

## SMART IDEAS. SMART FUTURE.

Alanah Pratt

Two thirds of NCEA students are severely affected by anxiety or stress. Why is this? There are many reasons behind it. Being a student, I myself have witnessed reasons for the stresses. Firstly, it's an important time. We are lead to believe that passing NCEA is the main way to become employed and be successful. But, the NCEA system at the moment isn't an accurate representation of the pathway for success and employment.

In its present format, I think NCEA is created for those who have good memories, work well under exam pressures, and are generally more academically focused. This doesn't give those who are more practical the opportunity to gain NCEA credits. As a country, we need to cater for the needs of people who are more practical, and help them to be able to get jobs, not just the more academically able students. That is why I think the idea of providing dual *pathways* or opportunities for students to achieve NCEA endorsed practical and/or NCEA endorsed academic would be good for our country moving forward. In both practical and academic, students would still be able to achieve merit and excellence endorsements, which could be attained using the present threshold of 50 excellence or merit credits.

NCEA academic would be the normal subjects you take at school. But, there would be certain achievements to complete to get credits for NCEA practical. These credits would be given based on work ethic, perseverance and work skills. It would require the completion of practical tasks without all the academic stress. Students would be able to get the credits that they require to pass, however, these credits wouldn't be given out easily. A robust and *credible* system of assessment would be used to ensure that programmes are focused on developing a good work ethic, perseverance, and work based skills. These are the soft skills students employers actually need in the future. It would develop school leavers more ready to make meaningful contributions to work environments.

Programmes would be personalised and interest based with the practical requirements of the course job specific, creating a *coherent* learning experience. For instance, a student with an interest in bakery would have differing tasks and assessment to those with interests in say hairdressing or barista employment.

A possible model could include a programme where the students works two days a week in the workplace (such as in a bakery). A supervisor in the workplace would be tasked with assessing and providing feedback on the pre-agreed criteria describing

work ethic, perseverance, behaviour and specific workplace skills (20 credits). The student would also be expected to complete write a reflective journal (10 credits) throughout the year and keep a portfolio containing evidence, such as photos, of successful achievement of specific job based skills. For example, a student in a bakery making breads and other baking delights could have photographic evidence showcasing this. Different aspects of the job requirements could receive further credits. Projects with practice based evidence identifying how to succeed in retail or comply with health and safety requirements are some examples, however, there is an endless amount of potential activities students could do to prepare for the years of work to come. I think this would not only encourage those who aren't academic to work harder, but it would also give them hope that they would be able to succeed in employment.

As with the present model, there is the argument from students completing academic programmes that this system would be easier and unfair, confusing employers. But the two titles NCEA Practical and NCEA Academic would clearly differentiate the programmes. Students completing academic courses will be easily identified by universities or tertiary institutes, which is usually what people aiming for high marks are trying to achieve. The practical course will be more for those who want to jump straight into a work field or apprenticeship.

I think in general, people who struggle with academic subjects find NCEA very hard, and give up because they feel as though they could never pass. This increases stress while decreasing sense of self-worth and future hopes and aspirations. We shouldn't be putting all this stress on developing brains. People should feel as though they still have the opportunity to do well, without having to be academic. I know many people who couldn't do the academic subjects, so dropped out, but actually ended up doing better and have proved to be more successful than people who carried on through NCEA. We need to sculpt NCEA for these people, the people who have the ability to do well in the workforce. We need to recognise and value good worth ethic, personality, temperament, and other soft skills just as much as academic success. <sup>1</sup>BBC News says "New Zealand has by far the highest youth suicide rate in the developed world." This obviously isn't all because of NCEA, but giving young people hope that they will have a future, even if they aren't academic, might lead to less teenagers feeling so hopeless that they want to end their lives.

<sup>2</sup>The New Zealand Curriculum has a vision to develop "young people who will be confident, connected and actively involved, lifelong learners." But with the way NCEA is

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-40284130>

<sup>2</sup> <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/The-New-Zealand-Curriculum#collapsible4>

structured at the moment, this vision is unattainable for a high proportion of learners. People aren't confident in their education and don't have the hope of being lifelong learners. Changing the NCEA system to making it fit for both academic and practical learners will help create hope for these students and give them confidence that they can succeed in life, improving *wellbeing* now and in the future.<sup>3</sup> In 2017, NCEA had an overall average pass rate of 72.9% over level 1, 2 and 3. This means over ¼ of New Zealand students sitting NCEA fail. Each year, the failures mean there is a smaller amount of students moving up through the levels. This doesn't even consider the factor of people who don't sit NCEA altogether because they don't believe that they can pass. NCEA needs to cater for these people who don't have the ability to pass in the present academi system.

We need to cater for those who try their best but are failed by a NCEA system that isn't fit for their needs. An *equitable* NCEA would recognise the diverse strengths of all students. The success rate of NCEA would increase, and perhaps so would the work ethic by many students, knowing they have a better chance and opportunity to succeed.

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/about-us/news/2017-nceanzscholarshipdata-available/>