



PPTA TE WEHENGARUA ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2024

NCEA LEVEL 1: IMPROVEMENTS TO IMPLEMENTATION NEEDED

A PAPER COVERING MEMBER EXPERIENCES OF THE LEVEL 1 IMPLEMENTATION AND PROPOSED ADVOCACY BY THE PPTA IN RESPONSE



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RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 That the paper be received.
- 2 That PPTA Te Wehengarua advocate to the Ministry of Education that there is an implementation plan developed to urgently improve NCEA Level 1 assessment processes, that includes genuine engagement with the teaching profession.
- 3 That PPTA Te Wehengarua urge for the NCEA Level 1 assessment improvement plan to be fully implemented before the end of Term 4, 2024.
- 4 That PPTA Te Wehengarua continue to urge the Ministry of Education and NZQA to commit to providing the additional resources required to ensure that the changes will meet the five principles of a strong NCEA qualification: coherence, credibility, equity and inclusion, pathways and well-being.
- 5 That PPTA Te Wehengarua continue to urge that all changes are clearly communicated to schools before the end of Term 4, 2024.
- 6 That PPTA Te Wehengarua seek an effective review process to inform the development and rollout of NCEA Levels 2 and 3.

1. THE DREAM

- 1.1 The Ministry of Education have clear goals for the NCEA change programme: “We also want to ensure everything we develop to support the NCEA changes will meet the five principles of a strong NCEA qualification – coherence, credibility, equity and inclusion, pathways and well-being.”¹ These goals broadly connect to the PPTA Te Wehengarua’s original criteria for a valid qualification’s framework: that it is fair, inclusive, cumulative, clear, motivating, coherent, constructive and manageable.¹

2. THE REALITY

- 2.1 The significant commitment and incredible amount of work that pilot schools, their teachers and students made to making Level 1 a great experience must be acknowledged. We know that some of their experiences and feedback have been included in the final version of Level 1 that we are implementing in 2024. However, there are still significant difficulties. Whether this is because not all the advice was taken on board, or issues of scale were not anticipated, a lack of transparency around the change process means that we may never know.
- 2.2 Starting Term 3, 2024 with the flurry of ‘non-end-of-year externally marked assessments’ (this clunky identifier is a fine example of the bureaucratic flavour of the processes that are being dropped in to schools) has brought a stark reality to the inefficient and overly complex design and implementation of the new NCEA Level 1 assessment processes.
- 2.3 The issues that have been created for the Principal’s Nominee role are so significant that they have generated a conference paper all of their own.
- 2.4 Schools have had to try and piece together content for courses at the start of the year as well as prepare students for new assessments (both internal and external) without having access to all the information. The external assessments and student exemplars that have been provided were based on the pilot programme and were clearly signalled as a rough guide only, so teachers have been expecting more coherent and clear updated information.
- 2.5 The focus on ensuring validity without resorting to a tightly bound mid-year ‘exam season’ (as we have at the end of the year), has given rise to a curious set of assessment conditions that are at the same time vague (to ensure equity of access?) and tight (to ensure credibility). This has resulted in extensive variation of assessment conditions across subjects and between schools and significant workload and cost for schools – with the result that the goals of access and credibility are at significant risk of not being achieved.
- 2.6 There are support materials missing right across the resource framework. While there are sample student responses available for all standards (except those requiring video submissions), there are none available for the externals. We have had no indication of the

¹ Qualifications Framework Inquiry, Te Tiro Hou (1997) - Commissioned by New Zealand Post Primary Teachers’ Association

expected timeframe for when these resources will be made available. It would help Schools need to know when material will be available will help with planning for 2025.

- 2.7 The process that was designed to ensure validity, is not ensuring anything of the sort. There is significant variation in assessment conditions across subjects and between schools. The requirement for the Principal's Nominee to not hand out assessment tasks to teachers to protect the integrity of the tasks, is invalidated as soon as one school in the assessment window has completed the task before another one starts it. There is nothing to prevent students from sharing what they remember about a task with students from other schools.
- 2.8 So many of the tasks have moved from 'the centre' (i.e. from NZQA), but no resources have moved with them. Schools are printing resource materials and having to invest their own time and money into managing assessment logistics and administration. This includes the administrative burden of having to transfer materials between different software and locking students out of the internet and assessments.

3. THE OPPORTUNITY

- 3.1 There is no communication on the Ministry website that indicates what will be the likely changes as a result of evaluation of this year's rollout of NCEA Level 1. This signals a lack of understanding that not all advice from the pilots has been affected and that additional issues will likely arise once the assessments have been scaled across the country. At this stage, it feels like there is a belief that NCEA Level 1 has now been implemented and adequately resourced. It feels like the plan is now to just let schools get on with it. There is considerable opportunity to ensure that Level 1 continues to evolve as the curriculum review continues as the hold on the Levels 2 and 3 Review of Achievement Standards (RAS) comes into effect.
- 3.2 Even though there are considerable concerns about *what* we are assessing at Level 1, the focus of this paper is to improve the *how*. Ideally, focusing on building a sound iterative evaluation and change process to tidy up the *how* will also inform the development of a process to refine the design and implementation of NCEA Levels 2 and 3 as well as further work on refining the *what*.

4. HOW WE PERFECT THE HOW

- 4.1 The Education Review Office (ERO) is currently visiting schools and talking to teachers about their experiences with the implementation of NCEA Level 1. It is understood that Minister Stanford has set the terms of reference and is expecting a report back by September / October. We need the Ministry of Education and NZQA to genuinely engage with the sector about the implications of this report. We need a robust, collaborative and transparent process of developing the resulting review programme as well as true collaboration around what the changes should be. Teachers have been very clear that this process must be driven by the profession.

5. WHAT THE HOW LOOKS LIKE

- 5.1 While work on the rollout of NCEA Levels 2 and 3 has been put on hold, the Ministry can put resources into the more urgent matter of fixing the new assessment processes, in particular, the non-end-of-year assessments that are marked externally.
- 5.2 This paper does not make recommendations about exactly what an improved non-end-of-year external assessment process may look like.
- 5.3 But in general terms to meet the access and credibility and workload issues, maybe simply an extension of what has been happening in Technology and Art for many years can give us some direction. Having an assessment task available at the start of the year that gives clear instructions about what evidence should be gathered by students to be delivered to an external marker in a curated portfolio by a particular date in Term 4. This process has been able to address the challenges of both equity and credibility. Where more appropriate (with regards to the knowledge and skills being assessed and to ensure credibility), student evidence provided in an end-of-year national examination remains.
- 5.4 Once this issue has been resolved, the delay in the rollout of NCEA Levels 2 and 3 implementation changes can now be used to ensure successful centralised and cohesive support for this work. Changes must be communicated, and resources must be delivered in a timely fashion. This means, for example that into the future, standards, specifications, conditions of assessments, exemplars, and assessment schedules need to be in schools by end of Term 1 the year before a level is introduced. In addition, there needs to be a minimum of three exemplars per standard within a year of implementation.
- 5.5 The broader programmes of support such as webinars, facilitators focused on NCEA implementation, cluster support via Subject Associations need to be underway by the start of Term 3 of the year before a level is introduced. The system must accommodate the fact that schools not involved in pilots need different levels of support. Teachers and students shouldn't be disadvantaged through having a lack of resources or because they are still getting used to the changes.
- 5.6 There is, quite rightly, an expectation that every registered teacher in New Zealand takes part in a Professional Growth Cycle. Teachers are expected to know their ākongā and they work hard to understand them, their aspirations and their challenges. Teachers look at the evidence to help them to respond effectively and to support their learners to thrive. They should have high expectations, and they do not give up on their students. They make changes if the evidence shows that they should. Given that the education sector is full of such progressions, you would expect that this would be a natural way for the entire system to operate. Being open to rigorous evaluation and having a commitment to make changes for the sake of students should lead to the design and implementation of an improvement plan that will lead us all to the place that we all want to go – to the realisation of the opportunities that the NCEA change programme offers.
- 5.7 We know that the Ministry is suffering under severe resourcing constraints, and we must call on the government to not neglect our national qualification and to adequately resource it.