



to the

Review of STAR and Gateway 2013

18 September 2013

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The New Zealand Post Primary Teachers Association, representing some 17,000 teachers employed in state and integrated secondary, area and intermediate schools, welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on “Discussion document – Review of STAR and Gateway 2013”.
- 1.2. This submission draws on an extensive body of knowledge and operational experience of these two programmes, experience which indicates that both deliver excellent student outcomes.
- 1.3. It is noted that the preferred response is by “survey monkey” but it is considered that this method is too restricted and limited in scope to deliver a sufficiently comprehensive response.
- 1.4. PPTA has had a long-standing concern about the interface between school and employment, training and further education, in which these two programmes play a very significant part. We have completed a comprehensive report which will be presented at the PPTA Annual Conference in early October and it is suggested that it would be a very valuable consultative document to take into account when formulating recommendations arising from this review.

2. Response to The Ministry of Education’s Proposed Options

Option 1: Increase the Minimum Achievement Expectation for STAR and Gateway

2.1 Introductory comments

In response to point 10 in the preamble to the questions, where it is stated “We do not have information about the credit achievement of learners who are part of STAR outside a tertiary setting”, we consider that this information should have been obtained for the purposes of this review as it is readily available on request.

The MOE ‘Guide to Schools accessing STAR’ states:

Report to the Ministry of Education STAR Funding Report Form
.....Schools are required to complete the Secondary Tertiary Alignment Resource (STAR) Funding Report Form. The form is to be completed annually, held on record in the school, and made available to the Ministry on request. It is the principal's and the Board of Trustees' responsibility to ensure that this and any other records related to STAR funding are accurate and are available for audit and reporting purposes.

A special four page report form is provided by the MOE for schools to collate the data. It would have been very simple to require schools to supply copies and it is a pity this was not done as schools put a lot of energy and effort into completing these forms which contain a wealth of information that would have made a very useful contribution to this review.

2.2 Option 1 Questions

Do you think raising credit achievement for both STAR and Gateway learners will help those learners to achieve more, particularly for learners who might otherwise struggle to complete NCEA Level 2?

Answer: Qualified yes – see below.

Do you support the rationale for lifting the minimum achievement expectation to 20 NZQF credits for STAR and Gateway?

Answers:

STAR – A qualified yes – provided there is provision for short courses of 1-3 days duration which are “career tasters”. However, STAR courses are not “subjects”. Students work towards unit standards which do not generate the opportunities to gain merits, excellences or endorsements. Some schools foster the achievement of these “academic add-ons” by limiting their subjects to 18 credits per year. The perception will be that STAR courses become second rate “subjects”. The expectation should be that all credits are NZQF – not some local variation.

GATEWAY – No. Academic achievement is not the main focus of Gateway, where the outcomes are employment related. In page 5 of the Gateway Handbook, a key statement is:

“Gateway supports learners to undertake learning and assessment in the workplace.”

This key driver is the reason why Gateway is so successful.

a) Increasing the required credits from 10 to 20 places more emphasis on academic achievement and takes the focus off employment outcomes.

b) Raising Gateway requirements to 20 credits equates a Gateway work placement to another “subject” at school which students would be studying full time.

c) Gateway students are usually in the workplace one day per week or the equivalent which is 20% of their total school time, leaving less time for other “subjects” but the main difference is that students are learning work-based skills as compared to studying in the classroom.

d) In a Gateway work placement trainees are learning skills and are assessed on their ability to complete an industry task. Gaining NZQF credits is secondary to learning and completing the task to the employer’s satisfaction.

e) The 20 credits looks reasonable on paper but will be very difficult to achieve operationally because:

- Industry does not have the resources to do the assessment, particularly outside the main centres.
- They do not get any funding to pay for assessors to visit work places to assess Gateway trainees, and those who charge fees are expensive.
- There are not enough industry assessors.
- Schools do not have enough staff who are registered assessors to undertake workplace assessment towards industry qualifications.

- There would need to be extensive consultation with industry training organisations if the workplace assessment requirements were to be doubled from 10 credits to 20.

Option 2: Alignment with Vocational Pathways

2.3 Introductory comments

Response to the questions needs to be prefaced by pointing out that the Vocational Pathways initiative, which PPTA generally supports, has not yet been implemented and schools are still coming to grips with the management changes required and the consequences such as aligning or modifying current courses within a coherent curriculum.

The term “fragmented qualifications” has unfortunate connotations. STAR courses are expected to result in credits that lead to National Certificates but most of these range from 40-70 credits and are simply not attainable by a secondary school student in one or even two years. It has always been the expectation they would complete the qualification at a workplace, in, say, an apprenticeship or a tertiary institution.

Many STAR courses are short courses that may supplement a school programme (such as industrial safety or first aid) or are categorised as “career tasters”. The courses are a response to the considerable “milling and churning” in career preferences as adolescents develop a clear career pathway. This aspect of career decision-making in STAR and Gateway programmes is a very positive outcome not measurable by credits.

2.4 Option 2 Questions

We are proposing that STAR and Gateway be aligned to the Vocational Pathways. In your view what would that mean?

Answer: We support the proposal that STAR and Gateway be aligned to the Vocational Pathways with the proviso that it be introduced in tandem and be flexible enough to cope with limitations in the scope of the recommended standards. For example, there is only one viticulture unit but 12 driving units.

It would mean that the programmes would need to be more focussed and structured, but at the expense of flexibility to meet specific needs of schools and students.

If Vocational Pathways were mandatory, should there be provision for credit achievement outside the Vocational Pathways?

Answer: There should be credits allowed because the Vocational Pathways are still evolving and some sectors are not yet adequately represented.

Are there any circumstances under which credits not on a Vocational Pathway should be allowed to be offered in STAR and Gateway courses?

Answer: Yes. But unit standards only – not achievement standards. In particular the circumstances are where there is a lack of coverage, e.g. the creative and leisure industries and occupational health and safety.

If a system of accreditation for STAR courses were adopted, would you support courses that wholly use the credits contained within the current Vocational Pathways being automatically accredited, and a fee, on a cost recovery basis being charged for vetting the coherence, relevancy and consistency of courses that contain non-Vocational Pathways credits?

Answer: We do not support accreditation and believe it to be unnecessary.

Option 3: Reweighting funding for STAR so that it supports Level 2 attainment

2.5 Introductory comments

There are some important factors to consider before responding to the questions.

The first is around the level of maturity of students, and in Year 11 the majority are quite immature. They have not yet formed career goals and are still developing social skills. Their personal attributes are still developing. However, there are exceptions and girls are more likely to be mature at this age.

The emphasis for weighting should be at Year 12, keeping in mind also that in many schools social progression is practised and a large number of Year 13 students are completing Level 2. These should also be a target group.

2.6 Option 3 Questions

Within the same overall STAR funding, do you support the re-weighting of STAR funding so that Year 11 students attract more units of funding than a Year 13 student?

Answer: No. For the reasons given above, and also because the target should be those students who will struggle to get Level 2. This will not become apparent until the end of Year 11.

Do you believe re-weighting of STAR funding so that Year 11 students attract more units of funding than Year 13 students will support more students achieving NCEA Level 2 or equivalent?

Answer: We do not support re-weighting from Year 13 to Year 11 because it dilutes the targeting factor in that many Year 11 students do not need STAR support to achieve Level 2 in the next year. It reduces the weighting for those students in Year 12 and Year 13 who are struggling to achieve NCEA Level 2.

Option 4: Improved Reporting about STAR

2.7 Option 4 questions

Do you currently record the participation of students in STAR programmes in your School Management System?

Are you able to differentiate between the achievement occurring in school as a result of STAR and achievement occurring as the result of other schooling?

What other approaches to gaining data about the performance of STAR students in schools could be investigated?

Schools have not been reporting to the Ministry since 2009 because they have been instructed not to! The Handbook instructs schools to complete the reports and hold them until requested by the Ministry. The relevant section has been quoted in the preamble to this response and it is inexplicable that the reports were not requested to inform this review. The information is readily available.

There is already in extensive use an excellent proven software package that facilitates the production of the STAR annual reports. There is no need to duplicate this and it is definitely not compliance heavy.

2.8 Final Question

Are there any other aspects of the administration, funding, operation and delivery of STAR and Gateway that you would like to bring to the attention of the Ministry of Education?

Answer:

The requirement on schools to produce a comprehensive annual report on STAR needs to be followed up by the reports being analysed by the Ministry, even on a triennial basis, to ensure schools are compliant with the guidelines.

The main weakness of STAR is this failure to close the loop of accountability. In this environment, complacency can soon take hold and some schools could take the vacuum as implicit approval to drift away from the STAR guidelines. Restoring the lines of accountability for STAR should be an important outcome of this review.

Any changes to the STAR guidelines/requirements should not reduce the ability of schools to utilise the funding to meet the individual learning needs of students.

Gateway reports should be checked and there be consequences when targets are not met.

Gateway funding should continue to be ring-fenced for that purpose, and not become just part of some wider Youth Guarantee funding.

3. Summary

3.1. Accountability for STAR needs to be restored and explicit consequences for non-compliance reinstated.

3.2. Re-weighting STAR funding from Year 13 to Year 11 is not supported. Any change should target those struggling to complete Level 2 whether in Year 12 or Year 13.

- 3.3. We do not support increasing the number of credits to 20 as a requirement of Gateway. If it is determined it should be done, then it should be phased in over three years with a programme to support and fund workplace assessment.
- 3.4. We support the Vocational Pathways initiative and the proposal to align STAR and Gateway, but with a reminder that Vocational Pathways are still evolving.
- 3.5. It should be acknowledged that while Gateway and STAR are highly successful, other initiatives under Youth Guarantee are as yet unproven and anecdotal reports need to be supported with hard evidence that has not yet been published.
- 3.6. Consideration should be given to developing an over-arching structure for all the various programmes under the Youth Guarantee umbrella which addresses the lack of coherence and patchy accountability and articulates clear, concise goals and objectives.

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