



Briefing Note: NCEA Review PAG and MAG Advice

To:	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
Date:	22 February 2019	Priority:	High
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Purpose of Report

The purpose of this paper is to provide you with the formal advice on NCEA of your Ministerial and Professional Advisory Groups.

Agree that this Briefing will not be proactively released at this time because it contains advice to you which may be the subject of future Ministerial and Cabinet decisions.

Agree / Disagree

Summary

- Following the engagement phase of the NCEA review and the release of the NZCER engagement report the Ministry, Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) and Professional Advisory Group (PAG) explored options for changes to NCEA and tested them at a CoLab event in December 2018.
- Based on engagement and CoLab feedback and the evidence available, the Ministry, PAG and MAG have prepared advice for you on NCEA.
- The NCEA review advice reports from the MAG and the PAG are annexed along with a letter to you from Jeremy Baker, chair of the MAG.

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22/04 2019

PP Richard D'ATH



Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister of Education

26/2/19

Background to the MAG and PAG advice

1. With Cabinet's authorisation you established the NCEA Review Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) in January 2018 to think innovatively about ways to strengthen NCEA. Their core responsibilities were to provide advice to you and the Ministry, to act as a critical friend of the Ministry through the NCEA Review, and to create a discussion document for the Ministry's public engagement.
2. The MAG developed a discussion document containing six Big Opportunities which was released to the public at the start of the NCEA Review engagement period in May, 2018 as bold ideas to stimulate discussion.
3. During engagement, after concerns about the lack of involvement of teachers and principals in the NCEA Review process, you sought Cabinet agreement to create the Professional Advisory Group (PAG), extend the MAG's term to match the PAG's, and extend the engagement period to end in October. Following the creation of the PAG, the role of both advisory groups was to provide advice to you, and to advise and support the Ministry. The PAG also had a specific mandate in their Terms of Reference to provide implementation advice on the NCEA Review.
4. The MAG and PAG met separately several times between September and November, 2018 to work through their views on NCEA and ideas for change. The Ministry provided research and data, including evidence briefs, on a range of topics, along with the NZCER Engagement Report. We also provided data and undertook research on request.
5. The MAG and PAG met together in November to share ideas and understand each other's perspectives with the chairs also meeting on several occasions.
6. The Ministry developed possible ideas for change based on the public engagement feedback alongside the MAG and PAG. These ideas from the Ministry, MAG and PAG were tested at a December CoLab event with over 200 stakeholders.

Drafting process for the MAG and PAG advice

7. Following the December CoLab event, the Ministry analysed the information and feedback provided and presented it to the MAG and PAG. The MAG and the PAG each met to form their provisional advice and recommendations. With Ministry secretariat support, they have since been iteratively drafting their advice. While the Ministry continued to support the groups and provide evidence on request, they have not had access to the developing Ministry advice or to each other's advice in full.
8. On 8 February 2019, the MAG and PAG met with the Ministry to further their individual drafting and to share an overview summary of their advice with each other.
9. The sets of advice annexed to this report has been approved by the chairs to go to you. They are still draft, pending any additional content or topics you request advice on. The final versions will be formatted appropriately for public release.

Context of the MAG and PAG Advice

10. While the MAG and PAG have created their advice independently, they wrote in the knowledge that each will form part of a wider set of advice, composed of that from the Ministry, MAG, and PAG. Recognising that you will be taking high-level proposals to

Cabinet before a period of consultation, neither report is comprehensive, instead providing the perspectives of the groups and their views on possible changes to NCEA.

11. While undergoing a similar process to develop their advice, the MAG and PAG have a different mandate and perspective. The MAG is composed of people from a range of backgrounds tasked with being innovative about possible changes to NCEA. Right from the creation of the Big Opportunities in the discussion document, they have challenged a traditional view of secondary education and assessment.
12. The PAG were nominated by sector representative bodies and have the task of providing advice from the perspectives of the sector – particularly around implementation. Being a representative body from across a range of New Zealand schools, they are aware of the various views and practices across our secondary education system which make identifying problems and solutions challenging.
13. The PAG have deliberately kept their advice broad, recognising that they are not experts in crafting detailed proposals for change, particularly around assessment methods and benchmarking. Instead they provide a sector perspective on the proposals they have identified as being worth implementing or further exploring, and a commentary on the wider changes which they think are important to continue improving our education system.

Next Steps

14. We will shortly provide the Ministry advice on the NCEA Review to you, along with documents to support your strategy session with the Ministry and the MAG and PAG chairs on 6 March.

Proactive Release

15. We recommend that this Briefing is not released at this time because it contains advice to you which may be the subject of future Ministerial and Cabinet decisions. We advise releasing this Briefing after your high-level proposals for change to NCEA have been considered by Cabinet.

Annexes

- Annex 1: PAG Advice on the NCEA Review
- Annex 2: Summary of the MAG advice
- Annex 3: MAG Advice on the NCEA Review
- Annex 4: Letter to the Minister from Jeremy Baker, MAG Chair

Executive Summary

NCEA is a robust qualification and the PAG supports its core design and flexibility. Improvements should be made – particularly relating to student and teacher workload, fragmentation of the curriculum, the credibility of NCEA, and the equity of the qualifications, assessment, and resourcing.

Principles

Wellbeing - Workload reduction is crucial and it is imperative that there are changes to NCEA targeting this ongoing concern. Any set of wider changes made to NCEA should also be cognisant of the workload implications. The balance between learning and assessment also needs to shift to enable responsive curriculum driving assessment to decrease the burden on providers and learners.

Equity and Inclusion - There are many inequities visible through NCEA, particularly regarding access, resourcing and achievement. Some teaching and assessment practices are not inclusive of all identities, cultures and abilities. The PAG recommends a shift in classroom, school, and system practice towards inclusivity of learners' abilities, cultures and identities. We also strongly believe ākonga Māori have a right to learn and achieve as Māori whichever school they attend.

Coherence - The PAG has highlighted that learning and assessment practice is sometimes fragmented, resulting in learners unable to make connections across their learning.

Pathways - The system needs to shift towards learners being empowered to enable good pathway decisions that are supported by schools, whanau and the community. It is imperative that all courses provide meaningful pathways that are respected, valued and made available to all learners.

Credibility – There is a lack of clarity and understanding about how NCEA works, a lack of confidence that NCEA literacy and numeracy is robust and valid, and the perception from some that NCEA lacks rigour. There are also worrying trends in selective engagement by some students regarding participation in external assessment, use of standards to gain 'easy' credits, and/or students disengaging with learning and assessment once they gain their desired credits. These impact on NCEA's credibility as students may be attaining qualifications without participating in a programme of coherent, meaningful learning.

Recommendations

Structure of the NCEAs

- Reduce the credit requirement to 60 for all NCEA qualifications and remove the carry-over.
- Explore the addition of a breadth requirement such as only 15 credits from each subject being used to gain the credits required for an NCEA certificate – aiming to encourage participation in broader study, not to prevent specialisation where it is appropriate.

- Remove all fees from NCEA.
- Keep NCEA level 1.
- Change literacy and numeracy – remove its assessment from the current standards and get the Ministry or an expert group to benchmark them and explore a better method of assessment.
- Simplify the Record of Achievement and explore the addition of a one page summative document.

Assessment standards and practice

- Review the achievement standards and develop a new set of achievement standards to increase coherence to *The New Zealand Curriculum* and *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa*, considering decreasing the number of standards and making them broader and more consistently sized.
- Explore methods to expand the range of external assessment options and the external marking of internal assessment.
- Review the unit standards used in schools to better align them to the achievement standards and therefore the curriculum – including credit values and size.
- Review the resubmission and further assessment opportunity policies and practices.
- Review the unit standards which reflect Māori Performing Arts and Toi Whakairo and replace them with achievement standards where appropriate. Develop assessment resources which enable assessment opportunities through which Māori are able to achieve as Māori.

Resourcing advice

- Māori-medium kura require significantly improved resourcing to ensure equity in delivering NCEA, including curriculum support and subject materials. This must be done with some urgency.
- Special Assessment Conditions should be further streamlined or made more accessible. It is also important to provide equitable and better learning support, including key personnel.
- Teachers need ongoing and freely-available access to quality PLD in te reo Māori and English.

Implementation advice

- Changes to NCEA will result in an increase in medium-term workload, but there need to be long term reductions which are clearly foreshadowed.
- Any improvements made to NCEA need to apply to all schools and kura.
- The sector will need to be supported with specific PLD for the review changes and there needs to be a clear communication strategy which reaches everybody, to ensure the existing qualification is not undermined.

Introduction

The following report is the advice of the NCEA Review Professional Advisory Group (PAG) regarding the review of NCEA.

With Cabinet's authorisation, you established the Professional Advisory Group to work alongside the Ministerial Advisory Group and to provide advice to the Minister and the Ministry of Education on the NCEA review. We are composed of current and former principals and teachers with extensive experience working with NCEA in a range of schools and kura. Further information on the membership can be found at <https://conversation.education.govt.nz/conversations/ncea-have-your-say/advisory-groups/pag/>.

We have been working to ensure that the expertise and voice of the teaching profession are actively engaged in the development of NCEA options for change and implementation by providing advice to the Ministry throughout the engagement process.

This report represents our views on NCEA and specific changes which we believe will improve the qualifications. We will continue to work with the Ministry of Education to contribute to the design and implementation of the changes which emerge from this review.

Path to advice

We were established by Cabinet in August 2018 and had our first meeting in September, during the engagement phase of the review.

We gained a shared understanding of our concerns with NCEA and reviewed evidence on NCEA and across a variety of related topics. We also helped the Ministry of Education through the latter months of engagement by supporting engagement opportunities and the development of material.

Right from the start, we have highlighted particular areas of concern with NCEA for the teaching profession such as over-assessment, workload, fragmentation of the curriculum, and literacy & numeracy. Our discussions considered that while there are significant issues concerning NCEA that need to be addressed, many of the major shifts fall outside the scope of the NCEA review but are nevertheless axiomatic in creating a system which is fair and equitable for all.

Alongside evidence from the Ministry of Education, we have received the NZCER Engagement Report which synthesised the findings from the public engagement of the NCEA and a range of public submissions on the review. We have thoroughly assessed and reviewed the evidence which has been provided to us and consulted with the various sector groups that PAG members represent.

From this, we have shared comprehensive feedback with the Ministerial Advisory Group and the Ministry of Education on the various options for change and the 'real-life' implications these may have within schools and the wider education system. We then tested our ideas with over 200 stakeholders at the December Co-design Laboratory event.

Background and current state

NCEA is an important qualification within the New Zealand education system. As such, it has enduring implications for the subsequent educational and labour market opportunities and outcomes of young people who engage with the qualification through a critical time of rapid personal growth and change.

NCEA offers a wide range of options which accommodate a broad diversity of learner needs, pathway options, and flexible learning areas across a range of secondary and tertiary providers. In practice however, not all learners receive coherent teaching and advice; which can reduce their range of choices and pathways.

However, the PAG is strongly of the view that NCEA is already a robust qualification and this review should focus on identifying and implementing justifiable improvements, rather than conducting radical change.

The flexibility inherent within NCEA does need to be balanced with managed workload, public credibility, coherence of programmes, and equity for all New Zealand students. Our recommendations within this report heavily focus on improving this balance.

High level system shifts

The NCEA Review is guided by five key principles: Wellbeing, Equity and Inclusion, Credibility, Coherence, and Pathways.¹ These principles serve as a framing device to ensure the qualification system effectively supports and provides value to its users. They are interconnected and generally provide a measure of what a successful NCEA would look like.

We have considered and developed system shifts around these principles which demonstrate where the key improvements should take place:

1. Wellbeing

We recognise workload caused by overassessment as a key challenge for the NCEA Review and believe this is an issue for students, schools, and teachers. This is exacerbated for students, as young people are not always supported to exercise agency and reflect their identity in their learning.

¹ *NCEA Review Terms of Reference*

We believe the balance between learning and assessment needs to shift to enable responsive curriculum driving assessment to decrease the burden on providers and learners.

Workload reduction is crucial and it is imperative that there are changes to NCEA that target this ongoing concern. Any set of wider changes made to NCEA should also be cognisant of the workload implications.

2. Equity and Inclusion

The PAG recognises there are many inequities visible through NCEA, particularly regarding access, resourcing and achievement. However many of these are caused by wider societal and systemic factors rather than NCEA directly.

While the flexibility of NCEA can enable equity, it can also lead to inequitable practice such as channelling (often Māori and Pacific students) into certain subjects and courses.²

The PAG also recognises that some teaching and assessment practices are not inclusive of all identities, cultures and abilities. In particular, too many ākonga Māori and Pacific learners and those with learning support needs do not get access to the learning they need to succeed in NCEA. To be equitable, our schooling system needs to be culturally responsive.

The PAG recommends a shift in classroom and system practice towards inclusivity of learners' abilities, cultures and identities. We also strongly believe ākonga Māori have a right to learn and achieve as Māori at any school or kura they attend. Māori-medium kura are often under-resourced to deliver a range of learning for their tamariki,³ while in English medium schools - where the majority of Māori receive their secondary education – culturally responsive teaching and assessment is not available for all.

There is evidence of some bias and racism in the education system – including in the experiences of NCEA – which exacerbate inequity.⁴ While learners' educational achievement is influenced by a range of factors, NCEA needs to do more to counteract the inequities in the education system which are highlighted by the achievement gaps between learners.

3. Coherence

The PAG has highlighted that learning and assessment practice is sometimes fragmented, resulting in learners unable to make connections across their learning.

² *NCEA Review: Findings from the public engagement on the future of NCEA*, pg 32.

³ *NCEA December CoLab: Report to MAG and PAG*, pg 4.

⁴ *NCEA Review: Findings from the public engagement on the future of NCEA*, pg 28.

We recommend a shift towards a focus on ensuring every young person has the range of capabilities, knowledge and skills that provide connections, transitions and progressions reflected in authentic assessment. There should be an expectation for all schools to provide and promote meaningful courses and programmes of learning for students; however this requires significant resourcing to accomplish in every school.

We recognise that the principles of coherence and pathways are particularly connected, with coherence contributing significantly to the availability of pathways.

4. Pathways

Currently, not every learner gets access through NCEA to the full range of quality pathways which are possible.

The system needs to shift towards learners being empowered to enable good pathway decisions that are supported by schools, whānau and the community. It is imperative that all courses provide meaningful pathways that are respected, valued and made available to all learners.

While many schools and teachers do it well, thoughtful course design that explicitly states the pathways and outcomes should be available in every school, to provide a senior secondary education system which creates credible options for all students.

5. Credibility

We are concerned that confidence in NCEA systems and qualifications is being impacted by a lack of clarity and understanding about how NCEA works, confidence that NCEA literacy and numeracy is robust and valid, and the perception from some that NCEA lacks rigour.⁵ The PAG recommends that there needs to be a shift toward greater understanding, confidence and therefore support of NCEA assessment and qualifications.

There are also worrying trends in selective engagement by some students regarding participation in external assessment, use of standards to gain 'easy' credits, and students disengaging from learning and assessment once they gain their desired credits. Furthermore, the PAG appreciates NCEA's flexibility in being able to be undertaken over multiple years, but is worried about the practice of students quickly gaining credits to 'get over the line' early in the following year. While this may be appropriate for some students, it places a burden on teachers and is a feature which other comparable secondary qualifications do not have. These all impact on NCEA's credibility as students may be attaining qualifications without participating in a programme of coherent, meaningful learning.

⁵ *NCEA Review: Findings from the public engagement on the future of NCEA*, pg 14.

Glossary of terms used

The New Zealand Curriculum and Te Marautanga o Aotearoa: *The New Zealand Curriculum and Te Marautanga o Aotearoa* set the direction for student learning and guide schools and kura as they design and implement a curriculum that meets the needs of their students. Schools are required to provide teaching and learning in all of the learning areas found in the appropriate curriculum document from years 1 to 10, but have greater choice and specialisation for senior secondary education.

The New Zealand Curriculum is taught in all English medium schools where teaching is in English including state and state-integrated schools. It is guided by a set of principles that are used by schools in their decision making and curriculum planning. The principles are: high expectations, Treaty of Waitangi, cultural diversity, inclusion, learning to learn, community engagement, coherence and future focus.

Te Marautanga o Aotearoa is used to design teaching and learning programmes in Māori medium schools where at least half of the curriculum is taught in Māori. It aims to develop successful learners, who will grow as competent and confident learners, effective communicators in the Māori world, healthy of mind, body and soul and secure in their identity, and sense of belonging.

Subject: When we refer to a 'subject' we are referring to a body of knowledge and skills around which courses in schools are often developed; such as English, History, or Pāngarau. These include teaching and learning which can be assessed through both achievement and unit standards. Certain subjects are approved to contribute towards the award of University Entrance.

Sub-field: Fields, subfields and domains are categories used by NZQA to group assessment standards listed on the Directory of Standards, with multiple standards within each domain, domains within each sub-field, and subfields within each field.

Sub-fields are broad categories, such as Social Science Studies or Languages, which often contain several subjects used by schools. On a student's Record of Achievement, results are listed by sub-field.

English and Māori medium: In this document we use the term 'schools and kura' to refer to all schools that offer NCEA across New Zealand; both English and Māori medium. This includes secondary schools and wharekura as well as kōhanga reo, comprehensive and area schools.

English medium refers to all education using English as the majority language of instruction, including state, integrated and private schools, Te Kura (the Correspondence School). Māori boarding schools and Māori immersion with less than 50% of teaching in te reo Māori are also included. Māori medium refers to education primarily in te reo Māori including kura reorua (Māori immersion), Ngā Kura ā Iwi, and Ngā Kura Kaupapa.

Analysis

System expectations – what we want to achieve

Our expectation is that NCEA will contribute to an education system that focuses on learning rather than assessment. We want to greatly reduce student and teacher workload while also improving the credibility of NCEA.

We also believe that for NCEA to work well for all students, it needs to be an assessment system which provides equitable opportunities for learning to be assessed, and has assessment practices which reflect learners by enabling authentic contexts for assessment that work for learners and recognise and accommodate students with different learning support needs.⁶

Our following recommendations strive to improve these aspects which we see as fundamental to improve the current system for all.

Recommendations

Structure of NCEA

1. Change the credit requirements for NCEA

Currently, to attain an NCEA, at least 80 credits are required, along with the literacy and numeracy requirements. For NCEA Level 1, these can come from any level, while at Level 2 and 3; 20 of these credits can come from one level lower (known as the carry-over) with the remaining 60 from the level of the qualification or higher. Effectively this results in different requirements for each NCEA; 80 credits for NCEA Level 1 and 60 credits for the majority of learners gaining NCEA Level 2 or 3. These credits can come from any standards which are listed on the Directory of Standards.

We have also heard that many learners are gaining significant numbers of credits (often well over 24) in particular courses – drawn from a single area of study. This is enabled by the current structure of the assessment standards, with some subject domains containing over ten achievement standards and additional unit standards per level of NCEA. Across all their courses, this means that learners often gain the necessary 80 credits while engaging with very limited programmes of learning. Some learners' NCEAs are therefore not reflective of a breadth of learning.

Recommendation 1: Reduce the credit requirement to 60 for all NCEA qualifications and remove the carry-over.

The carry-over contributes to confusion around the qualifications, and can impact students who arrive at levels 2 or 3. Removing it will help everyone understand the requirements of the qualifications and their progression towards attaining it.

As 60 credits is the effective bar currently for Levels 2 and 3, we suggest that should be made the new requirement. This will not have a significant impact on workload for

⁶ *NCEA Review Evidence Brief: Equity and Assessment.*

students or teachers but would be a reduction for Level 1. Given NCEA Level 1 is the first level of NCEA and is generally lower-stakes for learners, we do not think the current higher effective credit requirements for this level are justified.

Recommendation 2: Explore the addition of a breadth requirement such as a maximum of 15 credits from each subject to be used to gain the credits required for an NCEA certificate.

We are concerned that many students have very focused programmes of study right from NCEA Level 1, often to gain large numbers of credits in specific areas. Other students ignore some of their courses as they gain sufficient credits in a few to gain an NCEA, or do not sit externally assessed standards, even if they are enrolled.

We believe one of the strengths of NCEA is that it enables learners to have a broad and coherent programme of study. Changing the number of credits from each subject which can contribute to an NCEA would reduce the incentives to cram assessment into courses, creating space for more teaching and learning while reducing workload. This should also reduce the overall amount of assessment and support assessment focused on what is necessary or important, rather than everything possible. Learners will need to achieve in at least 4 subjects to gain an NCEA so this will ensure an NCEA represents some breadth of learning and encourage learners to stay engaged in more of their learning. This will increase the credibility of NCEA, and support students to develop a range of important skills and capabilities. All standards achieved would still appear on the student's Record of Achievement.

Our starting point for exploring this policy is a maximum of 15 credits as it would require achievement across at least 4 different subjects to gain an NCEA. In exploring this policy it needs to be specific enough to still enable large flexibility in programme design but sufficiently broad to ensure there is some range in each student's learning.

While we see benefits of a broader education for students across all three levels, consideration would have to be made as to the value of specialisation – especially at NCEA Levels 2 and 3. We are also concerned about the possible impact on students with particular learning needs; those who may not be able to achieve across a range of subjects, and those in alternative education or tertiary provision of NCEA. Our aim is to encourage students to participate in broader study, and to engage with their full programme of study, not to prevent specialisation from those for whom it is appropriate.

Due to resourcing and teacher availability constraints, there are schools and kura – particularly rural schools and those in Māori medium – which are only able to offer a limited range of courses contributing to NCEA. Without an increase in resourcing, such a change could severely impact their students' ability to gain an NCEA.

2. Fees

Currently students pay fees to have their results recorded on their Record of Achievement and to receive certificates. This is costly to administer (in both time and money) for NZQA, schools and teachers, and also imposes a burden on families. Schools and kura spend significant time ensuring that fees are paid and some pay the

fees for learners. Many students do not end up paying fees and may not receive their NCEA as a result. There is financial assistance available, but it still requires payment and is not available to all for whom fees are a burden. Further families may struggle to access the financial assistance due to factors such as language familiarity.

Recommendation: Remove all fees from NCEA.

Removing the cost of NCEA will remove a significant cost from families. It will also free up time and remove worry for schools, teachers and students. Making NCEA fee-less would also be consistent with our education system providing a free, quality education available for all, which we firmly support.

Along with removing fees from NCEA, we suggest it would also be consistent to remove fees from New Zealand Scholarship. As with NCEA, fees impose an inequitable burden on students and their families and may be a barrier to entry for some.

3. NCEA Level 1

New Zealand is unusual in having a national secondary qualification system which includes three years of high-stakes assessment. Opinion is divided on NCEA level 1 with some advocating strongly for it as the final schooling qualification for a significant minority of students and an encouraging indicator of success for others. However, some want NCEA level 1 removed as it imposes workload on students and teachers and may have limited value for the many learners who go on to achieve NCEA Levels 2 and 3.⁷ Several schools have recently stopped offering NCEA Level 1 to focus on levels 2 and 3, with others foreshadowing that they may stop offering it in the future.

Recommendation: Keep NCEA level 1.

The PAG understands that opinion is divided over retention of NCEA Level 1, but overall are convinced that it has sufficient value for learners for it to be retained, especially those vulnerable to leaving school without any qualifications. Our proposed changes to the qualifications should improve the manageability and reduce the workload of the NCEA Level 1, but we are open to reviewing its value in the future. We suggest the Ministry should monitor the continuing usage of NCEA Level 1 and the outcomes of students at schools who do not offer it, choosing instead to focus on attainment at Levels 2 and 3.

We believe NCEA Level 1 does currently have a place in our education system and attaining it holds two main purposes; it provides options for points of entry into further study or employment for those who leave school with it, and it is a first encounter with high-stakes secondary assessment – containing a range of options for young people to explore.

⁷ PPTA, *Submission to the Ministry of Education on NCEA Review – Big Opportunities*, pg 8.

4. Literacy and numeracy

Currently to achieve an NCEA, a student must meet the literacy and numeracy requirements, which are the same for all three levels. 10 credits are required in each of literacy and numeracy which may be gained by achieving in a wide range of selected assessment standards (including the three English for Academic Purposes unit standards) or in all three specific literacy or numeracy unit standards. Achieving a standard which meets the literacy or numeracy requirements provides the number of credits of the standard towards that requirement. Over 700 standards can be used to gain the needed literacy credits and over 90 standards for numeracy.

As there are many different standards across learning areas that may be used, we do not have a clear benchmark for the actual level which is required to gain the literacy and numeracy credits. Evidence suggests that many learners are gaining an NCEA while being functionally illiterate or innumerate.⁸ This poses serious credibility risks to NCEA but also may impinge on the future of young people who miss a necessary focus on their literacy and numeracy as they have been told they meet the required level.

Recommendation: The credentialing of literacy and numeracy should be removed from the standards in the different learning areas and assessed independently. It should also be benchmarked to ensure that the level assessed is appropriate, based on national and international measures.

We believe it is important that NCEA demonstrates the literacy and numeracy of learners accurately – which the current system fails to do – for the benefit of students and the credibility of the qualification. Clear literacy and numeracy benchmarks need to be created by the Ministry of Education or an expert working group, and implemented meaningfully and consistently into the system.

Along with the benchmarks, the best method of assessment would also need to be determined. While the PAG is satisfied that the current measures of literacy and numeracy incorporated into other standards is not effective, we recognise that there are a range of alternate options. We have discussed keeping it as a part of NCEA or removing it from the qualification altogether as well as various methods of determining the level of each student. The expert group should determine the best method of assessment, but should be cognisant of workload, as the PAG does not support a change which imposes significant work on teachers, such as a portfolio of evidence. We also have concerns around a single point in time assessment which could result in learners being scaffolded into passing and then stop focusing on literacy and numeracy. Likewise, while there are benefits of using technology such as a digital test, the unequal access of learners would render this inequitable as a sole approach.

⁸ Gill T, Johnston M, & Ward J, *Alignment of Literacy and Numeracy Measures: Research for the Tertiary Education Commission*.

The PAG also recognises oral literacy as an important aspect of literacy.⁹ Any test or measure of literacy could include oral components, although we recommend it is tested and credentialed distinct from written aspects of literacy. This is especially valid in a Māori context where oral communication and tradition hold added significance.

5. Record of Achievement

A New Zealand Record of Achievement (RoA) is an official transcript of all the New Zealand qualifications and standards that a person has achieved, including NCEA. This is commonly used by NCEA graduates for accessing employment and further study and training. For NCEA, the RoA lists all the standards completed by sub-field and the endorsements attained. Feedback from engagement demonstrated that many people find the current RoA difficult to interpret and think it doesn't accurately describe what a learner has learned and can do.

Recommendation: Simplify the RoA and explore the addition of a one-page summative document as part of the RoA.

The Record of Achievement is important to many NCEA graduates, but lacks clarity for many users. Often employers, especially those who have not experienced NCEA, do not have a detailed understanding and struggle to comprehend what the lists of standards sorted by sub-field say about the graduate. Including a summative document would provide a clearer picture of the candidate and their capabilities.

We expect our other proposed changes to the qualification will also help to simplify the RoA. If fewer standards are available and used, then the RoA will be less cluttered for many students. Having a sub-field cap would also mean that the choice of sub-fields and assessment standards within those would hold more meaning. Between the simpler Record of Achievement and an added summative document, we believe a clear picture of the general and subject specific knowledge, skills, and capabilities of each student should be accessible – even to those who do not have an in-depth understanding of NCEA.

Assessment Standards and Practices

6. Review achievement standards

One of our major concerns with NCEA currently is the over-assessment rife throughout the system. One of the causes of this is the sheer number of achievement standards with many small standards worth as little as 2 credits. This means there can be many assessment opportunities to gain the desired number of credits in a course, contributing to the workload pressures felt by both students and teachers.

⁹ Dewes T.K, *The Case for the Oral Arts*.

In some subjects, more and more standards have been added over time, leading to increased variation in the courses being offered in different schools. Many standards (particularly those externally assessed) are increasingly not being undertaken so there may be important knowledge, skills and capabilities which students are not learning.

We value local contexts and the ability to teach what is important for students however the wide variation between schools may be undermining the credibility of NCEA and means it is hard for employers and tertiary providers to know what students have learned when two students have taken the same subject but used totally different standards.

Recommendation: Review the achievement standards and develop a new set of achievement standards to increase coherence to *The New Zealand Curriculum* and *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa*. Consider decreasing the number of standards and making them broader and more consistently sized.

The current workload experienced by teachers is unsustainable, and is significantly driven by assessment. Decreasing the amount and frequency of assessment would be a key way to lower workload. Reducing the number of achievement standards in each domain is potentially a way to achieve this, creating more time for teaching and learning. We want to encourage teaching and learning, focus on important content, and push back against the use of piecemeal standards being driven primarily by credit accumulation.

If a reduction could be made, the range of achievement standards may look different for each domain and would need to be changed in consultation with the sector. A possible model would be four achievement standards per domain worth 4-6 credits each, with one or two externally assessed.

We have identified some strong benefits for students from having fewer standards, including;

- Increased course and programme coherence,
- Reduced workload,
- Consistency across schools – which is helpful for transient students trying to maintain learning programmes.

We are aware that some content which is currently assessed would not be directly covered by the new sets of standards, so it is critical that the Ministry works carefully with teachers to determine what knowledge, skills and capabilities are most important for assessment.

We also recognise the wide range of teaching and assessment practice which are enabled and supported by the current standards. A variety of achievement standards from different domains are used to build programmes of integrated and cross-curricular learning, as well as project-based learning. Many schools also have developed similar programmes in years 9 and 10, and expressed interest in using them for NCEA. Any changes to the achievement standards would need to include standards which can be

used for such teaching and assessment. This is an opportunity to develop resources which support teachers to use a range of assessment and teaching practices. Furthermore, the standards need to enable teaching, learning and assessment which reflect the rich local curriculum along with *The New Zealand Curriculum* and *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa*.

While there are clear benefits of having fewer standards, there could be a negative impact on student engagement and achievement, as low credit value standards are often used as motivators for students, or to re-engage or integrate transient learners. It is important that the potential impact on transient and other at-risk students is investigated and ways to mitigate it are explored.

There is also a risk that schools will decide these larger standards are unachievable for their students, and place them instead on a unit standards pathway. This already happens (and is one of the main concerns about equity in the system) and an exacerbation has potential to significantly harm students. To prevent this, we believe the unit standards used in schools should also be reviewed in a similar process, which is covered in Recommendation Nine.

Any significant change to assessment standards will impose a large medium-term burden on teachers, as they will have to develop new courses, resources and assessment tasks. While fewer assessment opportunities per year would be a workload reduction, this will take time to be felt and the more immediate pressures will require mitigating. The method of implementation and the messaging, support and resources provided will be crucial in ensuring teachers are able to adjust to changes to ensure they produce positive outcomes for students and teachers long-term.

7. External assessment and external marking of internal assessment

Currently, internal assessment involves teachers setting the task as well as marking and moderating, a large burden they face consistently. There is a lower workload for external assessment, but for many reasons, teachers and students often prefer internal assessment as it allows for the creation of contextual and specific tasks and also a wider variety of appropriate assessment opportunities. Most external assessment takes the form of an examination, with some use of portfolios or performances. Some learners, including many with learning support needs, do not achieve their best in a traditional examination format, while portfolios require hours of work from teachers and students and are often very high-stakes and stressful. This has led to a large increase in internal assessment at the expense of external assessment, significantly increasing teacher workload over time.

External assessment carries the public perception of credibility as the task setting and marking, generally performed by NZQA, is seen to lead to greater national consistency. When the achievement standards were designed, some important content was also deliberately placed in standards which are assessed via external examinations. The reduction in external assessment undertaken means many learners may not be engaging with important content in their chosen courses.

Recommendation: The Ministry should explore further options for external assessment and work with teachers and schools to explore the possibility of external marking of internal assessment where possible.

The current methods of external assessment result in students often having to sit a series of high-stakes examinations over a short period of time. We believe that technology will provide many benefits, including allowing assessment in a variety of forms and at different times and we support NZQA's move towards online examinations. There are still concerns however, as access to and use of technology is still far from consistent amongst students in New Zealand. There are also greater changes needed, as simply moving examinations online will not create fair and authentic assessment opportunities for all students in New Zealand, particularly those with a range of learning support needs.

As well as developing better forms of assessment using technology, we also believe the Ministry should work with NZQA to explore the tasks and formats of external assessment to ensure the best opportunities are provided to demonstrate the students' knowledge, skills and capabilities without creating an unnecessary burden. We believe that a wider range of assessment could be used without undermining the credibility of NCEA, and indeed, may well increase credibility.

Alongside improving external assessment, we support the external marking of internal assessment as and where appropriate. Having external marking would significantly reduce workload for teachers and increase the credibility of internal assessment. While we currently have a high agreement rate for internal moderation, using external marking would maintain trust in the results with less work for teachers.

We are aware that for many assessment contexts the teacher may be the best person to mark the work of their students but there are many assessments where it is appropriate to have external markers.

The PAG does have some concerns about the supply of markers, who generally would be current or former teachers. A simple shift in workload to other practicing teachers is not desirable, but we think good external marking processes would decrease the total workload. Furthermore, markers volunteer and are specifically paid for their work, so we believe it would be better overall for the teaching workforce.

Given the trend of decreasing use of external assessment by students, the PAG wants to encourage its use. Making external assessment more accessible through exploring further options will contribute, but we believe that our other proposed changes will also cause an increase in external uptake, especially if the number of achievement standards are reduced. Reviewing the achievement standards could be an opportunity to ensure externally assessed standards are an important and integral part of subject areas. An NCEA which represents learning across a range of sub-fields, including through external assessment, will be valuable to students and credible to those who rely on the qualification.

8. Review the unit standards used in schools

One of NCEA's key strengths is its flexibility and inclusiveness, recognising learning from a wide range of areas and sources. Achievement standards are drawn from the learning areas in *The New Zealand Curriculum* and *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa* and unit standards cover a wide variety of different skills and content, with many derived from industry. There is a big parity of esteem gap between these standards in schools, with achievement standards contributing to University Entrance, and often prioritised by students, families and whānau, and schools. While unit standards equally assess valuable knowledge and skills, we are concerned about some of the ways they are viewed and used within schools.

Recommendation: Review the unit standards used in schools to better align them to the achievement standards and therefore the curriculum – including credit values and size.

Currently achievement standards are used predominantly in schools (although increasingly tertiary providers are receiving consent to assess them), while unit standards are used widely by many providers of NCEA. In schools, unit standards often have lower status and can be used to gain credits for learners who may not otherwise gain a qualification.

The amount of time it takes to achieve an assessment standard is notionally set to ten hours of teaching, learning and assessment per credit, but this does not appear to be true for all unit standards used in schools. There are many unit standards which may be used to quickly gain credits, without necessarily forming part of a coherent programme of learning. This undermines the credibility of the qualification, as well as detracting from meaningful learning for the students.

Our recommendation to review the achievement standards will include ensuring the credit values are appropriate and will aim to create more coherent packages of learning for students. We propose that the Ministry and NZQA work with the standard-setting bodies to perform a similar review of unit standards used in schools. This would involve looking at the credit values, and ensuring that they are representative of the learning that has taken place.

Some unit standards may be predominantly used by students to 'farm credits' towards a qualification. We would recommend these either be replaced or enriched. Other unit standards do represent important learning when used to credential skills, knowledge and capabilities as a part of a coherent learning programme. Where these standards are discrete with low credit values, we would suggest investigating whether they can be integrated into larger standards, representing a wider set of learning – to discourage their usage for credit farming and improve their usefulness for the students who undertake learning which leads to their achievement. Unit standards are used in some schools alongside achievement standards to assess learning drawn from their local curriculum along with *The New Zealand Curriculum* and *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa*. The review of unit standards should continue to enable this contextualised assessment as part of a coherent programme.

Reviewing unit standards and re-evaluating their credit values to improve their ability to be offered as coherent packages of learning in schools, would improve their perceived value. Students would predominantly use them when they are relevant to their education journey. Reducing their ability to be used as 'easy' credits will also significantly improve the credibility of both unit standards and NCEA. We value the ability for NCEA to recognise a wide variety of learning, but want to encourage learning which contributes to a meaningful pathway for students.

We are concerned that there is already a disparity of esteem between achievement and unit standards. Improving the credibility and coherence of the achievement standards without making changes to the unit standards will just increase this disparity. The PAG believes this could exacerbate some of the worrying practices around unit standards. However, reviewing them will allow a more consistent, credible NCEA which is still inclusive and flexible of a wide range of learning.

9. Resubmission and further assessment opportunities

When undertaking assessments, students are allowed to have a further submission opportunity or a re-submission opportunity in certain circumstances. This is meant to be at the discretion of the teacher but it does not appear that the policies are being consistently followed. This lack of consistency and clarity results in vastly different practice across schools. In some schools it is normal for students to get multiple further opportunities at their request. Teachers often feel as if they are doing their students an injustice if they do not give them opportunities to improve their grades. This has led to resubmissions and further submissions becoming a significant part of some teachers' workload.

Recommendation: We recommend exploring options to change and clarify the resubmission and further submission opportunities policies and practice to ensure they are clear and consistently applied.

This recommendation is for the express purpose of reducing workload, as we believe use of these policies in some schools has far exceeded that which was intended. Having clear and consistent assessment policies will also increase the fairness of NCEA for students.

We recognise that re-submission and second submission opportunities do provide a valid avenue for students to correct genuine errors or demonstrate their learning, so care must be taken that the policies do not result in students being unfairly disadvantaged.

We believe that much of the problem might lie with communities of practice rather than with the rules themselves. Strong PLD focused on providing these opportunities should also be made available to change the culture and support teachers to use these policies only as appropriate.

10. Equitable NCEA assessment standards, practices and resources to enable ākongā Māori to succeed as Māori.

Mātauranga Māori is reflected in the achievement standards derived from *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa*, used in Māori medium education. There are also some achievement and unit standards in English medium which recognise Māori performing arts and Toi Whakairo, but these are not afforded equal recognition and support.

Furthermore, the PAG believes all teaching and assessment should be culturally responsive, including the assessment standards and opportunities. While this is possible with the current standards, it occurs too infrequently due to resourcing and teacher capability constraints. Resources are often not available which support teachers to create appropriate learning programmes and assessment tasks.

Recommendation: We recommend reviewing the unit standards which reflect Māori Performing Arts and and Toi Whakairo and replacing them with achievement standards where appropriate. We also recommend that when reviewing the achievement standards, their cultural responsiveness is considered and resources are developed which enable assessment opportunities through which Māori are able to achieve as Māori.

The current assessment standards which reflect mātauranga Māori are often not valued as highly as they should be. The unit standards used in English medium to credential Māori Performing Arts and Toi Whakairo do not count towards University Entrance and those students, even in immersion units, are not able to access *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa* derived achievement standards. The unit standards also do not allow students to reflect their greater levels of achievement as they do not recognise Achievement with Merit or Excellence. These unit standards should be reviewed and turned into achievement standards where possible, to allow equitable value to be placed on the learning they represent.

Whilst out of scope of this review, we believe mātauranga Māori should count towards the award of University Entrance in all schooling environments. It is an anachronism that students can engage in further education in some subjects at university, but are unable to use them to receive University Entrance.

Māori should be enabled to achieve as Māori in whichever school or setting they study in, but without resources and support, this will never be achieved. We propose that during the review of achievement standards, conscious effort should be made to ensure that the achievement standards as well as the resources (including sample assessment tasks and teaching and learning guides) support culturally responsive pedagogy and assessment. This is important not only for Māori students but also a wide range of learners for whom inclusive teaching and assessment is critical to enable engagement and achievement, particularly Pacific students and those with specific learning support needs.

Resourcing

Māori medium

The PAG recognise the incredible lack of resources which are available for many kura through New Zealand, particularly those fit for teaching in te reo Māori.¹⁰ This is further intensified by the lack of teachers able to teach specialised subjects in te reo. The last Pūtaiao text available in te reo Māori for kura was published in 1999, which is prior to the implementation of NCEA.

Many kaiako and teachers working within an ākonga Māori context are required to go beyond the call of duty to provide quality outcomes for their students and school community.¹¹ In conjunction with NCEA responsibilities the workload is phenomenal. There have been situations where tumuaki and kaiako have had to translate their own textbooks into te reo Māori to have up-to-date materials. This lack of resources is a severe inequity in the education system, and there needs to be significant development of curriculum support resources and subject material.

Learning support and Special Assessment Conditions

The PAG recognise that the Special Assessment Conditions (SAC) process has been streamlined, but it is still unwieldy for schools, teachers, and whanau. While technology will continue to make these conditions increasingly accessible (although the access to technology varies significantly, so some inequities may be increased if solely relying on technology) – both for internal and external forms of assessment – more work needs to be done to support students with learning support needs. SAC access could be expanded so it does not require an application process to be eligible for certain conditions. Furthermore, while increasing access to SAC will help students, it requires resourcing in schools to be effective. Schools and students need equitable and greater access to key personnel including teacher aides and we support increased funding for learning support in schools.

Professional Learning and Development

Professional learning and development is critical to enable teachers to perform and develop their expertise. Greater availability of PLD resources in te reo Māori and English are required. While Best Practice workshops are useful, they currently come at a cost and are often not available in some regions. Alongside these, teachers would benefit from more subject specific PLD which is not assessment focused in order to ensure that assessment doesn't drive the curriculum.

There is currently too great a reliance on subject associations and other teachers to provide PLD and resources and we support greater centralisation and funding of PLD.

Advice on change and implementation

The PAG believes there are changes which can be made to improve NCEA, but it is important that they apply to all schools and kura. Any such changes will cause medium-term increases in workload for teachers which must be clearly laid out with a mitigation plan. Any package of improvements also needs to result in long term workload

¹⁰ NCEA Review: Findings from the public engagement on the future of NCEA, pg 28.

¹¹ NCEA December CoLab: Report to MAG and PAG, pg 4.

reductions and change management needs to be resourced well and openly. This includes providing specific teacher PLD for any specific changes which will affect them.

If the review changes are not implemented well everyone – particularly students – will be disadvantaged. This could also be harmful for recruitment and retention of teachers.

Our recommendations are deliberately broad because identifying the design of changes to NCEA will require further work with experts and the sector to explore the mechanisms and implications. It is critical that consultation on proposals receives meaningful feedback from teachers and school leaders so the final changes are appropriate to be implemented in schools.

Proactively Released

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MAG summary of themes and recommendations

MAG's view of NCEA

- NCEA's a good qualification – it works well for many, but it could be excellent. Aiming for “What's good for all our kids”.
- How NCEA's implemented can get in the way of good teaching and learning and incentivises some perverse behaviours. We need to nudge practice.
- NCEA is a source of stress for many learners and teachers – wellbeing suffers.
- Its huge flexibility allows for diverse programmes and high learner choice BUT the choices are often made by others...learners may not have the agency to exploit the flexibility of NCEA.
- Not every learners has the same opportunities – e.g. Māori and Pacific learners may be advised or streamed away from academic courses.

System Shifts by principle

Wellbeing – reduce assessment workload to allow time for rich learning that recognises the culture and aspirations of every learner.

Equity and inclusion – NCEA standards, programmes, and assessment tasks all need to be strengthened to make the National Curriculum accessible to all learners. School practices around NCEA pathways advice and course entry are not always equitable and these practices are hardest to influence when based on unconscious bias. The barriers to NCEA need to be identified and addressed.

Coherence – rather than disjointed chunks of learning focused on standards, every learners deserves a coherent programme of learning that identifies the really important learning in the subjects, projects, or packages of learning they undertake. They see their NCEA assessments as stepping stones on a pathway toward a clear and worthwhile goal.

Pathways – NCEA's flexibility ought to allow for diverse pathways and learners deserve agency in steering their own way through but this requires quality advice and significant resourcing. The RoA should tell a young person's full learning story to date.

Credibility – simplifying the requirements and surfacing the important learning and capabilities of an NCEA graduate will help lift its credibility. Getting Literacy and Numeracy right is a must. Again, some perverse behaviours need to be addressed that currently undermine NCEA's status.

MAG Recommendations

The MAG's vision for NCEA – Level 1 learners exercise agency to explore through a range of challenges. This prepares them for deep dives at Levels 2 and 3 into areas of interest.

Strengthening NCEA's structure

- Make available a range of models and exemplar courses, including PBL tools, to enable exploration at level 1 NCEA
- New standards are developed to credential exploratory/project work
- The review of achievement standards takes account of the exploratory purpose of level 1
- Remove all NCEA fees as soon as possible
- All NCEA qualifications require 60 credits, with no carry-over credits
- Number of credits per full-year course is capped at 20 credits
- Students can only enter for 120 credits per year max
- At least 15 credits (of the 60 required) for any NCEA must be from externally assessed standards (includes expanding the definition of what constitutes external assessment)
- For the core 60 credits required for level 1 NCEA, no more than 15 credits can come from any one sub-domain.

Supporting quality assessment

- Review all assessment standards to ensure they are fit for purpose, using both a curriculum and an equity and inclusion lens.

- Reduce the number of achievement standards per subject matrix (fewer, larger achievement standards)
- Broaden the range of assessment tools and modes available
- New standards to assess project based learning and quality exemplars of how existing standards can be used to effectively assess and credential learning via projects.
- A technical expert group reviews moderation requirements and school practices to ensure moderation processes are efficient while remaining fit for purpose.

Literacy and Numeracy

- Establish a technical working group to determine the benchmarks for literacy and numeracy and the best tools to assess and report them (using the learning progressions frameworks)
- Year 9 and 10 learners are provided with opportunities to develop foundational literacy and numeracy capabilities as well as the skills and tools for learning through exploration
- Decouple the assessment of literacy and numeracy from NCEA
- Attainment against clear literacy and numeracy progressions is recorded in a learner's NCEA record of achievement

Building coherence

- Review all achievement and unit standards so they're linked to the competencies and capabilities from the National Curriculum
- Exemplify coherence – make available exemplar packages and courses that reflect either a “body of knowledge” OR “a body of practice”, in a variety of formats and contexts
- Require all schools to attest that programmes and courses are coherent (clearly defined and specified) and that they are fully accessible and contribute to a valuable and equitable pathway
- The achievement standards review provides strong shared definitions for achieved, merit and excellence so the step-ups are understood across all subjects.

Telling the learner's story

- Organise the record of achievement by courses with an outcome statement and graduate profile for each. Include all standards entered as well as those gained.
- Provide every learner with quality pathway mentoring to guide exploration at level 1 and ‘deeper dives’ into learning at levels 2 and 3, and ensuring equity of access to assessments and pathways.

Resourcing

- Develop an assessment guide to help schools and other providers to design courses and appropriate assessment programmes
- Provide on-going support and professional development to the workforce to build:
 - course and programme design capability
 - culturally responsive pedagogies and programme design skills
 - integrated assessment capability
 - pathways guidance and mentoring skills
- Provide quality exemplars of assessment options to scaffold teachers toward more innovative and responsive approaches
- Provide schools with clear examples of effective and efficient moderation, perhaps as part of an assessment guide.
- Māori-medium have highly specific needs and must be provided with targeted support.

Implementation advice

- To pre-empt adverse reactions we advise contacting key sector groups (e.g. PPTA, ITF and SPANZ) with advance communications prior to releasing the discussion document with proposed changes.
- Scenarios and case studies may be useful for conveying our vision for NCEA.
- MAG members are available to support regional discussions around the final proposals.
- Whatever we do mustn't increase teacher workload in the long term.
- It's important to make some visible changes as soon as possible (e.g. fees removed) to signal to the sector that significant shifts are imminent.

NCEA Ministerial Advisory Group advice to the Minister

Executive summary:

The Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) considers NCEA a good qualification – it works well for many, but it could be excellent. We've heard that some of the structural aspects of NCEA and the way NCEA is implemented can get in the way of good teaching and learning and incentivises some unintended behaviours. A significant proportion of these unforeseen negative outcomes particularly affect our most vulnerable learners, resulting in inequitable NCEA access and outcomes. NCEA has been a source of stress for many learners and teachers so their wellbeing suffers. NCEA's huge flexibility allows for diverse programmes and high learner autonomy but learners don't always have the agency to utilise that flexibility. The current review is an opportunity to strengthen NCEA's design and implementation and to nudge practice in secondary schools toward realising the full potential of NCEA for all young New Zealanders.

The MAG began its work by envisaging a future state for NCEA and we identified several key system shifts required to realise this vision.

To enhance **equity and inclusion** NCEA standards, programmes, and assessment processes all need to be strengthened to make the National Curriculum more accessible and culturally responsive for all learners. School practices around NCEA **pathways** advice and course entry, though hard to influence when based on unconscious bias, need to be improved so every learner receives quality, personalised advice. Simplifying the requirements for each level and surfacing the important learning and capabilities of an NCEA graduate will help lift its **credibility**. Getting literacy and numeracy right is a must. Reducing overall assessment workload will allow more time for rich learning that recognises the culture and aspirations of every learner, enhancing **wellbeing**. Rather than disjointed chunks of learning focused on standards, every learner deserves a **coherent** programme of learning that leads to a personally meaningful pathway and the record of achievement (RoA) should clearly tell a young person's full learning story to date.

MAG Recommendations

Strengthening NCEA's structure

The MAG's vision for NCEA is that Level 1 learners exercise agency to explore through a range of challenges, preparing them for 'deep dives' at Levels 2 and 3 into areas of interest related to their individual pathway. We recommend keeping level 1 but shifting its focus to learners maintaining breadth and exploring widely. The graduate profiles and outcome statements should be redeveloped to clearly indicate the different purpose of Level 1 compared with levels 2 and 3. Year 9 and 10 learners should be provided with opportunities to develop foundational literacy and numeracy capabilities as well as the skills and tools for learning through exploration.

To simplify NCEA, all qualifications should require only 60 credits, with no carry-over credits. To further address over-assessment, the number of credits per full-year course should be capped at 20 credits with students being entered for a maximum of 120 credits per year. The MAG recognises the importance of wide exploration at Level 1 across a breadth of the curriculum. One way to achieve this is to allow no more than 15 credits per sub-domain (subject) to count towards the core credits required for a level 1 certificate. To enhance the credibility of NCEA we also suggest requiring at least 15 credits (of the 60 required) for any

NCEA to be gained from externals. This recommendation would involve exploring and expanding the definition of what constitutes external assessment.

Supporting quality assessment

We recommend developing new standards to assess project based learning (PBL) and quality exemplars of how existing standards can be used to effectively assess and credential learning via PBL. A range of quality models and exemplar courses, including PBL tools, should be made available to encourage schools to use NCEA to credential exploratory/project work. We also advise broadening the range of assessment tools and modes available, including a wider use of external judgements and a thorough review of moderation requirements and school practices so they are fit for purpose and do not contribute to excessive teacher workload.

Building coherence

The MAG recommend several approaches to building coherence across the NCEA system. Firstly we should exemplify coherence by making available exemplar packages and courses that reflect either a “body of knowledge” OR “a body of practice”, in a variety of formats and contexts.

At the school level we recommend building in an expectation within school review systems that all programmes and courses are attested as coherent and contributing to a valuable and equitable pathway. At the standard level, coherence could be enhanced by reducing the number of achievement standards per subject matrix (fewer, larger achievement standards) so only what is really important in a subject is assessed.

Literacy and Numeracy

The MAG recognises that some NCEA graduates lack the literacy and numeracy they need to engage fully in work or further education. The MAG recommends decoupling literacy and numeracy from the award of an NCEA. Students should have opportunities to show that they have reached expected levels in literacy and numeracy in Years 9 and 10. Each learner’s actual stage of literacy and numeracy would need to be monitored throughout their secondary years until they reach the “expected NCEA benchmarks”. Determining the right benchmark is a job for a technical working group who should also decide on the best tools to assess and report them (but the MAG is aware of existing learning progressions frameworks that could be used). When they graduate with any NCEA a learner’s actual stage on the literacy and numeracy progressions is recorded in a learner’s NCEA RoA. For those who don’t reach the expected stages of literacy and numeracy by the end of year 10 continuous support is provided to enable them to reach it before they graduate.

Documenting the learner’s journey

The MAG favours organising the RoA by courses with an outcome statement and graduate profile for each to allow a richer story to be told. Including all standards entered as well as those gained tells the full story and dis-incentivises learners picking and choosing which standards they attempt. To ensure every learner follows a quality pathway, quality pathways mentoring should be provided to guide exploration at level 1 and ‘deeper dives’ at levels 2 and 3. To ensure equity of access to NCEA, the MAG recommends removing all NCEA fees as soon as possible.

Resourcing

To ensure changes are embedded firmly into practice, the MAG has identified several areas where significant resourcing will be vital. Some of this will be on-off implementation resourcing and some will be on-going. For example:

- On-going support and professional development for the teaching workforce to build:
 - course and programme design capability

- culturally responsive pedagogies and programme design skills
- integrated assessment capability
- pathways guidance and mentoring skills.
- Development of an assessment guide to help schools and other providers to design courses and appropriate assessment programmes
- Secure provision of quality exemplars of assessment options to scaffold teachers toward more innovative and responsive approaches.
- Māori-medium have highly specific needs and must be provided with targeted support.

Background:

The Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) was appointed in January 2018 to provide you and your colleagues in Government with advice on how to take NCEA from a good qualification to a great one. We were encouraged to think boldly and to draw on the expertise of the Ministry of Education and the wider education sector in our work. The MAG took a systems approach and produced a discussion document containing six big opportunities that informed the engagement stage.

We heard from New Zealanders across the spectrum of NCEA users in response to the provocative ideas we posed in our discussion document and interacted with a range of interest groups through a series of three CoLab workshops, hosted by the Ministry. Our emerging ideas were tested by a representative Reference Group and prototyped by participants at the third CoLab in December, 2018. The MAG met with the Professional Advisory Group (PAG) to seek an understanding from the sector perspective and to explore common themes and differences.

Throughout 2018 the Ministry provided detailed information to the MAG both pro-actively and in response to specific requests. A wide range of background papers and evidence briefs provided valuable input into our thinking and discussions.

This advice to you identifies:

- Several key system shifts we have identified based on the MAG discussions
- Our advice to you in the form of recommendations related to the structure and implementation of NCEA, unpacked to show our thinking and to identify interdependencies
- Our exploration of some wider enabling changes and influences which while they are technically outside of scope of this review, we consider relevant and do-able and which the MAG considers will be crucial to achieving our desired future state for NCEA
- Several narratives/stories woven throughout this document, based on what we've heard and on our vision of a future state, to illustrate what a really great NCEA looks like.

System Shifts –based around the five NCEA review principles

Throughout the NCEA review the MAG has been guided by five principles:

- Wellbeing
- Equity and inclusion
- Coherence
- Pathways
- Credibility.

Much of our discussion was focused on the ways NCEA acts directly or indirectly to contribute to or constrain these principles for the various users of the qualification. The principles acted as both a guiding structure and a screening tool to test ideas. Inevitably ideas and potential changes exposed the interdependencies and tensions between the principles.

During the engagement phase we heard from thousands of New Zealanders from across the spectrum of NCEA users. The overwhelming message was of a system with the flexibility to work for all learners, but one that is currently not realising its potential due to a multitude of confounding factors, only some of which fall within the remit of this review. Inevitably our discussions expanded beyond the scope of our Terms of Reference as we strived to unpick the complex interactions across the education and assessment systems in order to understand how prospective changes would play out for all NCEA's diverse users. We have identified a range of system shifts we consider desirable in order to strengthen NCEA and while some of these relate directly to the structure and design of NCEA itself, other shifts relate to broader transformational changes we hope can occur across the wider education system. We've identified a number of unintended and unhelpful practices, attitudes and behaviours that have evolved within schools and communities as NCEA has bedded in to the secondary education ecosystem over 15 years. Topics such as moderation practices and teacher workload, timetabling constraints and initial teacher education were amongst interacting issues that surfaced, especially in the CoLabs.

Each of the desired system shifts outlined below is prefaced by a brief problem definition. The recommendations in the next section are grouped thematically and supported by explanatory narratives.

Wellbeing – Problem and desired system shift

Currently the qualification drives excessive assessment workload for students, schools, tertiary educators, and teachers. Young people are not always supported to exercise agency in determining their pathway through NCEA and they have the right to feel their identity reflected in their whole learning and assessment experience. We need to shift the balance between “learning” and “assessment”¹² more towards learning so that assessment supports curriculum and improves learning. We also

¹² Within this report we have generally used the word “assessment” when talking about the summative uses of assessment. When we talk about excessive assessment, we mean that more time and resources are used in activities related to summative assessment than can be justified. We appreciate that formative assessment is a critical part of teaching and learning.

need to decrease the burden of assessment on both teachers/providers and learners so wellbeing is enhanced.

Equity and inclusion – Problem and desired system shift

While for some schools NCEA works well now, there are still some learners in every school for whom it does not work. We heard through the engagement phase from learners and groups who feel excluded from NCEA for a variety of reasons such as differences in their identities, cultures and abilities.

We need to change the way NCEA is structured and delivered to better support equity and inclusion. This includes the content of assessment standards themselves as well as the programmes of teaching and learning credentialed by NCEA. NCEA is not the source of and cannot redress all the inequities that contribute toward the current situation. While we confined our discussions to education system factors, we are aware that these fall within wider societal structures and influences beyond the scope of this review. A much wider system shift is needed to ensure full access to quality teaching and learning practices and multiple confounding influences exist, such as:

- lack of coherent teaching and learning programmes due to limited levels of teacher capacity, resourcing and curriculum design skills
- Treaty of Waitangi partnership rights and responsibilities are not fully recognised. For example, wharekura lack adequate resources to provide a full range of learning
- poor pathways advice, often based on unconscious bias
- practices in some schools that channel learners away from meaningful NCEA pathways

Shifting classroom and system practice towards inclusivity of all learners' abilities, cultures and identities will include providing access to both *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa* and *The New Zealand Curriculum* as learners want or need.

Coherence – Problem and desired system shift

Programmes of learning and assessment that lead to an NCEA are often fragmented so learners may miss out on important content and fail to make connections across their study. Some learners attain an NCEA without the knowledge, capabilities and skills needed to succeed in further education or the world of work.

We need to shift toward a shared understanding of coherence. The national curriculum uses coherence to describe an education that makes links within and across learning areas, provides for coherent transitions, and opens up pathways to further learning. We must clarify and exemplify what coherence looks like, including coherence within and across:

- subjects
- learning areas
- achievement standard matrices

and coherence across:

- programmes of learning and assessment
- years and NCEA levels on a learner's journey.

Coherence and pathways are inextricably connected. Every young person is entitled to a coherent programme that provides a pathway that “takes them somewhere”. Authentic assessment in which the task or activity is meaningful and there are clear expectations of an authentic, learner-relevant context and output, is part of this. Improving coherence can be expected to increase learner achievement and wellbeing and reduce truancy.

Pathways – Problem and desired system shift

Not every learner gets access to the appropriate range of quality pathways through NCEA which are possible. A school might lack the resources to offer a range of learning options or learners might be channelled into courses that do not align with their future goals and aspirations. With the right pathways support, many more learners could be progressing from schooling or foundation tertiary into further meaningful study, training, or work.

We need a shift towards learners being empowered to make good pathway choices supported by schools, whānau and the community, with relevant and personalised support for the pathways chosen – and with all pathways respected, valued and made available to all learners.

Credibility – Problem and desired system shift

There is currently confusion about what attaining each NCEA evidences about what learners know and can do. There is also a lack of confidence that NCEA assessment of literacy and numeracy is robust and valid. This suggests that not all learners achieving NCEA have the literacy and numeracy levels they need for further study, employment and life.

Credibility of the qualification is further eroded by:

- a perception that external assessment is more credible than internal assessment, despite a teacher who has worked alongside a learner being ideally positioned to attest to their competence
- an imbalance in rates of excellence grades across different subjects and assessment methods, especially at Level 3.
- learner (and teacher) behaviours such as not attempting (or offering) externally assessed standards resulting in gaps in learning.

We need a shift that builds greater credibility at the system level and at the level of individual assessments. By reducing the volume of assessment and providing better tools, we can enable teachers to make better judgements across the board. By clarifying the importance of each piece of learning (and assessment) in a coherent programme, learners, whānau and the community will better understand and have confidence in the skills, knowledge and capabilities – including in literacy and numeracy – that an NCEA signifies.

Glossary of terms used:

Record of Achievement (RoA): an official document listing all New Zealand qualifications and standards achieved by a learner, provided by NZQA.

Course: a designated unit of teaching, learning and assessment. May be subject-based or cross-curricular with an agreed set of assessment standards used to assess the learning achieved.

Programme: a collection of courses offered/undertaken over time that lead toward a learner's pathway.

Learning area: one of eight areas of learning described in the New Zealand Curriculum and one of nine wāhanga ako described in Te Marautanga o Aotearoa.

Subject: a body of knowledge and skills around which courses are often developed. Subjects might encompass a broad learning area such as Science or be specialised into narrower aspects such as Biology or Ecology.

Domain: a category used by NZQA to group standards within a specific subject, for example Biology – also used to establish eligibility for University Entrance.

Achievement standards matrix: a table detailing all the standards available to assess learning in a specific subject at each level of NCEA. Currently some matrices include standards worth a total of up to 64 credits at Level 1 NCEA. Teachers select standards from the matrix to best assess learners in each course.

External assessment: Currently seen as synonymous with formal time-bound examinations held at end of each year. A better definition would be any assessment judgement made not by the teacher or school but by an outside attester qualified to make that judgement against a specific assessment standard. This might be an examiner from NZQA or a range of other “experts”. Being “qualified” to assess externally might involve holding the workplace assessment standard as a minimum.

Learning progression frameworks (LPFs): a series of detailed descriptors that illustrate the significant steps learners take as they develop their expertise in reading, writing, and mathematics from years 1 to 10. Some teachers in primary and lower secondary already use these LPFs to identify students' reading, writing, and mathematics knowledge, skills, and attitudes and to plan programmes that provide future learning opportunities.

Project-based learning or problem-based learning (PBL): a teaching approach in which students gain knowledge and skills by working for an extended period of time to investigate and respond to an engaging and complex question, problem, or challenge.

Progress and consistency tool (PaCT): a teacher tool that uses the LPFs to help those working with students to understand, track and respond to individual student progress and achievement. <http://assessment.tki.org.nz/Assessment-tools-resources/Curriculum-Progression-LPF-and-PaCT>

MAG recommendations

Our recommendations fall into two broad groups. The first set relate to the structure of NCEA while the others address issues of NCEA's implementation and broader aspects of the education system that contribute to NCEA working well. We want to nudge the wider education ecosystem toward a desirable future state in which NCEA encourages and credentials rich curriculum-based learning, allows learners to explore multiple pathways and ensures equitable access for all young people who emerge with a Record of Achievement (RoA) that tells their unique learning journey.

1. Recommendations related to the structure of NCEA

NCEA Level 1

Problem – Level 1 currently lacks a clear purpose within the NCEA system. Teaching and learning programmes at Level 1 often involve high teacher workload and put huge assessment loads on learners. Three years of national assessment does not suit all learners and in many cases young people feel pressured to make choices that narrow pathways too soon.

MAG approach and thinking – The MAG considered several aspects of NCEA's structure:

- It is vital to get literacy and numeracy sorted. The MAG considers it the responsibility of the whole school community to scaffold and build learners' literacy and numeracy skills – not just teachers of English, mathematics and statistics, te reo Māori and pāngarau.
- The MAG explored the idea of a common core at level 1, derived either from key disciplinary knowledge and/or skills and competencies but does not generally support this idea.
- Instead we feel level 1 should allow learners to experience breadth and exercise agency. For many learners this would involve building on key disciplinary knowledge to scaffold them into study at higher levels. In any case, it is important to build the cognitive capabilities that allow learners to transfer and adapt their thinking but level 1 should generate a holistic picture of a student's learning rather than just a list of standards gained.

The MAG considers the overall purpose of schooling as a time for young people to explore widely and then to take deeper dives into areas of interest. Opportunities for students to explore widely often depend on school practices, culture and local curriculum design rather than on the mechanics of NCEA. Language is important. Terms like "flexibility" and "choice" may suggest random, purposeless activity whereas we envisage learners using agency to explore through their learning with a purpose.

We can promote and support things like lifting literacy and numeracy and encouraging projects or integrated learning and pathways opportunities that do not require sweeping changes to NCEA itself. As a qualification, NCEA level 1 should signal the things the New Zealand Curriculum and the Te Marautanga o Aotearoa

identify as important. It should indicate that a learner is competent, capable and ready for *their* next step.

Making significant shifts at Level 1 runs the risk of further disadvantaging the 10% of learners who leave school without any qualification. It also risks affecting the credibility of a qualification that for a further 10% is their highest qualification. Any changes must not prejudice the way NCEA can be delivered in foundation tertiary settings.

The MAG's Big Opportunity about a project within level 1, floated in the NCEA discussion document, has clearly generated a great deal of discussion and interest across the sector. Many schools have already explored integrated teaching and learning approaches including PBL across years 7 to 10 but few have successfully used NCEA to credential such programmes. The door is now open to demonstrate how a strengthened NCEA can support authentic exploratory learning via innovative, integrated assessment approaches in senior secondary. The upcoming review of achievement standards is a golden opportunity to recognise and support the special purpose of level 1 NCEA. We understand that Māori medium settings are already exploring the development of achievement standards that are moving away from subject-bound standards toward more holistic, integrated approaches.

Very few countries have three consecutive years of assessment for national qualifications and we heard about the impact of this continuous assessment on learners' and teachers' wellbeing. We know some New Zealand schools have adapted their year 11 programmes, dropping or adjusting their level 1 NCEA programmes in favour of a two-year pathway to level 2. Sharing examples of how NCEA can be adapted meet the needs of a range of learners and communities is a powerful way to trigger change.

Recommendations

- Keep level 1 but shift its focus to learners exploring widely. Levels 2 and 3 have a different purpose. They are for 'deep dives' into learning and this is clear in the graduate profile and outcomes statements for each level.
- Make a range of models and exemplar courses available, including project based learning (PBL) tools, to enable exploration at level 1 NCEA.
- Develop new standards to credential exploratory or project work.
- The review of achievement standards takes into account the exploratory purpose of level 1.

Why/what this looks like – Level 1 remains available as an opportunity to credential a holistic picture of a student's exploratory learning and success linked to key aspects of the National Curriculum, distinguishing it from levels 2 and 3, and the strategic purpose statement and graduate profiles for each level show those different emphases. Rather than accumulating a package of standards, level 1 learners are encouraged to explore a wide range of coherent courses, including cross-curricular

and project-based courses that build foundational learning skills to equip them for further learning. Schools are expected and supported to offer a wide range of learning opportunities tailored to each learner's interests and needs, while keeping open a wide range of pathways.

Reimagining Level 1 NCEA:

In this school, Level 1 NCEA is not compulsory. Instead most learners focus on a two-year pathway to a rich level 2 NCEA. Year 11 is used as a year to explore widely and get a taste of a wide range of subject areas so that when they are ready to dive deeply into a few specific subjects, the learners know how those subjects are and can be connected to other subjects. They know they can't and don't need to be experts in them all. All year 11 and 12 students select from a wide variety of modules, each spanning two subject areas (and co-taught by two specialist teachers) and offering achievement standards at both levels 1 and 2. There are no pre-requisites for using a level 2 AS. Which standards will be entered is something each student negotiates with their teachers and their learning coach as the module progresses, so every learner is working at the level that suits them. In year 11 it's compulsory to take at least one module each semester with a maths and an English component, but otherwise it's wide open. Some examples of integrated modules from the course booklet are:

GrabGold – Capitalising on this year's Winter Olympics and covering event management, group work to build teams to compete in a college Olympics, leadership opportunities, communication and training programmes this module blends English and Physical Education and offers L1 and 2 standards in both.

Gene Genius – Building skills in both Biology and Photography, this module explores the science of genetic variation and change as well as plant adaptations to tackle the hot issues around genetic modification, capturing key images using photography and producing an informative visual product. Both L1 and 2 AS offered in both subjects.

Twitterbugs – Using social media as our vehicle we'll inquire into NZers' attitudes to a specific issue chosen by YOU. We'll use the social inquiry process to structure our project and statistical analysis and modelling to make sense of the data we gather. Then we'll decide who to share our findings with. L1 and 2 NCEA standards in Maths and Senior Social Studies are available.

Change credit requirements to enhance credibility and wellbeing

Problem – What is required to gain an NCEA can be confusing and may appear to lack consistency. The importance of an NCEA with wide breadth of standards from across the curriculum and a variety of assessment modes is not always appreciated. Confusion about what a quality NCEA looks like undermines its credibility and makes it hard for learners to make well-informed decisions. It also plays into a culture of over-assessment which generates high workload and stress for teachers, learners and their family and whanau. NCEA is sometimes portrayed as a series of three buckets that learners must fill with credits and any credits will do. We are keen to shift this perception by clarifying NCEA's purpose and requirements

MAG approach and thinking – We heard through the engagement phase that many family, whānau and employers do not understand how NCEA works. The “carry-over credits” situation is one area that generates confusion. For example, level 1 NCEA (80 credits required) is perceived as requiring “more” than levels 2 and 3 (60 credits each plus 20 carry-over credits from the level below) and learners entering NCEA at level 2 or 3 may be disadvantaged, needing to earn extra credits to fulfil the “carry-over” requirement.

We also heard that externally assessed standards (externals) are perceived as “harder” and more credible than internals. The value of internal assessment as hugely flexible and responsive to learner needs, interests and opportunities is often lost under the suspicion that internal assessment may be less rigorous, despite moderation processes. The different purpose of each mode of assessment and the value of both within a credible NCEA is not always understood and appreciated.

Lack of clarity about what’s required for an NCEA leads to a culture of credit-harvesting (gathering as many credits as possible to hedge against failure) and school programmes may contribute to this culture by offering high numbers of credits “to allow a buffer” in case learners don’t achieve every standard. This culture of overassessment has led to some unhelpful attitudes and behaviours such as:

- Each course offering significantly more credits than needed “in case students miss some”
- Students accumulating (and being rewarded for) vast numbers of credits
- Some learners gaining a very narrow NCEA, comprising credits from only 2 or 3 domains/subjects
- Students only attending to what’s assessed - “is this worth credits?”
- Students disengaging partway through a course/year once they have gained enough credits
- An emphasis on simply gaining credits rather than striving for excellence grades
- Schools “dropping this standard” so key components aren’t even taught
- Learners gaining their NCEA entirely from internally assessed standards with no externally assessed component.

These attitudes and behaviours mean assessment drives learning. They also contribute to overassessment, excessive workload, poor coherence and low teacher and learner wellbeing.

Recommendations

- All NCEA qualifications require 60 credits, with no carry-over credits.
- The number of credits per full-year course is capped at 20 credits.
- Students only enter for a maximum of 120 credits per year.
- At least 15 credits (of 60 required) for any NCEA must be from externally assessed standards (with an expanded definition of what constitutes external assessment).

- For the core 60 credits required for level 1 NCEA, no more than 15 credits can come from any one sub-domain.

Why/ what this looks like –For learners to navigate their pathway through NCEA with confidence, assessment associated with each course also needs to be pared down to what is really important. Not all learning needs to be assessed and the coherence within courses should be sufficient to maintain learner engagement (more on coherence later). Once this is established, the number of standards (and credits) actually offered in a course can be a lean subset of those available. Ensuring credits are earned from across at least 4 sub-domains/subjects encourages exploration at level 1 NCEA (while learners may gain up to 20 credits per course, only the best 15 count to their NCEA). Learners focus on the quality of credits rather than the quantity – they do not accumulate excessive credits or disengage partway through a course. Wellbeing is enhanced and workload is reduced.

What constitutes external assessment needs to be explored and expanded (fully discussed later). Currently about 25% of credits across the board are earned from “externals” (examinations, externally assessed portfolios and common assessment tasks (CATs)) but this hides a huge subgroup of learners who gain their NCEA solely through internally assessed standards. This reliance on internal assessment erodes credibility and is also an equity and pathways issue for those learners. Requiring a minimum number of “external” credits would increase NCEA system credibility since not all courses a student takes could be entirely internally assessed and potentially it would reduce teacher workload since externals typically generate a lower teacher workload than internals, not to mention removing the time and stress involved in internal moderation. Applying this requirement at a certificate level recognises the value of specialist courses such as those offered through trades academies and ITOs where a body of practice is most appropriately assessed using internal assessment.

A learners NCEA Level 1 programme might look like:							
<i>Courses taken across a full year:</i>	<i>Credits offered*</i>	<i>Credits gained</i>	<i>Check for breadth#</i>				
<u>Science (2 half-year modules)</u> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: center;"><u>INT</u></td> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: center;"><u>EXT</u></td> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: center;"><u>INT</u></td> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: center;"><u>EXT</u></td> </tr> </table>	<u>INT</u>	<u>EXT</u>	<u>INT</u>	<u>EXT</u>	20	20	15
<u>INT</u>	<u>EXT</u>	<u>INT</u>	<u>EXT</u>				
<u>Individual project (PE and health focus – assessed via 2 PBL and 1PE achievement standards)</u> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 33%; text-align: center;"><u>INT (PBL)</u></td> <td style="width: 33%; text-align: center;"><u>INT (PBL)</u></td> <td style="width: 34%; text-align: center;"><u>INT (PE)</u></td> </tr> </table>	<u>INT (PBL)</u>	<u>INT (PBL)</u>	<u>INT (PE)</u>	15	10	10	
<u>INT (PBL)</u>	<u>INT (PBL)</u>	<u>INT (PE)</u>					
<u>Integrated studies (Media, social studies, PE)</u> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 33%; text-align: center;"><u>INT (Media)</u></td> <td style="width: 33%; text-align: center;"><u>INT (Soc St)</u></td> <td style="width: 34%; text-align: center;"><u>INT (PE)</u></td> </tr> </table>	<u>INT (Media)</u>	<u>INT (Soc St)</u>	<u>INT (PE)</u>	15	15	15	
<u>INT (Media)</u>	<u>INT (Soc St)</u>	<u>INT (PE)</u>					
<u>Applied Mathematics</u> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: center;"><u>INT</u></td> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: center;"><u>INT</u></td> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: center;"><u>INT</u></td> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: center;"><u>EXT</u></td> </tr> </table>	<u>INT</u>	<u>INT</u>	<u>INT</u>	<u>EXT</u>	20	10	10
<u>INT</u>	<u>INT</u>	<u>INT</u>	<u>EXT</u>				
<u>English</u> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: center;"><u>INT</u></td> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: center;"><u>INT</u></td> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: center;"><u>EXT</u></td> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: center;"><u>EXT</u></td> </tr> </table>	<u>INT</u>	<u>INT</u>	<u>EXT</u>	<u>EXT</u>	20	15	15
<u>INT</u>	<u>INT</u>	<u>EXT</u>	<u>EXT</u>				
<i>*All achievement standards are worth 5 credits</i>	90	70	65				
<i># All credits are recorded on RoA but the core 60 credits can't include more than 15 from any one sub-domain to ensure breadth of exploration at level 1 NCEA.</i>							
<i>Literacy is attested on RoA as stage 5 (expected level for an NCEA graduate); Numeracy is attested as stage 4 (still developing).</i>							

Review assessment standards and assessment practices to promote coherent and inclusive learning

Problem – Our National Curriculum provides guidance about the important competencies and attributes we need in our school leavers but it is also very permissive and does not always clearly signal clearly what is the most important learning. NCEA’s flexibility makes it a powerful tool capable of supporting the vision of the National Curriculum but there are many unintended consequences of NCEA’s structure and implementation that mean programmes of teaching, learning and assessment are frequently highly fragmented and as a result learning is disjointed. When assessment drives activity in senior secondary, deep coherent learning is squeezed out. There’s also a risk that inclusivity is compromised by a “one size fits all” approach to both teaching and assessment. In many subjects, the examinations used to assess external standards have become generic and predictable and in others they are perceived as something of a lottery. The essential integrating purpose of externals is often not realised.

MAG approach and thinking – We need to ensure that the tools used to build an NCEA – the assessment standards – are working well. That applies to the modes and conditions of assessment and the way assessment is woven into programmes of learning.

We know that subject matrices include more standards than can be used in one year with many worth as little as 2 or 3 credits, so teachers suffer from a “tyranny of choice” when deciding what to assess. What is assessed often determines what is taught or at least what is focused on and what is dropped from a course. Sometimes key content and skills may be “lost in the gaps” because of the focus on credit-gathering and when programmes use a “one size fits all” subset of assessment standards, learning and assessment may become inaccessible for diverse learners, including those with disabilities or learning support needs. Significant work is needed to clarify what’s really important across subjects, ideally building those things into larger (and fewer) standards designed to reflect the holistic intention of the National Curriculum.

There will be some real challenges in developing fewer, larger standards. They will need to focus on what’s really important in a subject/discipline and also incorporate curriculum competencies and capabilities. Larger standards could provide more opportunity for key concepts to be explored and applied across wider contexts allowing greater application of those valued knowledge and skills. Smart standard- and task-writing will be the key to realising the potential of richer achievement standards. They may also be a key to reducing/mitigating teacher and learner assessment workload.

The MAG explored the idea of external assessment and its place in NCEA. Externally assessed standards should focus on the integration and application of the key knowledge, skills and capabilities that are most valued in a subject. We heard that external assessment is perceived as more rigorous than internal assessment so it contributes significantly to maintaining the credibility of the qualification. The use of externally assessed standards has in many cases contributed to fragmentation of

learning by breaking it up into discrete predictable chunks. On the other hand, if external assessment tasks are well designed they should support coherence and credibility by drawing together the strands from across sub-topics, promoting the integration and application of the important knowledge and skills in a subject. We favour expanding the definition of external assessment to include not just time-limited examinations confined to end of the year, but any more objective measure that uses a judgement separate from that of the immediate classroom teacher or school. This provides a valuable and credible perspective on the capability of a learner that comes from outside the school/institution. Currently portfolios are assessed externally by a panel of assessors and we heard of NZQA assessors attending a national Māori performing arts event to externally assess performers in real time. We also heard about NZQA's work towards on-line, anytime assessment of externals. We strongly recommend that achievement standard and task developers be supported to explore other more innovative methods of assessing externally. We recommend a thorough review of examinations to determine what already works well and what can be improved then exploring more creative strategies and systems such as blended approaches with teaching and assessment managed by the teacher but attested by an outside expert. Other possibilities include: suitably qualified expert stakeholders attesting to the success of an inquiry project; a master craftsperson attesting to achievement of a practical standard; a panel of teacher experts collaborating on-line to assess portfolios of naturally occurring evidence. PBL is currently not well understood and how to assess it remains a puzzle. Currently PBL features mainly in the pre-NCEA years or sits alongside senior secondary NCEA courses rather than contributing coherently. The capability to effectively deliver and assess PBL is thinly spread throughout our current teaching workforce.

Recommendations

- Review all assessment standards to ensure they are fit for purpose using both a curriculum and an equity and inclusion lens.
- Reduce the number of achievement standards per subject matrix (fewer, larger standards).
- Broaden the range of assessment tools and modes available. This means developing a broader definition of the term "external".
- Develop a set of standards specifically designed to assess project based learning (PBL) and provide quality exemplars of how existing standards can be grouped to effectively assess and credential learning via PBL.

Why/ what this looks like

Standards that are fit for use by a diverse range of learners will ensure more equitable access to an NCEA qualification. Maintaining a mix of internal and external assessment modes maintains NCEA's credibility and recognises the differing strengths of diverse learners.

Better resourcing of fewer, larger achievement standards is a 'win-win'. Making fewer standards available means there are more resources to support development and delivery to realise:

- authentic assessment
- culturally responsive methods and contexts
- more options for learners
- better guidance on assessment for those with learning support needs.

Externally assessed standards using a range of evidence-collection methods, would support coherence and credibility by drawing together the strands from across topics/subjects. Teachers can focus on assessment for learning while assessment for credentialing is attested by NZQA.

Secondary schools will share a clear understanding of PBL and how it can be assessed effectively and credibly. Projects become another tool in the teaching, learning and assessment toolkit and are used within or across subjects and learning areas. Real world, culturally relevant contexts and topics for projects make NCEA accessible for a wider range of learners.

Lucy's story:

Lucy's grandad was a joiner and passed on his love for timber and cabinet-making. After gaining some really useful project planning and design skills in her Level 1 Technology and Graphics & Design courses, Lucy's expanded her vision to starting a business of her own, making and selling original bespoke furniture. At NCEA Level 2 she gained a place in a Gateway programme working with a boat-building company where she learnt how a large project is managed, saw how a business is run and expanded her own practical skills. In school she launched into a deep dive into Technology, continuing her Applied Maths course and also picking up Business Studies. Her Technology teacher provided formative feedback through the year but her final portfolio of work from this school-based course including her planning and design work and several pieces of furniture built to buyers' specifications, were (externally) assessed by the Timber Construction assessor from the local Polytech. Through her Gateway work she earned a number of Unit Standard credits at Level 2 and her supervisor at the Boatworks attested to several advanced procedures and concepts criteria in the Technology achievement standards as well. After Year 12 she is ready to progress on to a tertiary advanced trades course and meanwhile she has started her own business, working from her family garage at home while she further hones her skills in management and construction.

Getting Literacy and Numeracy right

Problem – Current NCEA literacy and numeracy benchmarks lack clarity and assessment processes can lack rigour and this undermines NCEA's credibility. The actual levels needed for young people to become functionally literate and numerate appears unclear. There are indications that some NCEA graduates emerge without the capabilities they need for further learning or to enter the world of work. One factor is the current two-path system to attaining NCEA literacy and numeracy requirements which too often means learning and assessment of these key capabilities happens

coincidentally, not explicitly. Employers and others cannot tell from a RoA what a young person's actual stage of literacy and numeracy is.

MAG approach and thinking – The MAG holds the view that clearly defined fundamental proficiency in literacy and numeracy is important for an NCEA graduate. We identified four key questions:

1. What specific aspects and capabilities should be included in literacy and numeracy?
2. Where should the proficiency level sit?
3. Where/how should literacy and numeracy be taught and assessed?
4. How should literacy and numeracy “count” toward an NCEA?

There is a tension between a “one size fits all” approach to functional literacy and numeracy and the need for a different range of literacies/numeracies to support different learning and career pathways. There's also a risk in separating literacy and numeracy from everything else a learner does by having it explicitly taught and assessed in isolation. By definition, literacy and numeracy needs to be taught with a purpose/in context and across all aspects of all subjects, but the current system of relying on literacy and numeracy teaching and assessment being embedded within a range of more than 600 achievement standards means learning and assessment happens coincidentally (if at all) and not explicitly. It makes sense for course developers and teachers to identify their specific disciplinary literacies and numeracies and surface these explicitly in their teaching, especially at levels 2 and 3 where learners are beginning to take deep dives into subjects of particular interest, where the subject-specific aspects are particularly important. It also makes sense to expand the meaning of literacy to encompass important aspects such as oracy.

The MAG considers years 7 to 10 the key time to embed foundational literacy and numeracy for all learners. This responsibility should not lie with English/te Reo and Maths/Pāngarau teachers but with all teachers. There must be a clearly articulated expectation that “you'll be more successful in NCEA if you reach this essential literacy and numeracy stage” before embarking on NCEA. We know that a significant proportion of year 8 students are currently capable of accessing NCEA (meet current literacy and numeracy expectations) but others need further support.

<https://www.tec.govt.nz/assets/Reports/3198200d93/Alignment-research-paper-Summary.pdf> Ensuring literacy and numeracy is a middle school focus would require targeted resourcing including developing and refining the tools for building adolescent literacy followed by ongoing PLD to support teachers to deliver literacy through their disciplines and to use robust methodologies to make judgements about each learner's stage of literacy and numeracy at regular intervals across each year.

The benchmark for NCEA literacy and numeracy should be reviewed and clarified by an expert technical group to generate a clear statement of the competencies expected. The Learning Progressions Frameworks (LPFs) have a part to play in determining where that benchmark should be (as well as helping teachers assess against that benchmark). The system would be better served by a literacy and numeracy reporting system with more than one reporting category so a learner's current level can be reported and, as needed, improved on over time. We know the

current system is not working and that it incentivises unintended behaviours such as levering learners through standards just to fulfil literacy and numeracy requirements. If teachers have good information about the actual literacy and numeracy stage of each learner they can take this into account, improving their teaching. If each learner's actual literacy and numeracy stages are reported (on school reports and their NCEA RoA) as a separate item from English/te Reo and Mathematics/Pāngarau grades there's a real incentive to ensure literacy and numeracy are addressed continuously. We'd expect literacy and numeracy to continue to develop beyond NCEA level 1 but this would be most appropriately achieved via subject-specific literacies and numeracies, surfaced by specialist teachers. (Current UE literacy and numeracy systems would still work at Levels 2 and 3).

Literacy and numeracy might be attested:

- as a compulsory credit-bearing component of an NCEA
- as a co-requisite but reported/credentialed independently from NCEA
- by actual stages being reported alongside NCEA on the RoA but not as a co- or pre-requisite to any NCEA.

In the last two scenarios a learner who does not gain an NCEA could still have their literacy and numeracy recognised. Under scenario three, a learner might gain an NCEA but still be operating below the benchmark level for literacy and/or numeracy. The MAG favours option three in which each learner's actual level of achievement in literacy and numeracy is attested by teachers using a robust methodology (such as a modified progress and achievement tool (PaCT) and clear learning progression frameworks (LPF)), and those proficiency stages are reported to NZQA and appear on the RoA. The MAG sees real value in de-coupling literacy and numeracy from NCEA so it is not gained by default. However, rather than assessing literacy and numeracy via standards (by having learners jump over a bar once) we favour an approach where each learner's actual stage of literacy and numeracy is reported on their RoA at the time they gain any NCEA. Learners could gain essential NCEA literacy and numeracy at any stage, including well before they undertake NCEA, so it could be a focus at years 9 and 10 to ensure learners are ready to access learning at NCEA Level 1. With several steps on the LPFs, learners might begin year 11 below the expected stage but progress to the "fundamental" stage over two years, while building their NCEA. We don't expect literacy and numeracy progress to stop at the "fundamental" stage either. A "life-ready" stage above the fundamental stage would signal to employers and others that a learner has made further growth. Simply reporting on levels of literacy and numeracy without it being a pre- or co-requisite for an NCEA would mean some learners would gain an NCEA who would not do so currently. For example, a school leaver with NCEA Level 3 might only be sitting at NZC Level 4 on the LPF for writing. This might have implications for the credibility of NCEA although being completely clear about an individual learner's proficiency in literacy and numeracy could actually enhance the credibility of NCEA since it is no longer "hidden" in a collection of standards on the RoA.

Teachers and providers would need to be provided with good models of how a school can create and maintain appropriate systems to teach and assess literacy and numeracy along with exemplars that support judgments and tools that assist with

generating evidence. Some computer adaptive assessment tools have already been trialled that could be refined and used to support this approach.

Recommendations

- Establish a technical working group to determine the literacy and numeracy benchmarks and the best tools to assess and report them (using the Learning Progressions Frameworks (LPF)).
- Year 9 and 10 learners are provided with opportunities to develop foundational literacy and numeracy capabilities as well as the skills and tools for learning through exploration.
- Decouple the assessment of literacy and numeracy from NCEA.
- Attainment against clear literacy and numeracy progressions is recorded in a learner's NCEA Record of Achievement (RoA).

Why/what this looks like – Once we are clear about what essential literacy and numeracy is required to access NCEA and this is pegged to the existing (or an extended) LPFs, everyone can see clearly exactly where each learner sits. This means family and whanau as well as the learners themselves can be involved in supporting their next steps toward proficiency or extension. With training and support, teachers can use new specialised tools and methodologies to attest to each learner's level of literacy and numeracy. For instance, by using a portfolio of evidence from across subjects and courses. On-line assessment tools support teacher judgements. This approach provides a more robust system for making explicit the levels of literacy and numeracy required to be an NCEA graduate.

Being aware of each learner's literacy and numeracy stage encourages teachers and task developers to be more explicit about what literacy and numeracy is required to access learning at a particular curriculum and NCEA level. A learner arriving at the NCEA years without the expected literacy and numeracy skills gets continuing support in those areas while they embark on NCEA. No learner is abandoned and there's a clear understanding that every child deserves to be functionally literate and numerate.

These expected literacy and numeracy levels (as well as specific disciplinary literacies and numeracies) must be taken into account when reviewing/developing new standards and tasks. For example, the significance of oracy as a valued form of communication (especially for Māori and Pacific learners) is not apparent in existing "literacy" standards and other forms of explanation/communication need to be explored too.

The NCEA RoA reliably attests to a learners story/journey – using robust attestations of literacy and numeracy linked to the progressions frameworks that increase the credibility of the qualification.

2. Recommendations related to implementation of NCEA within rich programmes of learning.

Promoting Coherence

Problem – Learners report that they struggle to see the connection between the pieces of learning that make up their years of study under NCEA. This fragmentation is found:

- within learning areas – where units and courses of study tend to be characterised as collection of standards
- in short, rigidly-timetabled periods that lead to “chunking” of learning with time-limited pressure-points for assessment events
- in a lack of links between subjects so skills and knowledge gained within one is seldom explicitly valued or applied in another
- in a lack of clarity about progression (across achieved, merit and excellence grades and across NCEA levels 1, 2 and 3) so learners are left puzzled by how they can achieve a particular assessment criterion and why they did or did not earn a higher grade or endorsement.

Where there is a lack of coherence, learners tend to lose sight of what learning is really important and they may fail to make the meaningful connections needed to sustain their learning.

MAG approach and thinking – ERO’s recent report “What drives learning in senior secondary schools” <https://www.ero.govt.nz/publications/what-drives-learning-in-the-senior-secondary-school/> indicates that many schools are struggling to incorporate “front end” curriculum competencies into teaching and learning programmes, with assessment tending to drive learning instead. While current NCEA settings allow for coherence (and examples of effective programme design do exist), NCEA’s flexibility makes it permissive and has often led to unforeseen fragmentation.

Coherence is one of the key principles identified in the National Curriculum. A coherent curriculum is defined as one that delivers a broad learner-centred education that makes links within and across learning areas, provides for coherent transitions, and opens up pathways to further learning. For teachers and learners this feels like “joined up learning” in which the knowledge and skills gained at one point in the learning journey are valued and applied in future learning. Coherent learning has a clear purpose and leads somewhere. Rather than a course being described and delivered as a set of discrete assessment standards so that learning lurches from one assessment event to the next, course descriptions and learning sequences should reflect the development of the really important ideas and concepts in a discipline or topic. The role of assessment in a coherent programme is to provide both learner and teacher with an understanding of the learner’s progression and to inform next steps during the learning process. NCEA’s role is to attest to specific milestones of learning using clearly defined standards that identify important learning outcomes, either derived from the National Curriculum or from bodies of practice. NCEA has a role to play in amplifying the common aspects of rich learning that are characterised by the vision, values and competencies of the National Curriculum and

we need those shared aspects to be made more explicit. We need to ensure the review of achievement standards focuses on developing subject matrices and individual standards that weave the curriculum capabilities with the key disciplinary knowledge or body of practice so they capture what is really important.

Current distinctions between “academic” and “vocational” standards and courses are counterproductive. All courses/pathways should be integrated, whether they are subject-based or rich combinations of skills and knowledge - they should all lead in a direction that has a purpose. To support the parity of esteem of diverse pathways, we need to ensure that all standards (both MOE and ITO developed) that contribute to an NCEA are part of coherent sets and that they clearly reflect the competencies and capabilities (the “front half”) of the National Curriculum.

We need to explore how PBL can contribute to coherence. Many differing assumptions and perceptions exist about PLB and research is scarce so sharing effective examples of PBL in action is vital to dispel myths and encourage diversification. We’re aware that PBL demands high levels of teacher capability but if done well it is a chance to integrate learning across subject areas without losing what is really important within disciplines. PBL models the way the world works and young people need authentic experiences before they move beyond school. Learning and assessment experiences in authentic contexts such as Food Security and Climate Change, demands a multi-disciplinary approach that will equip young people well for life beyond school. A robust coherent qualification that credentials problem solving skills is a huge asset if they are to address the problems of the real world.

We are mindful that mandating changes can alienate the sector and may generate resistance to the changes we seek. In nudging the sector toward greater coherence, we believe exemplifying the desired system shift is far more likely to affect change but inevitably it will demand significant support so there are significant PLD implications here.

Recommendations

- Require all schools to attest that programmes and courses are coherent (clearly defined and specified) and that they are fully accessible and contribute to a valuable and equitable pathway.
- For standards delivered by schools and tertiary education organisations (TEOs) providing NCEA, review all achievement and unit standards to ensure they are linked to the National Curriculum (every “body of knowledge” and “body of practice” ought to be able to be aligned with curriculum competencies and capabilities).
- Exemplify coherence by making available exemplar packages and courses that reflect either a “body of knowledge” OR “a body of practice”, in a variety of formats and contexts.

- Use the achievement standards review to provide strong shared definitions for achieved, merit and excellence so the step-ups are understood across all subjects and standards.

Why/what this looks like – Schools, teachers, whanau and learners have a shared understanding of what coherence looks like and why it is important. School and learning area internal review processes are used to examine courses and programmes of learning to attest that they are coherent. ERO enquires into the coherence of courses and programmes as part of its regular review cycle and this applies some quality control to the process. Applying an additional equity and inclusion lens to course and programme design means learners are not excluded from NCEA-assessed pathways.

Coherence will be evident at all levels of system – at the qualification level, within and across programmes and courses of learning, and at the individual level in each learner’s pathway. All three are critical for credibility. Responsibility sits with

- standards-setters at the standard level
- schools/providers/teachers at the programme and course design level
- schools/whanau/learners at the pathways level.

Enhancing coherence:

At the end of each year the school dedicates time to reviewing their programmes, right down to the individual course level. Teams of teachers evaluate each course looking for where it flowed well and identifying any stress points where learning was held up by assessment or where things were disjointed. Their starting point is “What’s the really important learning here and if there were no NCEA what would learning look like across the year?”. Learners are involved in the review and their feedback is used to refine courses to enhance coherence. The timing and mode of NCEA assessment is one area where changes can make a huge difference. Teachers have a wide range of tools available to be innovative and responsive to local opportunities and they scan ahead to identify potential contexts and contacts in the wider community for the following year. The findings of this review form part of the learning area and whole school annual self-review process and findings are shared with the Board of Trustees. ERO enquires into programme and course coherence as part of its school review process.

Enhancing the Record of Achievement

Problem – The current record of achievement (RoA) lists standards under sub-fields (categories within domains), with each standard title and grade achieved (N,A,M,E), forming a long list of individual chunks. How these chunks contribute to any specific course let alone a learner’s overall pathway is often very unclear.

MAG approach and thinking – Our discussions explored how we might adapt the RoA to make it a more useful document. We took into account the ideas emerging from the work of the Curriculum Progress and Achievement (CPA) MAG and also the

current developments in IT/on-line capabilities including NZQA's initiatives around the on-line environment (NCEA on-line).

Schools are expected to co-design pathways with young people and these ought to be evident in a leaver's RoA. To provide a fuller story of the learner's journey that RoA could also details of all courses taken, CV statements and their final/current level of literacy and numeracy. Currently schools provide a range of leaver documents but there is no consistency across schools. At the third CoLab in December, several groups prototyped ideas about an expanded RoA that would tell the learner's story - "I chose this pathway and here's how I got to this point in my learning journey...". This would be a quality assured document attested both by the school (for the pathways/CV component) and by NZQA (for the NCEA results) so it would have high credibility.

NCEA graduate profile statements for each NCEA level ought to frame the RoA with course outcome statements framing each course taken to show how this course contributes to their personal journey. We are keen to explore the feasibility of expanding the RoA further to include leadership and participation in school activities in a leaver profile statement. While there are workload implications for an expanded leaver profile statement we are aware that schools currently write testimonials anyway and huge volumes of participation data and other relevant information is stored on school management systems so we envisage something could be done efficiently to promote this idea using inter-operable data management systems.

Recommendation

- Organise the Record of Achievement (RoA) by courses with an outcome statement and a graduate profile for each. Include all standards entered as well as those gained.

Why/what this looks like –A really meaningful record of achievement is based on more than just standards achieved. The RoA enables a young person to tell the story of their pathway through NCEA. The flexibility of NCEA is realised in the diversity of combinations of assessment standards used to assess innovative courses and the credibility of NCEA is enhanced. Each young person's strengths and interests as well as their knowledge, skills and competencies are clearly evident to employers and further education recruiters and the RoA provides a conversation-starter to guide their transition to work or further education. In our future ideal state, universities recognise the value of this more coherent approach and any accredited Level 3 course can contribute to University Entrance.

Schools reinforce the expectation that students will be assessed against every standard in a course they are enrolled in and all results are reported in their RoA (e.g. 12 credits earned from a total of 18 credits offered in Marine Biology). With fewer larger standards available and a cap on the number of credits offered in a course, the unintended behaviour of learners not submitting some standards is no longer incentivised.

Reimagining the RoA:

A group of Principals, Tertiary educators and Employers collaborated at the December NCEA CoLab to prototype an expanded learner's Record of Achievement. They thought it might include:

- *NZQA's quality assured statement of all courses completed, with graduate profiles and outcomes statement for each and all credits entered as well as those gained*
- *A record of the extra- and co-curricular activities undertaken during the young person's secondary years as well as their career pathway map, built in collaboration with learning mentors. (This component generated from the school management system using existing data – minimal extra workload and replaces testimonial)*
- *A student/teacher compiled profile of the young person "soft skills" and strengths including a reflective statement from the young person on their learning pathway so far and their aspirations for the future*
- *Literacy and Numeracy stages attested against the Learning Progressions Frameworks at the point of the most recent NCEA certificate or school leaving date.*

So a school leaver who had served as the school's orator or did the karanga at the school's powhiri, has that captured and recognised. So does the student who spent lunchtimes mentoring a fellow student with learning support needs or clearing weeds from the school's community garden. These activities are turned into capabilities and recorded as part of their individual stories.

Ensuring equity of opportunities and outcomes

Problem – We have heard about examples of persistent racism and teacher bias including evidence of lower expectations and different course and pathways advice for Māori and Pacific students. Some learners feel excluded from quality NCEA-supported pathways by practices such as streaming. Research shows students' access to learning opportunities partially depends on their perceived potential with real implications for learners with identified learning support needs.

MAG approach and thinking – While many principals and schools are most concerned with "what's good for my kids", we also need to consider "what's good for all of our kids" to ensure that those who most need support receive an equitable share. That said, the issues (and solutions) for ākongā Māori, Pacific learners and those with learning support needs are quite distinctly different and cannot be lumped together. We know that relationships between learners and trusted mentors/teachers are important to everyone, but especially so to our Māori and Pacific learners and their whanau and fono.

Recommendations –

- Review all assessment standards to ensure they are designed inclusively.

- Provide every learner with quality pathway mentoring to guide their exploration at NCEA level 1 and deeper dives into learning at levels 2 and 3, and ensuring equity of access to assessments and pathways.

Why/what this looks like – Learners with a clear purpose, who feel affirmed and enabled, are more likely to engage, to learn and to achieve. With a clear and aspirational pathway ahead of them, NCEA becomes a means to an end and not the end in itself. A RoA that paints the picture of the learner's journey means each choice contributes to a single story. When teachers truly know their students, the various competencies and experiences each diverse learner brings with them can be integrated into their learning and assessment. Targeted PLD will be needed so teachers develop their capabilities in designing and delivering responsive NCEA-assessed programmes and in providing mentoring and pathways advice that in turn will enhance equity of access to NCEA. Initiatives to ensure learners with learning support needs have access to meaningful NCEA options via special assessment conditions (SACs) continues to be progressed via other Education Work Programmes.

Fees

Problem – NCEA should allow all learners to achieve their full potential but we know financial inequities can pose a barrier to this. This particularly affects low decile learners and schools who report some learners studying and completing assessment requirements but not gaining NCEA credits. Non-payment of fees can bar learners' access to further study or employment as NCEA credits may be excluded from their Record of Achievement. Students at low-decile schools are less likely to enter for a Scholarship and entry costs are one significant factor in this.

MAG approach and thinking – By addressing the fees barrier we can open up NCEA for all learners, regardless of their financial situation. The MAG explored ideas of adjusting fees to family circumstances but factors such as not knowing about financial assistance and a reluctance to be stigmatised by receiving it, may prevent this approach from working well.

Recommendation

- Remove all NCEA fees as soon as possible.

Why/ what this looks like – Every learner undertaking an NCEA assessment has their achievement credentialed on their RoA, regardless of financial circumstances. Consideration should be given to implementing this immediately, particularly to show that changes are being made promptly. This is a simple step to demonstrate to whānau and young people that we have listened, and while other recommendations will take time to implement, this can be done straight away. We would need to explore the implications of removing fees for remarking of external assessments as this might incentivise unintended behaviours. Similarly, targeted fees relief for disadvantaged students wanting to sit Scholarship should be explored. Removing fees as one source of stress means both learners and teachers can focus

more on what is important and schools no longer need to collect fees from families and whānau.

Support for teachers to shift assessment practices around NCEA

Problem – Assessment is a fundamental part of any teacher’s job but training, resourcing and support are often insufficient to build the capability needed to consistently provide authentic, culturally responsive, rich assessment opportunities. There is wide agreement across the sector that currently there is too much assessment going on.

Whole-school PLD initiatives are valuable but subject-specific PLD also has a part to play in strengthening the way NCEA is implemented in senior secondary. While subject Facebook pages abound with innovative ideas for teaching programmes, the vast majority of assessments submitted to NZQA for moderation show teachers resorting to minimally modified TKI assessment resources. The flexibility of NCEA is not being fully realised.

MAG approach and thinking – PLD targeted at curriculum and assessment design specific to secondary needs is vital. Unpacking the two-fold purpose of assessment – to inform next steps in learning (formative assessment or assessment for learning) and to attest to a specific milestone in that journey (summative assessment), is a start. Currently teachers feel PLD is somewhat random and they often rely heavily on subject associations and social networks to share ideas and assessment resources because they lack the time and expertise to develop their own.

We have heard loudly in the engagement phase about the extra burden that falls on Māori medium schools in terms of their need for support with resource development. The equity implications of the current lack of support fall on both Māori medium teachers and their ākonga. For example, all external assessments for use in Māori medium should all be available in te Reo.

Recommendations –

- Develop an assessment guide to help schools and other providers to design courses and appropriate assessment programmes.
- Provide on-going support (PLD) to the workforce to build:
 - course and programme design capability
 - culturally responsive pedagogies and programme design skills
 - integrated assessment capability
 - pathways guidance and mentoring skills.
- Provide quality exemplars of assessment options to scaffold teachers toward more innovative and responsive approaches.
- Māori medium have highly specific needs and must be with targeted support.

Why/what this looks like – We need to highlight and value the role of the teacher in the NCEA process. Empowering teachers by providing more quality tools and options and simultaneously reducing the volume of assessment should lead to synergies, improving wellbeing as well as raising the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

Similarly learner wellbeing is improved when high-stakes, ‘all-or-nothing’ assessment is less frequent and the contexts, modes and activities are more meaningful and relevant. Culturally responsive teaching, responsive course design and appropriate assessment practices can significantly improve outcomes for traditionally underserved learners.

Improving assessment and reporting:

For some time now teachers in this region have been working together via their professional networks to explore more innovative and holistic assessment approaches. In the past the typical pattern was to start with a chunk of teaching based tightly on “what does this standard want?” leading to a “practice/formative” assessment event. This was followed by a period of furious marking to provide feedback before the “real/summative” assessment event. While teachers waded through the mountain ...rinse and repeat for three terms then substitute school and end-of-year exams as the focus.

With ongoing support and PLD teachers now use a wider range of assessment modes (e.g. podcasts, blogs and debates), they apply recommended word/duration limits to encourage quality synthesis rather than volume of evidence, and collect real-time evidence based on teacher/learner dialogues and learner reflections for formative purposes and for making final assessor judgements. There is seldom a single “assessment event” and learners are coached to manage their study and assessment loads as part of their regular “ako” time with their mentor teacher.

Teacher and learner workload has reduced with teacher feedback and next-steps advice being entered into each learner’s page on the school’s student management system. This constitutes real-time reporting to both learners and their family/whanau so twice yearly written reports and frantic “speed-dating” parent report evenings are a thing of the past. Specialist data managers manage the flow of data and information between school, home and NZQA, reducing teacher workload and ensuring efficiencies for all users. They triage whanau inquiries and liaise between whānau and classroom or ako teachers ensuring channels of communication are clear, manageable and efficient.

Relationships between the ako teacher and the 15 learners in each ako group are paramount. Whanau know and trust the ako teacher who has been with their learner since year 9 so has a key role in mentoring and pathway advice. Whanau who in the past struggled to support their learner now have access to quality information and can be fully involved.

Moderation issues

Problem – Current moderation requirements are perceived by teachers as high. An unintended consequence of the present moderation environment is a tendency to

over-engineer moderation within schools leading to excessive teacher workload. Teachers say they get mixed messages from NZQA. They are encouraged to be innovative, yet they report inconsistencies in feedback from external moderation across regions, schools and moderation cycles and this fear of “being slammed in moderation” stifles innovative assessment approaches.

MAG approach and thinking – Internal moderation is the cornerstone of the quality assurance system for NCEA and is vital for the credibility of the qualification. Moderation ensures all our learners are treated fairly in their NCEAs. NZQA's basic requirements and what schools perceive as required seem to be quite different. Schools are rightly concerned to ensure a high degree of rigour in their quality assurance systems but there needs to be far greater clarity around what constitutes sufficiency so that schools can proceed with confidence and teachers gain some workload relief. For teachers to be encouraged to be responsive and innovative with internal assessment, they need confidence that their efforts will be received constructively by NZQA moderators.

Recommendations

- A technical expert group reviews moderation requirements and school practices to ensure moderation processes are efficient while remaining fit for purpose.
- Provide schools with clear examples of effective and efficient moderation, perhaps as part of an assessment guide.

Why/what this looks like – For learning to be coherent, assessment should involve authentic activities within culturally relevant contexts and this requires innovation and adaptability on the part of teachers/assessors. In a mature assessment system a high trust approach enables and encourages high quality, responsive assessment, including the collection of evidence over time, with less reliance on formal time-limited events that tend to generate high workload and stress for both learners and teachers. Moderation of internal assessment is vital to maintain credibility of the NCEA qualification and in an ideal system it would serve as valuable professional development for teachers as well.

Concluding comments from MAG Chair:

In January last year the Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) was charged with thinking innovatively about ways to strengthen NCEA. Since then we have been privileged to interact with a wide cross-section of New Zealanders for whom NCEA is important. We have listened and heard the experiences, good and bad, of numerous young New Zealanders, their families and whanau, schools and providers, as well as employers and other community stakeholders. Those experiences have informed our discussions and the advice contained in this report.

I want to thank the Ministry of Education for supporting the work of the MAG by providing timely and quality information and data to support our thinking as well as secretariat support and robust discussion. I also want to thank the members of the MAG for their frank, honest and thoughtful contributions to this important work. Members have brought diverse perspectives and expertise to the table and together we have challenged traditional thinking on senior secondary education and assessment.

The NCEA has been built on sound foundations. We look forward to a future in which NCEA meets the needs and aspirations of all young New Zealanders and realises its full potential across society as a mature and credible qualification for our country.

Jeremy Baker,
Chair, NCEA Ministerial Advisory Group,
22 February, 2019

Proactively Released