNET Initiatives and Projects

EDNET Coordinator briefed on the current projects and initiatives, and the delegates discussed the following questions:

* + *What are your thoughts and considerations about 2021 EDNET Initiatives and Projects?*
  + *How can we best implement APEC Education Strategy and its action plan?*

*Australia* acknowledged the position to taking forward the Strategy, and given their ongoing relevance, expressed support to policy discussion and outcome-focused project work.

*Chile* echoed *Australia*’s opinion and acknowledged the relevance of APEC Education Strategy and its action plan, pointed out that same issues exist after COVID-19, such as education equity, inclusion and allocation of resources.

*China* supported the hosting of the AEMM this year or next year depending on the format. China also acknowledged the relevance of APEC Education Strategy, suggested to update the action plan to incorporate the changes that have occurred since the outbreak of COVID-19, and probably submit it as a deliverable of AEMM. China expressed appreciation for member economies’ support for APEC Education Research Network and welcome member economies to join the Network.

*Thailand* emphasized the importance of digitalization of education provision, capacity building of teachers and students’ digital skills, assessment of online learning in terms of EDNET initiatives and projects. *Thailand* also proposed to have the Strategy and its action plan revisited and revised to ensure its responsiveness to the changing context and suitable for the global economies.

*New Zealand* suggested that give already full ministerial meetings in 2021, the AEMM be hosted next year or the year after that. In this regard, topics and agenda can be prepared through regular dialogue and discussion, thus laying the groundwork for a successful AEMM.

*USA* expressed support of the groundwork for an AEMM in 2022 and support of the sharing of best practices for COVID recovery and those on learning losses and equity. *USA* is drafting the concept note for the APEC-funded project focusing on reskilling and upskilling for submission in project session one, and invited interested economies to be co-sponsors. *USA* recognized the significance of periodic AEMM for APEC, bringing ministers together as leaders of education to learn from each other and build consensus, and suggested to use the year of 2021 to build building blocks for AEMM in the future, identify the structure and topics to make AEMM a real dialogue and a real learning and participatory event. USA also suggested to carefully consider the timing of the AEMM to avoid conflict with prospective education ministerial meeting to be held by OECD at the end of 2022.

*Singapore* emphasized the significance of mental well-being and cyber wellness when advancing digital inclusiveness and innovation and looks forward to hearing more about the projects and events as shared by New Zealand that would address those areas.

*Japan* echoed the *USA*’s suggestions regarding the timing and agenda-setting of the AEMM and the identification of topics interested to ministers. Acknowledging the relevance of the Education Strategy and its action plan, *Japan* shared a plan of organizing a webinar focusing on curriculum reform in terms of information education in February and invited member economies to join it.

*Malaysia* proposed early sharing of concept notes of projects by economies to allow ample time for member economies to consider co-sponsoring and to encourage willingness of more economies to co-sponsor in order to achieve the 6 co-sponsorship needed for HRDWG proposals. On the implementation of the APEC Education Strategy 2016-2030, *Malaysia* proposed for EDNET to seek the assistance of APEC Secretariat and other working groups in order to learn of their approaches and methods regarding the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the Strategy, such as possibilities of a mid-term review, etc. Echoing the viewpoints of other economies, *Malaysia* suggested solid preparation and determination of concrete outcomes for the AEMM.

EDNET Coordinator proposed to have a separate short session for potential applicants to secure co-sponsorship.

*The Philippines* suggested to have ministers present recovery plans beyond COVID-19 at the proposed AEMM, and to include digital citizenship for both students and teachers on the agenda. *The Philippines* suggested to conduct a survey on how many economies could make participate if it is not a very formal meeting at the last quarter of this year. *The Philippines* also suggested Malaysia to consider hosting a virtual AEMM this year and *the Philippines* would support it.

In response to the *Philippines’* response,*Malaysia*supports the plan of *New Zealand* to be focusing on the groundwork in preparation for AEMM and determination of concrete outcomes and take it forward from thereon.

**5. Closing Remarks**

New Zealand and the EDNET Coordinator gave closing remarks.