

30 October 2025

s9(2)(a)



Our ref: OIA 2526-0401

Tēnā koe s9(2)(a)

Response to your Official Information Act request

Thank you for your email of 10 October 2025 to the Ministry for Ethnic Communities (the Ministry) for the following information under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act):

“Could I please request all advice and information – including all, but not limited to, aide memoires, briefings, correspondence (including between you and the Minister’s office), emails, meeting notes, rapid responses, reports, comms/media responses and key lines related to the following:

1. *The pausing of Ethnic Communities Graduate Programme*
2. *The Recognition of Palestine as a state...”*

As you are aware, on 29 October 2025, the Ministry transferred part 2 of your request in full to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) under section 14 of the Act, as it is believed to be more closely connected with the functions of MFAT.

In response to part 1 of the request, there are five documents in scope of the request. The Ministry is releasing three documents to you in full. Two documents are partially released to you with some information withheld under section 9(2)(a) of the Act to protect the privacy of natural persons. Please refer to the document schedule attached.

Please note that any feedback submissions provided from Ministry staff on the Ethnic Communities Graduate Programme proposal during the consultation process has been summarised and addressed in Document 5 - *MEC ECGP Decision Document*.

As is required by section 9(1) of the OIA, I have considered whether the grounds for withholding information under section 9 of the OIA are outweighed by other considerations which would make it desirable, in the public interest, to make that information available. In this instance, I do not consider that to be the case.

Under section 28 of the OIA, you have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Office of the Ombudsman of my response relating to this request. The relevant details can be found on their website at: www.ombudsman.parliament.nz.

Please note, due to the public interest in our work, the Ministry may publish responses to requests for official information on our website, shortly after the response has been sent. If you have any queries about this, please feel free to contact our Ministerial Services team:

Ministerial@ethniccommunities.govt.nz

Ngā mihi



Edward Firth
Director of Ministerial Services

Document Schedule

Document	Date	Document Name	Decision
1	15 November 2024	Email on Graduate Programme Change Proposal	Some information withheld under section 9(2)(a) of the Act.
2	18 November 2024	Email to Staff – Graduate Programme Change	Some information withheld under section 9(2)(a) of the Act.
3	18 November 2024	Master Change Proposal for MEC	Release in full.
4	10 December 2024	Email to Staff – MEC ECGP Decision Document	Release in full.
5	10 December 2024	MEC ECGP Decision Document	Release in full.

From: [Mervin Singham](#)
To: [Paul Tryon](#)
Cc: [Christine Hogg](#)
Subject: RE: I226-11-24 Graduate Programme Change Proposal
Date: 15 November 2024 10:46:56
Attachments: [image001.jpg](#)

Thanks PT. This looks good. Thanks.

Ngā mihi,

Mervin

Mervin Singham ([him/he](#))

Chief Executive

Ministry for Ethnic Communities | Te Tari Mātāwaka

L5, Radio NZ House, 155 The Terrace, Wellington 6140, New Zealand

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From: Paul Tryon

Sent: Friday, 15 November 2024 10:06 AM

To: Mervin Singham

Cc: Christine Hogg

Subject: I226-11-24 Graduate Programme Change Proposal

Hi Mervin

Further to our conversation.|

Regards PT

Kia ora katoa

This morning, we are commencing consultation on a proposal to end the Graduate Programme when this intake finishes its cycle in February. Whilst we are consulting now, the programme will continue to run until February and, if confirmed, there will be no impact on staff until March. However, we are committed to providing staff certainty now and allowing time to seek suitable alternatives prior to the programme ceasing.

This proposal is ringfenced to the Graduate Programme only. Whilst it is limited in scope, I understand that it will potentially be concerning to you. The rationale for this proposal is outlined in the consultation document which is attached. It is important to note that part of the context to this proposal includes that we were unable to meet all the of the cost of running the third intake from baseline. We sought support from Public Service agencies, and, in June 2022, the Ministry of Education transferred \$180,000 in funding support for the third intake of the Programme. Unfortunately, we have no such support for future intakes. If you wish to provide feedback, then you are welcome to do so. The process for this is outlined in the consultation document. I am sure that you will all support 9(2)(a) who is directed affected by the proposal.

Ngā mihi,

Mervin

Paul Tryon (him/he)

Director Corporate Services

Ministry for Ethnic Communities | Te Tari Mātāwaka

Phone 9(2)(a)

155 The Terrace | PO Box 805, Wellington 6140, New Zealand

Mobile: 9(2)(a)

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From: [Mervin Singham](#)
To: [MEC All Staff](#)
Subject: Graduate Programme Change
Date: 18 November 2024 16:13:44
Attachments: [MASTER Change proposal for MEC - November 24.docx](#)

Kia ora koutou

Today we are commencing consultation on a proposal to end the Graduate Programme when this intake finishes its cycle in February. Whilst we are consulting now, the programme will continue to run until February and, if confirmed, there will be no impact on staff until March. However, we are committed to providing staff certainty now and allowing time to seek suitable alternatives prior to the programme ceasing.

This proposal is ringfenced to the Graduate Programme only. Whilst it is limited in scope, I understand that it will potentially be concerning to you. The rationale for this proposal is outlined in the consultation document which is attached. It is important to note that part of the context to this proposal includes that we were unable to meet all the of the cost of running the third intake from baseline. To meet the shortage in funding, we sought support from Public Service agencies, and, in June 2022, the Ministry of Education generously transferred \$180,000 in funding support for the third intake of the Programme.

Unfortunately, we have no such support for future intakes.

If you wish to provide feedback, then you are welcome to do so. The process for this is outlined in the consultation document. I am sure that you will all support ^{9(2)(a)} [redacted] who is directly affected by the proposal.

Ngā mihi,

Mervin

Mervin Singham (him/he)

Chief Executive

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Ministry for Ethnic Communities
Proposal for Consultation
November 2024



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Table of Contents

Contents

Section. 1 Introduction	3
1.1 Purpose of consultation document.....	3
1.2 Timeline.....	3
1.3 Process for providing feedback.....	3
1.4 What happens after the consultation period?.....	3
1.5 Employee support.....	4
Section. 2 Overview of the proposal	4
2.1 Rationale for change	4
2.4 Summary of potential changes on current positions.....	5
Section. 3 Proposed change protocol.....	5

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Section. 1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of consultation document

This consultation document outlines a proposal to cease the Graduate Programme. We are seeking feedback on all aspects of this proposal.

1.2 Timeline

The broad consultation and decision timeline are as follows:

Date	Event
11 November 24	Consultation document released to PSA
18 November 24	Consultation document communicated and released to affected staff and the organisation (as agreed with PSA).
18 November to 29 November 5pm	Consultation period – 2 weeks Proposal open for discussion and feedback
2 December – 4 December 24	Feedback collated and analysed. Final decisions made by Fleur Murray, Deputy Chief Executive Corporate Services
6 December 24	Decision document released to PSA and affected staff (unless further consultation is required) - as agreed with PSA

1.3 Process for providing feedback.

The closing date for feedback is **5pm on Friday 29 November 2024**. You are encouraged to provide feedback on all aspects of the proposal. All feedback should be sent confidentially to the feedback address feedback@ethniccommunities.govt.nz. All submissions will be acknowledged on receipt.

If you require any further information or clarification on the process, please raise this through the email address provided. If you would prefer to provide verbal feedback, please book a time to speak with either Fleur Murray or Paul Tryon.

The PSA have been briefed on the proposed changes and PSA members are also able to discuss the proposal with their delegates or the PSA Organiser.

1.4 What happens after the consultation period?

Once the consultation period has ended, all feedback will be analysed and considered.

As the DCE responsible for the Graduate Programme, I will make the final decisions on the confirmed structure. Once those decisions have been made, a final decisions document will be produced and presented to employees (as per the timeframe above).

Employees who are affected by the final decisions will be advised prior to the decisions being presented to all employees.

1.5 Employee support

Any queries regarding the change process should be directed Fleur Murray or Paul Tryon.

Further and ongoing support is also available to employees from Vitae, through the [Employee Assistance Programme](#). This confidential service provides access to a selection of counselling providers.

Vitae can be contacted by phone on 0508 664 981 or through their website at <http://www.vitae.co.nz>. The Vitae website can also be accessed through a link on the [Employee Assistance Programme](#) pages on the intranet.

Section. 2 Overview of the proposal

2.1 Rationale for change

The Ethnic Communities Graduate Programme (ECGP) has been successful since its launch in July 2021, with 53 graduates involved over three 18-month programmes. Intake three is due to finish at the end of February 2025 and we are committed to ensuring this programme runs to completion, delivering the full impact of the programme for individuals involved.

With the change in MEC's operating model from 1 July 2024, our focus has moved to where we can have most impact. We have moved away from being a service provider, allowing a focus on our role as chief advisor to the Government on Ethnic Communities. We are not a service delivery agency and cannot meet the needs of a broad range of complex and diverse communities without working through other agencies whose role is to design policies and provide services to the public. While we have had some success in this space, much more needs to be achieved. This is why moving forward; our outcomes need to be focused on delivering at the macro not micro level.

Whilst our Graduate Programme has been successful, it is focused on individuals and in a specific [entry level] area within the public service career pipeline. The impact for the 53 individuals while personally high, will have comparatively minimal impact within the public service and system context. The programme was originally designed to address the low representation of ethnically diverse employees and the barriers they face accessing employment in the public sector. However, the percentage of ethnic graduates in the public service has improved over the last five years to be more representative of New Zealand's population.

Further, we expect cost pressures to build with inflation and wage growth over the next three years continuing pressure on our baseline. We were unable to meet all the of the cost of running the third intake from baseline, and we sought funding support from Public Service agencies. In June 2022, the Ministry of Education transferred \$180,000 in funding support to the third intake of the Programme. This was a one-off funding arrangement which is now complete.

We do not see a fourth or further intake as being aligned with MEC's new operating model and it would put pressure on our, as well as our host agency baselines. Support will continue through the ongoing development of our intercultural capability function and through the more system focussed Papa Pounamu initiatives to support the goal of ensuring Ethnic Communities are fairly represented at all levels in the public service.

2.4 Summary of potential changes on current positions

The proposal to cease the Graduate Programme would result in the **Graduate Programme Lead position being disestablished**. It is proposed that this would not occur until the current programme was complete in February 2025. There would also be a short period to wind up the programme with the proposed end date being 15 March 2025.

Section. 3 Proposed change protocol

The proposal will follow the change protocol outlined in the Te Tari Taiwhenua - Department of Internal Affairs Collective Agreement 2024 - 2026

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From: [Teena Patel](#) on behalf of [Mervin Singham](#)
To: [MEC All Staff](#)
Subject: MEC ECGP Decision Document - December 2024
Date: 10 December 2024 11:08:35
Attachments: [MEC ECGP Decision Document - December 2024.docx](#)
[image001.jpg](#)

Kia ora koutou

We have now completed consultation on the proposal to cease the Graduate Programme at the end of the 3rd intake and have made the decision to confirm the proposal. As a result, the Graduate Programme will end when the Graduates complete their placements in February.

We received several submissions, which are summarised in the attached decision document, along with our responses. It is clear from the feedback that people feel strongly about the success of the ECGP and will be disappointed that the programme will not be continued. However, our assessment is that the number of ethnic graduates entering the Public Service is no longer the key issue with good levels of representation in the lower tiers of Government agencies. Ethnic people advancing into the third tier and above within agencies is now the priority. Unfortunately, the expiration of time bound funding and these shifting priorities mean the additional investment that would be required to continue the programme cannot be justified.

The decision to cease the programme does not diminish the success, hard work and commitment that has been evident in delivering 3 intakes and supporting the 53 graduates and their host agencies over the last 3 ½ years. I acknowledge that this decision has an impact on one of our staff member and I am sure you will all offer them support over the coming months.

Ngā mihi,

Mervin

Mervin Singham ([him/he](#))

Chief Executive

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Ministry for Ethnic Communities
ECGP Decision Document
December 2024



Re-issued under the Official Information Act 1982

Table of Contents

Section 1. Introduction.....	3
Section 2. Final Decisions	4
Section 3. Feedback	5
Section 4. Change Protocol.....	11
Section 5. Employee Support	11

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Section 1. Introduction

Introduction from Fleur Murray, Deputy Chief Executive - Corporate

Tēnā koutou katoa,

This document outlines the final decision for the proposal to finish the Ethnic Communities Graduate Programme (ECGP) at the completion of the third intake which is due to be completed at the end of February 2025.

I would like to acknowledge the impact of this proposed change, following on from the Ministry wide change earlier in the year and thank you for your engagement in the consultation process.

It has been clear from the feedback received that people feel strongly about the success of the ECGP and are disappointed to consider the programme will not be continued. While I empathise with this sentiment, the final decision has had to also consider other factors including financial sustainability for the Ministry, the current operating environment, and the other levers available to support intercultural capability uplift within the public sector.

In confirming final decisions, I would like to note the professionalism demonstrated by the affected staff and remind everyone of the support that is available and is outlined in Section 5.

Ngā mihi nui,



Fleur Murray
Deputy Chief Executive – Corporate Services

Section 2. Final Decisions

After considering all feedback from the consultation, the proposal to cease the Graduate Programme at the end of the third intake is confirmed. Consequently, the role of Graduate Programme Lead will be disestablished with effect from the 28th of March 2025. This will allow for the programme to be wound up and for final documentation to be prepared.

4.1 Confirmed Impact - Systems Capability and Programmes

Position	Impact of final decisions
Graduate Programme Lead.	Position disestablished.

Section 3. Feedback

Five submissions, including one from the PSA on behalf of members, were received during the consultation period. All submissions were carefully considered by the Deputy Chief Executive – Corporate. The feedback is summarised in the tables below.

Feedback Summary	Response
Lack of funding should have been anticipated in the last change process, as well as other options for funding, outsourcing, collaboration with others and scaling considered.	In March 2024, at the time of the initial change, it was pre-emptive to make the decision to cease the Programme as we were unsure of the impact of the Fiscal Sustainability Programme on the sector. The timing of our initial change process (March 23) and the fact that intake 3 wasn't due to end until Feb 25, provided additional timeframe to consider options. Some agencies have subsequently either made the decision or are intending to reduce their participation in the programme. Running the programme with fewer graduates is not considered feasible.
ECGP only programme and if disestablished, there will be no dedicated programme for ethnic people.	Noted.
What alternatives were considered - were there discussions with the PSC, seeking club funding from other agencies or 3rd parties, redesigned?	The impact of the Fiscal Sustainability Programme has put pressure on all agencies across the public sector and some participating agencies have already made the decision to not participate further. MEC is of the view that there are no viable alternatives.
MEC needs to continue to raise the issue of ethnic representation in the public sector workforce, especially at the leadership level.	Agreed and we will continue to do so.
MEC should continue to encourage greater intercultural capabilities of public sector employees and foster greater diversity, inclusion, and representation within the workforce.	Agreed and we will continue to do so.
An evaluation should be completed to document the learnings and outcomes of the programme.	Agreed and this will be a task for the wrap up of the programme.
The ECGP is a valuable programme and needs to exist in some form even if there are only a few grads, could the role be brought down to part time?	The programme is not viable below its current level and therefore a part-time option is also not viable.

This should have been considered during the previous change process.	We did consider it, but at that stage we did not know that some agencies would no longer want to be involved, this has only come to light recently
Keep early in careers interventions on the MEC work plan and explore ways to support ethnic graduates.	Noted
There is evidence to suggest that where there are pipelines for representation it is possible to move the dial. Turning the tap on an off impacts supply in the long run.	We appreciate that there have been benefits from the programme, particularly for the individuals involved. Unfortunately, difficult decisions need to be made, balancing the limited resources the Ministry has with the impact of initiatives.
Overseas many interns are not paid. Have we considered talking with MSD about a stipend or offering unpaid exposure. I know many would consider that over no chance at all.	No, we have not considered such an unpaid scheme, which we do not think would be appropriate.
The ECGP is a programme where the Ministry can show direct, practical and tangible impact on the public service.	Noted. The Ministry must make difficult decisions given the fiscal constraints, some of which not all will agree with.
As this is directly tied to the Royal Commission of Inquiry recommendations, it is reputationally damaging for the Ministry to be disestablishing this programme	The Ministry is the Government's Chief Advisor on Ethnic Communities and will continue to provide evidence-based advice which reflects the needs of Ethnic Communities and ensures the delivery of accessible Government services.
Disestablishing the ECGP on March 15 shows little sensitivity given its close ties to the Royal Commission and Christchurch shooting.	We are not disestablishing the programme on the 15th. Rather, the programme will cease at the end of the current intake in February. The 15th allows for a programme wrap-up. We do note the significance of the date and will extend the wrap-up until the 28th of March
Members recognise that March 15 is a significant anniversary date, considering the origins of the Ministry and the ECGP. It seems inconsiderate to disestablish a role on this date. We recommend pushing the proposed end date to the end of March, at the earliest.	As above.
The previous Minister valued the programme.	Noted.

<p>There remain problems with DE&I in the Public Service. While these problems exist, the Ministry should be doing everything it can to improve Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in workplaces, not removing measures that support it.</p>	<p>Noted and agreed that there remain issues in relation to DE&I across the sector. The Ministry will continue its work in the DE&I space.</p>
<p>It is concerning that this change is being proposed just months after the Ministry's more substantial change proposal. It is difficult to see how the situation for the ECGP has changed in these months</p>	<p>We believe, as noted above, it would have been pre-emptive to cease the ECGP at that stage. While there is no perfect timing, the decision was made in the initial change process to consider this decision at another stage. Since March 24, it has become clear that there will be sustained pressure on public finances over the coming periods which will impact all public sector agencies, including MEC. This means we must make difficult decisions on priorities.</p>
<p>Part of the rationale is that the Ministry has moved away from being a service provider yet continues with the ECDF, is considering taking on a service from MBIE and exploring offering an in-person workshop for public service leaders. These are all examples of service delivery.</p>	<p>We accept that there are limited instances where the Ministry will engage in service delivery. Where we do so, this investment is made considering the impact of the investment on the system and contributions to MEC and portfolio priorities. Macro level initiatives that benefit broad groups are favoured under the operating model the Ministry is working to. The ECDF is not considered a service, rather we manage and administer a fund. MEC is considering taking a service from MBIE which aligns with intercultural capability, is part of being a system partner and is cost neutral.</p>
<p>It is also important to recognise that hiring managers, teams and wider Ministry's more broadly also benefit from our graduate programme.</p>	<p>Agreed.</p>
<p>The overall data for ethnic community members in the public service is also not representative of the New Zealand population. Public Service Commission data shows that the total percentage of Asian workers in the public service is 12.5% compared to 15.1% across the total population. There is clear value in ensuring that ethnic community members who would otherwise not consider a career in the public service have a dedicated pathway to do so.</p>	<p>The Ministry will continue to focus on providing advice which demonstrates the value of a diverse and inclusive workforce. Unfortunately, currently, we do not have the resources to dedicate to extending the programme beyond intake three.</p>

Has engagement taken place with other agencies to determine if they would like to continue funding graduates within the Ethnic Community Graduate Programme. It would be helpful to provide evidence that agencies are unable to fund graduates.	Yes, we have engaged with other agencies. They make their own decisions based on their fiscal position and priorities and are not obligated to provide such evidence.
The ECGP provides a significant point of difference to ensuring agencies are building their inter-cultural capability and diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives.	Noted. The Ministry will continue with its work in building intercultural capability within the public sector.
We have moved away from being a service provider, allowing a focus on our role as chief advisor to the Government on Ethnic Communities. The Ministry still delivers services e.g. funding, nominations. Does the Ministry have plans to remove these services?	No, there are no plans.
The impact of the ECGP is undersold in the proposal. While the number of individuals participating in the programme are comparatively small, the potential impact of these individuals on the system over time is great.	We appreciate that there have been benefits from the programme, particularly for the agencies and individuals involved. Unfortunately, currently, we do not have the resources to dedicate to extending the programme beyond intake three.
The programme's impact on the people leaders, teams and workplaces can be challenging to measure and should not be overlooked.	Noted, see above.
The ECGP is considered by members to be one of MEC's most successful programmes and a major deliverable that has consistently received support and appreciation from other organisations. Stakeholders and communities have also greatly benefitted from the programme and would strongly oppose the changes as well.	Noted.
Members would like to see the evidence of the lack of system impact by the programme presented in the change proposal.	We acknowledge that the ECGP has had an impact, unfortunately, currently, we do not have the resources to dedicate to extending the programme beyond intake three.
Where is the data which shows an increased percentage of ethnic graduates in the public service over the last five years?	We acknowledge that the ECGP has had an impact, unfortunately, currently, we do not have the resources to dedicate to extending the programme beyond intake three.

<p>There are ongoing issues, and the proposal gives this a very light touch and reads as though “the job is done” removing barriers to entry, progression and the harnessing of talent of Ethnic Communities into the public service. Is that the intention of the change document?</p>	<p>This is not the intent, and we acknowledge that the ECGP has had an impact.</p>
<p>Further articulation is needed in the change proposal of what “macro” and system change involves in MEC’s new operating model, and why a programme like this does not align.</p>	<p>Macro level initiatives are considered to impact broad groups or significantly influence the system. In the past we have been more engaged at a micro level, advocating for small groups and on occasions, individuals. Under our new operating model, we do not have the resources for this and need to prioritise our effort on those initiatives that have the broadest/macro impact.</p>
<p>Further evaluation of the programme and documentation of what made the programme successful should be completed.</p>	<p>Agreed and this will be a task for the wrap up of the programme.</p>
<p>It is important that work to support a pipeline of talent from Ethnic Communities into the Public Service is continued and for the Ministry’s new integrated work plan to show how we will contribute to system wide initiatives.</p>	<p>The Ministry will continue to support intercultural capability building within the public service which will over time support the development of a diverse public service. The Ministry’s integrated workplan will be completed shortly and will lay out the Ministry’s work for the next 18 months to the end of June 2026.</p>
<p>The intercultural capability function currently consists of 1 FTE. We are concerned that 1 FTE will be insufficient to manage the work in this space, with the ECGP position disestablished. A clear work programme needs to be clearly articulated and fully resourced.</p>	<p>Agreed that a clear work programme needs to be articulated. The Ministry will need to work within the resources available and will continue to monitor workload.</p>
<p>What research has been done to understand the potential impact of disestablishing the ECGP for the public service and representation of Ethnic Communities in the public sector?</p>	<p>The Ministry has engaged with several agencies regarding their ongoing intentions and have considered this alongside the ongoing requirements of the Fiscal Sustainability Programme.</p>
<p>We recommend a case study or report to provide better evidence to ELT and the Minister before a decision is made to cease the programme and disestablish the position.</p>	<p>Noted.</p>

<p>Given this programme is described as successful, we would like to know if the Ministry approached agencies (aside from the current six host agencies) about support for a possible future intake before deciding to end the programme.</p>	<p>MEC has had conversations with agencies. Some have either made the decision or were intending to reduce their participation in the programme. As noted above, all agencies are facing fiscal pressures.</p>
<p>Aside from cooperation with government agencies, partnerships with or sponsorships from private sector organisations could be explored. This was done for the Business Symposium and would be in keeping with current practice at the Ministry.</p>	<p>We don't consider this to be a feasible option currently.</p>
<p>Supported by the Ethnic Xchange, the Ministry has enhanced and developed new relationships with private sector corporations and businesses. We recommend exploring opportunities to collaborate with businesses to deliver their existing graduate programmes (for example, KPMG and PWC) or develop a new programme on the premise of capitalising on the 'ethnic advantage'.</p>	<p>We don't consider this to be a feasible option currently.</p>

Section 4. Change Protocol

The change protocols outlined in the Te Tari Taiwhenua - Department of Internal Affairs Collective Agreement 2024 - 2026 **will be followed for affected staff.**

Section 5. Employee Support

1. Any queries regarding the change process should be directed Fleur Murray or Paul Tryon.
2. Further and ongoing support is also available to employees from Vitae, through the [Employee Assistance Programme](#). This confidential service provides access to a selection of counselling providers.
3. Vitae can be contacted by phone on 0508 664 981 or through their website at <http://www.vitae.co.nz>. The Vitae website can also be accessed through a link on the [Employee Assistance Programme](#) pages on the intranet.